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"The Creation of Space": Narrative Strategies, Group Agency and Skill in Lloyd Jones' *The Book of Fame*

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We began to float and to achieve a kind of grace that had become second nature, like language or riding a bike.

—*The Book of Fame*[1]

Early in Lloyd Jones' *The Book of Fame*, a novel about the stunningly successful 1905 British tour of the New Zealand rugby team known as the "Originals," one of the players turns to music to represent the ease with which they defeated English sides in their first two matches:

> One night Frank Glasgow sat down at the piano and composed music to describe the English style of play; it went—plonkplonkplonkplonk, plonk.
>
> You heard that and saw the English shift the ball across field, one two three four stop and kick for touch.
>
> To describe our play Frank came up with this number—dum de dah dum de dah bang whoosh bang! whoosh dum de dah clicketty-click bang! whoosh dah.(37)

Jones represents here both the nature of skilled group action—in the form of a "music new to English ears"—and the difficulties of capturing it in words. The novel's form is as fluid and deceptive, as adaptable and integrated, as the sweetly shaped play of the team that became known during this tour for the first time as the All Blacks, scoring 830 points in 32 matches while conceding only 39. Employing a dazzling array of narrative strategies, and a sensuous, highly wrought style that blurs distinctions between prose and poetry, heightened to match the exquisite precision of his subjects' movements, Jones incorporates lists, repetitions, menus, newspaper reports and materials from diaries and scrapbooks, along with metaphors from and links to contemporary arts and news events in "that year" when "Einstein and Matisse caused a stir" (167). While the novel is thus "bedded in research," it is a product of mindful aesthetics with a focus on shared expertise, imagination, embodied agency and skilled vision.[2] It, therefore,

differs dramatically from revisionist or sociological, historical treatments of the tour.[3] Jones revels in the spaces created by the scant records, such that "the imagination slips easily into the gaps" (177).

In literary criticism and theory as in the cognitive sciences, sport has struggled to be seen as a legitimate area of inquiry. In literary studies, sport has either been relegated to the area of genre fiction or seen as a cover for some other, more important subject such as postcolonial identity. While *The Book of Fame* certainly demands reading in terms of "the snare of history" (51) as much as do Marina Warner's *Indigo*, Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* or Shehan Karunatilaka's *The Legend of Pradeep Mathew*, it also treats sport on its own terms as a rich world, a set of bodily skills and an honest profession in itself.[4] Introducing his edited collection of New Zealand sports writing *Into the Field of Play*, Jones contested easy dismissals of the subject:

> I've always felt that sport in our neck of the woods was closer to a taste or colouring in the landscape—best viewed as a number painting that connects the small boy with his racquet playing on the street, with the old man at the club, the trophies, ladders and newsletters and fixture listings in Thursday night's paper, to the televised event at Wimbledon. And only once you begin to list such things and make the connections, you begin to realize just how big the catchment is, and how few of us escape it—and, more lamentedly, how few of us choose to write about it.[5]

So sport in *The Book of Fame* is a concentrated arena inhabited by extraordinary athletes whose "industry was football and experiments with space" (73). Both writers and cognitive theorists are increasingly aware of the wide "catchment" area of sport and embodied intelligent action in general. They embrace the challenge of understanding those who dedicate years to arduous training in unique, culturally specific activities with intense ideological, affective and motivational force.

In writing a book on this subject, Jones faces two problems. First, the narrative as received from historical sources is almost too good: a group of men unknown to the public and to each other travel from the other side of the world, crush their hosts at every turn and introduce a new style of the game to an awed audience. The material almost writes itself, but might do so unfortunately into that most clichéd of sports narratives: the triumph of the underdog. Second, skilled action confronts writers with the problems of "languaging experience,"[6] which Jones confronts in an essayistic manner, proliferating metaphors to convey both the richness and the slipperiness of his subject. Because of the innovative strategies by which Jones responds to these challenges, a reading of *The Book of Fame* can contribute to the interdisciplinary study of literature and cognition, exemplifying genuinely two-way "exchange values."[7] On the one hand, we can gain insights into the nature of skillful group agency, of distinct forms and at distinct timescales, by focusing on the precise forms taken by the All Blacks' creation of space. Here, we treat *The Book of Fame* as a brilliant evocation of features of collective thought, movement and emotion that both everyday and scientific inquiry can easily miss. On the other hand, we can also read back into the novel a subtle, fascinated interrogation of the mechanisms by which small groups

form, evolve and act. In this more ambitious mode of analysis, we use independently motivated theoretical concerns to help us see real features of the literary work that might otherwise remain invisible.[8]

The Book of Fame is narrated in the first-person plural, by and through a superficially undifferentiated "we." The story is told collectively, as or for the "twenty-seven in our party," from manager George Dixon to the Invercargill bootmaker Billy Stead, from the captain Dave Gallaher, "a meatworks foreman," to Jimmy Hunter, who "farmed in Mangamahu, north-east of Wanganui" (9). Although James Wood claims that "successful examples" of stories told in the first person plural "are rare indeed,"[9] critics have discussed a surprisingly rich and varied range of "narrative fiction in the first person plural,"[10] though to our knowledge Jones' novel has not yet been assessed in this context. First-person plural narratives exemplify a core variety of "collective narrative agents"[11] and of "social minds in the novel,"[12] and some critical literature on these topics draws directly on research and theories of joint action in social ontology and cognitive science: our reading of *The Book of Fame* too hones in on its subtle treatment of group agency.

