

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA  
PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS/INGLÊS E LITERATURA  
CORRESPONDENTE

IMAGINING PAIN: THE REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE IN  
*BELOVED, PUSH, AND THE DEW BREAKER*

MARINA BARBOSA DE ALMEIDA

Tese submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina em  
cumprimento parcial dos requisitos para obtenção do grau de

DOUTORA EM LETRAS

FLORIANÓPOLIS

Setembro 2011



For professor José Luiz  
Meurer (*in memoriam*) whom we always called Zé.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work could not have been accomplished without the generous support of a number of institutions and people, and I wish to thank them here.

The financial support offered by CNPq in the first six months and by CAPES throughout the rest of my study and during my doctoral fellowship in England enabled me to devote myself fully to my work.

To my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Sérgio Luiz Prado Bellei: for being generous with his knowledge and time, for his work ethics, and for sharing with me his passion for literature, theory, and academic research. I am deeply grateful for his encouragement throughout the research and writing of this text, and during my teaching internship. His support, guidance, and significantly, his trust and respect for my ideas and choices have given me confidence about my work and about myself.

To Dr. Gail Lewis and Dr. Vron Ware, my supervisors during my doctoral fellowship: for offering me a much needed opportunity to look at my work through interdisciplinary lenses. Their insights and knowledge have altered the course of this study for the best.

I owe many thanks to the faculty, staff, and colleagues in Pós-Graduação em Letras/Inglês e Literatura Correspondente at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. I wish to express my gratitude to João Carlos da Silva for his help with every PGI matter, for his humor and attentive care.

I am very thankful to the Centre for Citizenship, Identities and Governance (CCIG) at The Open University, particularly to Professor Engin Isin and Anne Paynter.

I am very grateful to a group of friends and colleagues who listened throughout and who cared about this project and about me. To Dr. Keli Pacheco for her astute listening and thoughtful responses, and for nurturing friendship. To Dr. Raia Prokhovnik for welcoming me with open arms at the CCIG and for her encouragement and counsel. To Prof. Dr. José Roberto O'shea for his support and for being such an inspiring teacher and researcher. I am especially grateful to Prof. Dr. José Luiz Meurer (*in memoriam*) for always encouraging me and my research with enthusiasm.

To the professors who read and commented on my research

project at different stages in this process: Claudia Lima Costa, Eliana Ávila, Maria Lúcia Martins, Jean McAvoy, and particularly to Magali Sperling Beck for her precious feedback and support at the final stage of writing.

Working on this project has often seemed lonely. The people whom I share my life with have been giving me constant support and friendship. I am forever grateful to my loving family, my parents, Ronaldo and Marilene, and my sisters, Maíra, Joana, and Lígia. To my best friends, Daniela and Maria Helena. To my cousin and great friend, Clarisse. To my adorable and fun flatmates, Katharina and Gwenola. Finally, to Brian for his love and unwavering faith in me and belief in us.

ABSTRACT

IMAGINING PAIN: THE REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE IN  
*BELOVED, PUSH, AND THE DEW BREAKER*

MARINA BARBOSA DE ALMEIDA

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

2011

Supervising Professor: Dr. Sérgio Luiz Prado Bellei

This dissertation examines how representations of violence and of human suffering can affect us. It discusses how media discourses have desensitized audiences by domesticating violent images that fail to shock and to cause empathy. In contrast to media representations, this study looks at literary representations and the experience of reading narratives that are thematically and aesthetically violent. The discussion follows Marco Abel's (2007) approach to the representation of violent events in terms of their aesthetic force; that is, in terms of literature's potential to defer the transformation of the *experience* of violence into the *representation* of violence. The analyses of *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison, *Push* (1996) by Sapphire, and *The Dew Breaker* (2004) by Edwidge Danticat illustrate how Black Women writers have deployed *the deferral of truth* as a narrative strategy that carries the potential to disrupt knowledge, to bring back sensation, and to offer readers the possibility of constructing new meanings. In this way, these literary narratives of violence and suffering become spaces of indeterminacy and doubt, but also of imagination, creativity, and reflection.