But the 1905 "Originals," who acquired the name "All Blacks" either through a typographical error in a report that they played as if they were "all backs" or because of what the Devon *Express and Echo* called "their sable and unrelieved costume," were no ordinary group.[13] The embodied skills of a successful sports team, as of dancers or musicians working together, constitute a unique form of collective action, and Jones' novel models a variety of strategies for representing such skilled joint activity. In their practice sessions on the SS *Rimutaka*, pumpkins bought in Montevideo are rearranged on the deck to model "possible lines of attack" in service of "the creation of space" (18) and from the time of scoring their first points on English soil, as Jimmy Hunter takes "a sweet transfer" from Billy Stead and "spins free" of the defense "as easy as passing through a revolving door," they realize collectively in action that "space was our medium/our play stuff," that "space can be wooed."[14]

In what follows, we focus on the relationship between skillful performance and collective action. These topics fall outside the ambit of much current work by literary theorists using cognitive research, who have instead tended to focus upon theory of mind and modularity, metaphor and blending, emotion and empathy, consciousness and concepts, representation and so on. But skilled performance and collective action nevertheless comprise surprisingly lively research fields across the sciences, from neuropsychology to philosophy of mind and cognitive anthropology. These areas of inquiry may provide even more productive avenues for future work in the interfield of literary and cultural theory and the cognitive sciences.

Skill and group agency in the cognitive sciences

Expert sportspeople share with dancers, acrobats and musicians extraordinary capacities for skillful movement in complex, changing settings. Their actions are, at times, perfectly shaped for the current situation. Even unforeseen challenges,

requiring unplanned responses, can elicit extraordinary precision and timing in the control of unfolding action sequences. In open team sports, for example, two or more teammates can baffle a defensive line by magically meshing the direction and pace of their movements so as to create gaps or elude their markers. No matter how high speed the sport or performance, movements can seem to flow effortlessly, as if there was all the time in the world to inhabit each moment fully. Such expertise of course rests on arduous training, on long histories of experience sculpting grooved bodily routines. But in constantly adapting their skills to present demands, and fitting performance to the needs of each audience and situation, skillful performers reveal in their mindful bodies a kind of intelligence in action that remains as mysterious to theory and science across the disciplines as it is to the struggling novice. For all the rage about embodied cognition, for all the resources poured into sport science, for all the wishful dreams of a future neuroaesthetics, we have no integrated theoretical grip on the nature and mechanisms of skilled movement. Neither disappointingly abstract philosophical work on embodiment nor scientific data gathered in artificial lab settings far from the complex ecologies of practice can match what we fleetingly glean about the experience of expert performance from the occasional unusually articulate practitioner.

Arguably, both the difficulty of objective study of skill and the rarity of sustained informative phenomenological report are to be expected. On many views of expertise, its processes are pre-eminently tacit, not just inarticulable but inaccessible, and only likely to be disrupted by any attempt to tap, probe or inspect them. Effective descriptions of skilled movement may thus have to be indirect, the more so since sports narratives are often rife with clichés. Yet experts and coaches or teachers do develop and employ their own rich ways of talking and thinking about their activities. It is difficult for outsiders—fans, journalists, researchers or critics—to tap what may be peculiar, subculturally specific communicative forms that run "beyond the easy flow of everyday speech."[15] Alongside ethnography, the subtler tools of creative writers and artists might offer different imaginative access to the more or less silent springs of skilled action.

Such considerations about the priority of the tacit realm in embodied performance also perhaps explain why both the philosophy and the sciences of mind have tended to focus more on disorder and breakdown than on extraordinary skills, on dysfunction rather than heightened function. Yet honed expertise lies at the heart of characteristically human cognition in action, and is a fundamental, rich basis for mindful aesthetics in literature and culture. How can we find ways to study both the skills of the elite performer and the more widespread but still flexible and often exquisite everyday skills involved when people cook and drive, tend gardens and homes, make clothes and pots and blankets, write programs and tell stories? As we suggested above, literary researchers interested in skilled action can critically engage with a range of ongoing research programs on skill in the sciences of mind. Indeed expert movement, like memory, is an exemplary topic with which to combat the persisting caricature of the cognitive sciences as irretrievably marred by universalizing rationalist individualism. Far from privileging the detached or disembodied reflective planning of action, major current theorists of skill who differ on many other points argue that the strategic (or

"cognitive" or "higher-order") control of action decreases dramatically or disappears as skills are developed to expert levels. In cognitive psychology and sport science, this point may be couched in terms of the increasing automaticity or "proceduralization" of skilled performance.[16] In philosophical traditions springing from Ryle or from phenomenology it may be described as the intuitive development of "know-how" or motor intentionality.[17] In Hubert Dreyfus' phenomenology of expert performance, for example, "mindedness is the enemy of embodied coping."[18] Such views radically privilege the silent or disappearing body of the expert, predicting that performance is all but traceless, produced by embodied mechanisms so divorced from attention and awareness that memory can get no grip. For Dreyfus, "an expert's skill has become so much a part of him that he need be no more aware of it than he is of his own body,"[19] while Beilock and Carr find evidence of "expertise-induced amnesia" in laboratory versions of sporting tasks.[20]

But such strong reactions against intellectualism have been criticized in turn for evacuating intelligence entirely from the body, and dividing doing from knowing. They thus leave unexplained experts' abilities to cope effectively with significant complexity or perturbation in their field.[21] While the forms of thinking in question must be highly dynamic, expert musicians and sportspeople do maintain ongoing online awareness of and strategic control over certain changing aesthetic or competitive features of their performance.[22] Among a recently burgeoning array of work on these topics in philosophy and cognitive theory, notable strands aim at identifying the key dimensions on which distinct forms of skillful action may vary,[23] and at more experience-near investigations of the embodied phenomenology of expert movement.[24] In our view, this kind of lively debate, which spans a range of methods and traditions in a field of cognitive science which is perhaps less high profile than others, affords inviting space for new critical moves from literary, historical and cultural theorists.

Similar opportunities arise in debates about group agency and group cognition. Humanities researchers sometimes assert that such notions, and allied ideas like collective memory, can only be used metaphorically, because mind, memory, agency and cognition are individual capacities. James Young prefers Jeffrey Olick's term "collected memory" to "collective memory," because "societies cannot remember in any other way than through their constituents' memories"[25]; in assessing Alan Palmer's extensive cognitive-literary studies of "thought that is not located in an individual mind," Patrick Hogan comments that "unfortunately, it is difficult to say just what this might mean" and that "cognitive science offers no help here."[26]

To the contrary, ideas with such difficult ancestry do indeed elicit widespread suspicion, due both to individualist assumptions in psychology and to political concerns about the top-down imposition of homogeneity and groupthink in our managerialist culture.[27] But with the ongoing advances of movements *within* the cognitive sciences which treat mentality as situated, distributed, dynamical and embodied,[28] there are substantial and expanding traditions of research both in empirical psychology and cognitive neuroscience and in philosophy and social ontology, which precisely theorize and study small group cognition, memory and action as emergent phenomena distinct (in a sense that obviously requires clarification) from the cognition, memory and

action of the individuals who compose the group. On the one hand, considerable progress has been made on the metaphysical issues of just what "emergence" amounts to here. The intuition that a robust form of group cognitive process needs to be more than the sum of its constituent members' cognitive processes has been rendered more precise. Enthusiasts for and critics of stronger theoretical notions of group or collective cognition are increasingly able to agree on key concepts and requirements for resolving the debate even where they remain divided on how those concepts apply to actual cases.[29] On the other hand, empirical studies of strong forms of joint action and collaborative cognition in dyads, small groups and teams flourish in mainstream contemporary cognitive science.[30]

For current purposes, rather than summarizing the debates and available positions here, we point to an under-noticed difference between two broad directions of investigation into group agency. Some accounts focus on more formal and explicit mechanisms of cooperation, addressing, for example, public expressions of joint policy, belief or intent by institutionalized groups such as committees or organizations. Central topics in this field of social ontology include the possibility of stark divergence or discontinuity between the beliefs or attitudes of the group and those of its members, the kinds of open or mutual knowledge required to ground the formation of a "plural subject," and the challenges of maintaining consistency in collective decision-making over time.[31] In these traditions, the medium of group agency is typically taken to be linguistic, in the form of public representations.[32] While this approach offers some hope of identifying principles in common across smaller and larger groups, an alternative starting point is to focus on less easily articulable mechanisms. These lines of enquiry are not incompatible, of course, and we will suggest below that it would be a mistake to neglect explicit mechanisms of group formation. But when thinking and acting in the "we-mode," members of small groups may rely on more tacit kinds of shared action representations to ground strong forms of cooperation, by way of a range of collective socio-cognitive processes which were significant driving forces in the history of our species, supporting cross-generational apprenticeship learning and newly stable means of cultural transmission.[33] Embodied interaction and mutual alignment occur in small groups by way of a range of nonverbal processes including gesture, facial expression, posture and patterns of movement.[34] If such dynamic forms of coordinated movement and cognitive interdependence are likely to be essential components of highly skillful cases of collective action like team sports, they will also require distinctive, subtle methods and vocabularies to identify, study and describe.

Skilled action in *The Book of Fame*

Such vocabularies might well be found in fiction and literary analysis as much as in reports from laboratory or ethnographic settings. In eschewing conventional first- or third-person narration, Jones uses alternative strategies to introduce his cast of characters, emphasizing these details of embodied movement and of glimpsed habits and quirks. The plural narrator of *The Book of Fame* tells us that it was "in such small

telling ways, through gesture and anecdote," that the New Zealanders departing on the long voyage to England "revealed ourselves to one another" (10). Even while "the larger sense of who we were hadn't yet forged itself," mutual recognition gradually emerges across the party of the men's patterns of humor, expressions, bodily comportment, dress, moods and personalities:

> The bookworm in Billy Stead
> Mona Thompson's fondness for setting his hat brim at a low tilt
> Eric Harper's learned ways with cutlery and table napkins
> [. . .] Jimmy Hunter's habit of closing his eyes and touching his nose
> whenever praised
> [. . .] the way George Tyler would butter his toast and afterwards, lick
> each finger tip.

Some are "jovial and spry at breakfast"; others emerge as "lags and wisecrack artists": some turned a tall story over "stone by stone" while others "sat back and enjoyed it like music" (10–11). On seeing filmed "shadows of themselves" in a London theater, and overcoming initial bewilderment at how "Fred looked like Fred, Billy Wallace like Billy Wallace, Jimmy Hunter himself but only more so," the tourists notice not only "what a mess the lineouts were in" but also "things, personal things, previously intimate to ourselves. Fred Newton scratching himself . . . Massa closing one nostril to blow snot out the other" (59–60). By the time of the journey home months later, the forms of *habitus* that have become shared and mutually recognized second nature within the group expand to include taste and temperament, manners and character, preferences and passions:

> McDonald's dainty way of drying himself, first towelling his feet, then
> each toe—not something you ordinarily see in a big man
> Cunningham's love of shovelling coal into the stoker of the SS *Rimutaka*
> Seeling's refusal to do the same [. . .]
> Those who preferred black tea with one sugar [. . .]
> the early nighters
> the insomniacs [. . .]
> The impulse of some to stop and pat a mangy dog
> and the single-minded haste of others. (168–9)

These embodied and nonverbal forms of alignment and mutual understanding form a dynamic but enduring foundation for shared identity and collective action.

Even at the outset, the individual skills of the members begin to form particular combinations: "Cunningham's singing and Frank Glasgow's piano playing; it only took a snatch of a melody from Cunningham for Frank to produce the whole works" (11). Such interactive cross-cuing, in any medium, signals the kind of interdependence in cognition and action that characterizes the plural subject, one operating as what Daniel Wegner calls a "transactive memory system": such a system consists of the distinctive,

often highly specialized memories or skills of the individual members of the group, plus a sufficiently shared understanding of how those capacities are distributed so that appropriate information or performances can be filled in or created as required.[35] Just as a family, a group of friends or a long-standing couple may together remember something that none of the individuals could recall alone, so even forgetting can be fluent in a group with a rich enough shared history.[36] The New Zealanders' support play reminds one commentator of the way skilled actors can work around a lapse on stage: "to watch the 'Hamlet'-clad lot retrieve a failure is almost as interesting as the excitement at their customary swooping or rush of attack… There is always somebody under-studying for the time-being the player is hors de combat. Into the breach the new 'artist' without a second's hesitation goes" (44).[37] To exemplify the "moral advantages from combination" after months together, the narrator cites

> the time at a hoi polloi dinner that Carbine forgot the word
> he was searching for & George Smith chimed in
> beautifully
> with a connected subject. (170)

Such complementarity also operated on the field. Jones is quoting Gallaher and Stead's 1906 book *The Complete Rugby Footballer on the New Zealand System*, written for £50 each in the aftermath of the tour, in which these "moral advantages" of combination are illustrated by the case "when a player is making a great and difficult individual effort and is closely attended during this risky period by a trusty colleague ready to take the ball from him at the moment that his own possession of it becomes untenable."[38] This takes much longer to say than to do, and Jones employs varied tactics for dealing with the clunkiness of words for these mysterious interactive group processes that just occur and are gone. On first landing in England, the team find themselves displaying ball skills and making unprepared jokes for the waiting reporters: "It was amazing how quickly we found our voice and style, without thought so it seemed, like the wilfulness of water or the way light will bounce off in every direction at once" (25). Although such capacities for joint action are built partly on forms of unconscious mimicry and creative imitation which are also found in some other animals, humans are unusual in also easily performing "complementary instead of identical actions" in service of some broader shared or emergent goal which requires differentiated contributions from each group member.[39] Below we underline the heterogeneity and internal differentiation of even as integrated and coherent a group as this, a feature which we think undermines some standard concerns, both conceptual and political, about the idea of group agency. Here we stress again that such specialization or uniqueness is bodily at the same time as it is cognitive, as must be the case in a team game involving so many distinct demands and requirements on players in different positions as does rugby.

The team's integrated style of play is articulated in both mechanical and organic terms in the contemporary sources that Jones threads profusely through the novel. One report says, "They work together like the parts of a well-constructed watch. Wherever a man is wanted, there he is!" (36). Against England, another newspaper comments,

the pack or scrum displayed a "corporate instinct," playing "like eight men with one eye" (98). In the central and shortest chapter, "How We Think," the players consider "the shape of our game" and see "an honest engine," with Billy Stead describing the "glorious feeling" of gliding outside a man:

The English saw a tackler
we saw space either side
The English saw an obstacle
we saw an opportunity [. . .]
The formality of doorways caused the English to stumble
into one another and compare ties
while we sailed through (75)

Radically new possibilities for group action emerge as "a matter of arrangement, of getting the combinations right" (72), manifesting in such uncanny mutual anticipation as in the "Taipu move" when Jimmy Hunter finds a man as he "props inside his opposite and flicks the ball back on his inside" (171). They gain a kind of knowledge that is

inexact
a feeling
of shape & movement
that understanding of trees in a high wind
of knowing what to do
having been there before & all that
The simplest of ideas gained & held on to
from things
that move together
in a loose shambling way—or
what others like to call
harmony (169–70)

Against Ireland, the novelty of the New Zealand system was so glaring that "it felt as though we were playing two different codes. We saw the paddock as an ever-changing pattern of lines. The Irish, on the other hand, saw the field as a sort of steeplechase, covered with low barriers and walls which as far as they were concerned were there to smash into": as Jones foreshadows much of the subsequent history of clashing rugby cultures across southern and northern hemispheres, the tourists "longed to tell them what they were doing wrong" (89–90).

In addition to music, early cinema, visual art and theater, the players compare themselves to other kinds of performers—Savade the lion-tamer who advises them on working the crowds to "share your joy," acrobats and jugglers and tightrope walkers, the "farcical acts of the Italian circus" (106) and "the non-verbal humility of world strongman Eugene Sandow and his assistants studying us in our baths following victory over Middlesex" (153). These are all apt parallel performance forms, for this

team sport revolves not only around tactics and "ideas of space and longing" but also around strength, balance, flexible anticipation, drill and repetitive scrum work (133). Such physical skills ground the embodied confidence that springs from just knowing what to do together, each man able to move "instinctively into that space cleared for him," as a speechless Billy Stead still does in front of the waiting Invercargill crowd on his return home (162).

The art of movement, Jones describes, in part rests on body memory, which is a distinctive kind of procedural or skill memory: "what we knew was intimate/ as instinct or memory" (73–4). As we have noted, expertise in sport as in dance and music must rely heavily on such nonverbal mechanisms of alignment, on routine and habitual skill, on grooved and tacit knowhow. In these procedural forms of memory, movement history (both individual and shared) animates present action within the novel demands of a current situation, drawing on past experiences by improvising on their basis rather than reproducing their content.[40] Know-how of this kind is not explicitly *about* the past experiences in which it was actually gathered. Whereas personal or autobiographical remembering, even of a highly reconstructive variety, can bring specific past events to mind *as* past, in performing on the basis of skill memory we need not be aware at all of any particular past episode from which our embodied capacities derive.[41] Psychologists sometimes sharply distinguish such procedural memory from anything that can be consciously accessed or verbally articulated, pointing further to widespread practitioners' lore about the disruptive effects on movement skill of sudden intrusions of consciousness or thought.[42] From such a perspective, it might appear that the New Zealanders' individual and collective skill memory—the "kind of grace that had become second nature"—should be seen as pure and thoughtless intuition or habit, "like riding a bike," the motion of tuned bodies that in action come, in a certain sense, out of time (37).

The animal and material comparisons Jones employs seem at first blush to fit this picture of dynamic sports performance as pure presence. The New Zealanders are eels, wasps and monkeys, the backs like mercury (39–40). To explain how "it has all to do with space, finding new ways through," Freddy Roberts compares "the course of a spooked hare," and watches

> the spired rooftops
> as a flock of starlings
> switched shape and direction (66–7)

Even off the field, wandering the streets, or with "the boys milling outside the hotel steps," "they appeared to move together, like a herd bound by a solid core that knows and only wants itself for company" (134). And in a key passage at the end of the chapter on "How We Think," Billy Stead is again "describing the various character of space": "there was the fox outside Cambridge which he'd seen turn and run this way and that, in and out of the hounds pursuing it—a life-saving understanding of space instantly lost to memory" (76). So one form of self-organization in the collective is produced by the aggregation of such individual animal instincts. Such flocking behavior and

"swarm intelligence" is widely studied in the contemporary cognitive sciences, with tools from the physics and biology of phase transitions in collective behavior applied to both social and cognitive phenomena in human crowds and populations. Surprisingly complex collective effects can arise when individual animals or agents are following fairly simple rules.[43]

Although this kind of model clearly connects with the ideas of distributed cognition and group agency toward which we are working,[44] it captures only one relatively restricted form of emergence, and therefore cannot fully account for the kind of mindful collective action that Jones represents. Groups with a rich shared history possess an extensive repertoire of shared and possible actions quite unlike the patterns produced by the aggregation of instinctual flocking behaviors. Such flock or swarm systems, in a real sense, are not mindful at all at the collective level: no real learning or memory is required of the individual animals, and each of them is assumed to follow the same set of options, with the group behavior emerging by mere aggregation. But in two main respects the skillful group agency invoked in *The Book of Fame* is of a very different sort: first, in the composition of the group and the relation between the group and its members, and second in the availability of explicit and self-reflective mechanisms of group identity-formation in addition to these more low-level or automatic processes.

First, the New Zealanders are in no way a homogeneous group. We have noted the idiosyncratic habits and differences in personal style that shape their mutual discovery, but Jones also continues to stress the disparate individuals and subgroups constituting the collective. There are "the Otago boys" and "the big men," the farmers and the loose forwards. Onboard ship, when staring out at a new landmass they are "trying to make up our minds about South America"—not "our mind" (17). Again, in a team sport like rugby it is obvious that the relation between group members must be one of complementarity rather than identity or even similarity, even when at another level of description they can rightly be seen in action as "fifteen sets of eyes/ pairs of hands and feet/ attached to a single/ central nervous system" (67). So Jones' narrative "we," the plural subject, is not incompatible with genuine plurality and diversity among its components; and he creates space and voices for many of the unique individuals.

Group agency of this kind in no way effaces the person, just as the coherence and shared commitments of the whole can coexist with stray and even conflicting beliefs and desires among the parts. This point about genuine group agency has both ideological and cognitive implications, which we address briefly in turn. There is a worry that concepts like group cognition, collective memory, joint agency and plural subjectivity spring from and play into a specific late capitalist drive to render individuality obsolete and to subsume us all into and under the unity, strength, values and mission of our institutions. Joshua Ferris, who employs "we" narrative to striking effect in his office novel *Then We Came to the End*, explains in an interview his reaction to the way "companies tend to refer to themselves in the first-person plural": in his book, "you see just who this 'we' really is—a collection of messy human beings—stripped of their glossy finish and eternal corporate optimism. It returns the 'we' to the individuals who

embody it, people with anger-management issues and bills to pay, instead of letting the 'mystic we' live on unperturbed in the magic land promoted by billboards and boardrooms."[45] But in these novels as in our organizations, the existence of genuine internal diversity and complexity in a collective does not entail that the group level is somehow unreal, or will dissolve under individualist reduction.

Back in cognitive theory, one of the most promising recent lines of argument for group cognition and collective agency, by Georg Theiner and colleagues, relies on a well-developed scheme in philosophy of science for understanding mechanistic explanation across levels.[46] The mechanists typically work outward from case studies in biology or neuroscience to capture the exact sense in which certain kinds of wholes can be more than the sum of their parts while still not becoming ethereally disconnected from those parts. They focus on the arrangement or *organization* of those components.[47] They stress the contextually sensitive activities and processes in which those organized components engage: "emergence" here is given technical precision by identifying it as the failure of aggregation.[48] Roughly, to the extent that the behavior of a complex, multilevel system (whether biological or social) does not change when its component parts are exchanged or altered, then it is a merely aggregative system that does not exhibit emergent behavior, and it can be explained entirely in terms of the aggregated or merely juxtaposed action of its separable components. The more the system's behavior changes with such changes to its parts, the more it exhibits genuine emergence. These are matters of degree, so we have a spectrum of possibilities rather than a sharp distinction between a mere aggregate and a genuinely emergent collective system. Theiner persuasively applies this mechanistic framework to the case of groups. The nature and extent of emergent collective action in any group depends both on the unique nature of the group members and on the particular ways in which they relate to each other over time (the ways the components are organized or arranged).[49]

We suggest that this interlevel analysis of emergence in groups is particularly well suited to the case of elite sporting teams. Visiting Oxford, the New Zealanders compare the qualities of their homeland: "what we realized was this—it was a matter of arrangement, of getting the combinations right" (72). In a passage Jones takes directly from Gallaher and Stead, Billy Stead notes that despite their preference on the field for attacking in numbers with a shared strategy, opportunistic solo efforts have their place: "We in New Zealand are great sticklers for our orthodox systems of combination, but at the same time we do not prohibit individualism . . . Our attitude is one of unofficial and very guarded approval."[50]

In addition to this internal complexity and heterogeneity, there is a second respect in which the kind of group agency exhibited by the New Zealanders clearly departs from the animal collective, and from reliance solely on instinct and routine in a more mindless embodied present. As in any such long-term human group, even one so identified by and with its expert physical skills, there is also an explicit and self-reflective dimension to their group formation and identity. This arises in the earliest phases of forging "the larger sense of who we were" (10). In contrast to modern elite sports teams, many of the squad had not played together before the tour: as Gallaher

and Stead tell us, it was only on embarking that "for the first time did many of the team see and know each other," for they had been "chosen from the extreme north and from the extreme south, and between these points there is a distance of twelve hundred miles."[51] So Jones can start at this point, picking up on and transforming his sources' statement that during the early "dreadful Antarctic storms . . . we studied the game very deeply, and made ourselves thoroughly sympathetic with each other in all matters."[52] He has them emerging from their places "of bush-creeping isolation" (10), winning at cricket against the passengers and crew—"us against 'the world' " (11)—and realizing that "being nowhere in particular, and without traditions to adhere to, we could be whatever or whoever we chose" (13).

On the long slow sea passage, "with whole days to kill . . . we were in danger of going our separate ways until Mister Dixon called us together" (14). Jones has Dixon, the manager, "propose that, from now on, all knowledge and experience would be pooled": the world is to be named afresh together, "to create 'an atmosphere' where we might share and share alike" (14). In a heightened passage, the players share not just tobacco and stories and "whatever we happened to carry in our pockets or in our thoughts" but also "small descriptive features" about their wives and girlfriends at home, donated into this masculine social space, "thus allowing them to construct and furnish their own visions," in select fragments evoking particular women's movements and styles and expressions which Jones sustains through 16 examples over two pages (14–16). So while there are times when the men say little, or tire of each other's company and part on their days off, or try not to look too closely into each other's faces, on many other occasions verbal and deliberate communication explicitly enhances sense of themselves as a collectivity. There is no tension, therefore, but a deep complementarity between the tacit and the explicit features of group process: between the easy grace of embodied interaction achieved together on the field and the openly expressed, mutually accessible common knowledge of their joint commitments on which theorists of social ontology like Margaret Gilbert have tended to concentrate. Certainly they have pooled their wills in the way Gilbert sees as essential for the genuinely plural subject, a process which gives rise to characteristic sets of norms, obligations and expectations within this community.[53] A richly described case like this, in Jones' treatment, can indeed remind theorists that all these levels and processes coexist within a group. The team's activities essentially involve both nonconscious routines and explicit declarations, both the embodied joy of successful joint action as they open up another defensive line and the off-field analysis of a tougher game in which "the space we usually basked in just wasn't there" (43).

Another explicit dimension of group identity can be identified in the team's collective attempts to assess their place in the world: in England, in history and in *The Book of Fame*. On initial arrival in the old country, "we weren't sure how to place ourselves in that scene outside our window," and only gradually do the players "try to insert themselves" (30). They first begin to situate themselves not through language, but through recognizing familiar "mannerisms and transactions of the people . . . the way a barman with one neat action sweeps the bar top dry before setting down a pint of Guinness," the

same measuring sideways glance out of an Irishman's face
when a leg pull was on . . . That was us as well. (31)

Within weeks, after a string of triumphs, they share a new confidence:

England felt like a place specially created
for us to excel. (53)

At the National Portrait Gallery, among "the famous faces which seemed to want us to know them," they find one hall displaying "famous groups . . . Men of Science Living in 1807–8/ Swinburne and his Sisters": but "none like us" (54–5). Their early surprise at being the center of attention ("we'd catch them looking at us, measuring and evaluating" (32)) shifts as win follows win until "we'd moved from the world of ordinary men." Fame has many aspects. One is sheer joy:

we were the stuff of the shop window
What children's birthdays are made of [. . .]
We were the place smiles come from.

Or "a shoal of brilliantly coloured flying fish" (42) "a thing of wonder," like "sword-swallowing Moroccans" (168). Another is curiosity in comparison, as the New Zealanders check their daily allotment of lines in *The Times* and track notables in other domains and their "attempts to ascend the greasy pole."[54] Another is commodification, as trophy hunters grab their old cufflinks, signatures and train tickets, as their images appear on "postcards hawked about town" (57–9). Fatigue at the effort of being themselves produces a countervailing yearning for the inanimate, appreciating

those things
which are utmost and confidently themselves
a lily flat on a pond
the pattern of wallpaper in an empty hotel room
the last tree in a paddock (61)

or at least to be free of human time and projects like the Serpentine ducks who

did not appear to crave a crowd—
there was no scoreboard, no tally. (103)

Only a mindful collective could thus dream of escaping mental life.

Fame is the heart of the explicit self-conception that emerges through the New Zealanders' shared experience as they "changed people's lives" (107) and "introduced new ideas to Europe" (167). Only when exhausted on the long voyage home, between two lives, "somewhat betwixt, lame in our deckchairs, like old folk sharing memories," do they amass examples and assemble "this story we'd created for ourselves" (151), collating

the trip's novel experiences and telling incidents into some sort of version that might last, that might stick in memory right through to the end of the night of the 1955 reunion in

> a crowded city bar on Lambton Quay
> two old men driven into a smoky corner
> unnoticed. (173)

They can only imperfectly compare themselves to other groups inhabiting worlds "bound by the same elemental fear & wonder," as they think

> of Roman galleys
> pulling on oars out to the wide ocean. (172)

Finally, fame also brings and then intensifies the possibility of failure, the shadow of and behind their shared commitments. The novel is given shape in part by "the irresistible attraction of defeat," by Wales' controversial 3–0 victory in Cardiff, the New Zealanders' only loss. As they sense "what defeat might be like" they feel "blind terror": afterwards, "none of us could imagine laughter again except as something that might happen to other people," and they dream of "a place where there's no such thing as fame" (123). Even though the team recovers to win their final four club matches, "everything we did took a crucial second longer," and "no one spoke of grace anymore. It was like it had been rubbed from our limbs" (125).

Although we have been discussing more explicit and more implicit forms of action and group process separately, they are, as we noted, intimately intertwined. What group members say and think and remember is grounded in and colored by what they do. Reflective and articulated self-conceptions at both individual and team level coexist with various ways of understanding "the things you see but can never tell about" (157). The latter kind of inarticulable awareness is not thereby essentially inner or private: it too can be shared or mutual, another form of common knowledge. To underline the point that different rhythms and timescales thus operate simultaneously and (usually) cooperatively in skillful group agency, we finish by briefly considering Jones' evocations of cross-temporal phenomena and of the ways that memories of different kinds interanimate. The novel is full of "moments." But rather than being static snapshots of isolated, disconnected events, many of these moments are in motion, drifting and reassembling.

Early on the voyage out, Bill Cunningham senses the rhythm of his ordinary miner's life as already "distant, like a place inhabited by cousins once visited as a child. While you've never gone back you can't forget it either" (13). On reaching England, the New Zealanders map it against old templates, trying "to locate something of what our parents had said, or a vista passed down by our grandparents. One or two of the players argued with the view" (22). It takes many reminders running back and forth between past and present for them to be able "to disassemble what we saw from what we knew or had heard or read" (22). Just as personal or autobiographical remembering is often a compilation or assemblage of many different sources,[55] so perception and emotion in the present are often shot through with memory. On hearing a familiar sound of wood

on wood, Bunny Abbott "hears doors creaking in the bush—he blinks—and seeing it's England, colour enters his cheeks," while O'Sullivan "has the muddled idea that he's been here before" (23–4). In the midst of their unquenchable successes, dulled by their routines, sudden moments transport the players far away again:

> a baby's cry sending Stead's thoughts to Invercargill [. . .]
> a dog's bark causing the ears of Deans and Hunter to twitch
> and the exact hour in the hills registering in their eyes. (80)

These are ordinary memory phenomena, elicited both explicitly by letters from home and by just being confronted by the difference between those old "homebaked moments" and the present: struggling with homesickness on a gray day in West Hartlepool, Jimmy Hunter broke the silence—"How's this. In Mangamahu, on a hot day, the gorse bushes explode" (80–1). On the "black night crossing" to Ireland, we "drifted off to thoughts of home," eyes sometimes tearing at a specific memory, of smells—bacon fat, or deer—or of merely "looking out at the back yard with its chore list" (87). As Jimmy Hunter watches the crowds gather for the England game at Crystal Palace, a single shaft of memory plummets him to other times and places, as "the sound of a bellbird echoing from afar, across oceans, has him looking past these English trees to the heavily dressed branches of an elm brushing back the hurrying brown water of the Wanganui" (96). In further showing the ways that memory muddles time, Jones deploys lists and fragments, patchy sequences of items and experiences that connect as psychology rather than narrative. In the novel's final pages, memory drifts, across later wars and other stories. This is just what cannot happen for Billy Stead's fox, the one running this way and that in and out of the hounds pursuing it: unlike the New Zealanders' creations, its "life-saving understanding of space" was "instantly lost to memory" (76). Human memory and action are not entirely traceless.

Though all the versions of a complex and structured sequence of events and joint actions like a long-gone rugby tour are incomplete and partial, a novel such as this illuminates the space of multiple possibilities and of play. Both skill and group agency, we have suggested, are intriguing theoretical topics in their own right, ones which deserve more serious attention across the disciplinary spectrum. This one literary treatment of skilled collective action by Lloyd Jones offers a rich case study for mindful aesthetics. The point here is not simply to apply research in the cognitive sciences to a literary text; indeed, as should be clear from our discussion of the literature, there is no "settled science" of skilled group activity, but rather an assemblage of contentious, conflicting and emerging attempts to probe this often experienced but poorly understood phenomenon. In this context, fiction can be read as a form of skilled vision in itself.

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