Number of pages: 193

Number of words: 59929

## RESUMO

IMAGINING PAIN: THE REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE IN  
*BELOVED*, *PUSH*, AND *THE DEW BREAKER*

MARINA BARBOSA DE ALMEIDA

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

2011

Professor Orientador: Dr. Sérgio Luiz Prado Bellei

A presente tese reflete sobre maneiras de sermos afetados por representações de violência e sofrimento humano. A discussão parte da incapacidade do discurso midiático em sensibilizar sua audiência quando imagens violentas não são capazes de causar choque e empatia. Em contraste a estas representações, este estudo examina representações literárias e a experiência de leitura de narrativas que são temática e esteticamente violentas. O argumento segue a metodologia proposta por Marco Abel (2007) na qual a representação de eventos violentos é abordada em termos de sua força estética; em termos do potencial da literatura em suspender o significado e a verdade evitando, assim, a transformação da *experiência* da violência em uma *representação* da violência. As análises de *Beloved* (1987) de Toni Morrison, *Push* (1996) de Sapphire e *The Dew Breaker* (2004) de Edwidge Danticat ilustram como escritoras negras norte-americanas utilizam o recurso narrativo *deferral of truth* (“postergar a verdade”). Tal recurso carrega o potencial de subverter o conhecimento do leitor, trazer de volta sensação e oferecer a possibilidade de criarmos novos significados. Desta forma, estas narrativas de violência e dor tornam-se espaços de indeterminação e dúvida, mas também de imaginação, criatividade e reflexão.

Nº de páginas: 193

Nº de palavras: 59929

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Signature Page</b>	ii
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	iv
<b>Abstract</b>	vi
<b><i>Resumo</i></b>	vii
<b>1. Introduction</b>	
1.1 Representing Violence and Human Suffering	3
1.2 The Construction and Representation of Identities	7
1.3 American Identities	10
1.4 Representing African-American Identities	17
1.5 Black Women's Literature	21
1.6 Representing Violence and Human Suffering: the Aesthetic Register	24
<b>PART I</b>	
<b>2. Imagining Pain: Reading, Affect, and the Representation of Violence</b>	27
2.1 The Inexpressibility of Pain	30
2.2 The Experience of Affect	39
2.3 The Affective Force of Images	49
2.4 Marco Abel's pedagogical experiment	54
2.5 Affective Encounters in the Act of Reading	57



<b>3. Imagining Black Pain</b>	60
3.1 Authenticity in the Representation of Suffering	60
3.2 Constructing Affectivity and Subjectivity	68
3.3 Affective Encounters, Emotions, and Literary Representations	76
<b>PART II</b>	
<b>4. Black Women's Literary Narratives of Violence</b>	83
4.1 Black Women's Literature and Black Feminism	84
4.2 Black Women's Writing and the Representation of Violence	90
<b>5. <i>Beloved</i></b>	97
5.1 The Choices of Margaret Garner and Sethe	102
5.2 The Force of Invisibility and Pain	106
<b>6. <i>Push</i></b>	116
<b>7. <i>The Dew Breaker</i></b>	125
7.1 Deferring Judgment in <i>The Dew Breaker</i>	136
<b>Final Remarks</b>	141
<b>Bibliography</b>	144
<b>Appendix</b>	156

*“It's gonna hurt, now,” said Amy. “Anything dead coming back to life hurts”.*

(Toni Morrison *Beloved* p. 42)

## 1. Introduction

The story of this dissertation began few years before I started my doctoral studies. And it began with a book of images. In July 2005 I left the exhibition *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* at the Chicago Historical Society with its catalog in hands. Although I had been curious to see this exhibition, attending it proved to be a frustrating experience. I ended up restless and sulky, but curiously, sulky at myself for being unwilling to see the whole collection of photographs<sup>1</sup> being displayed. I purchased the catalog telling myself I could see the photographs later. Or deluding myself from the fact that, although I found them horrific images, I wanted to *have* them, bring them home with me.

Back home I placed the catalog in a bookshelf. I was doing my Master's at the time - on racial and gendered representation in Di Cavalcanti's mulattas and I did not pick up that book for months. Occasionally someone would pick the catalog out of the shelf, flip its pages and either ask me where I got it or silently place it back. Once, a red go g t r o g t e p o t o g r a p h s r e t a t a s e d " d o o a v e a o o o p t r e s o g a o r p s e s " r e p e d t a t e a e d e a t a s e r " o r o r " d t e a t a o g e t a t o i t s place on the shelf, waiting to become work as I waited for a convincing answer.

My work came when I wrote my doctoral project. I was going to depart from the violence *in* and *of* those images in order to address the representation of racial violence in African American literature. Back in the museum I was intrigued by those photographs, by the choice of organizing such show, and significantly, by the fact those events took place and thousands of people attended, took pictures, kept and exchanged them. I still am. Of course I can posit a list of individual and collective reasons, present historical and psychoanalytical explanations. However, none of them turn the sensation of looking at them into the ultimate meaning of them. In this way, I like to think that, for me, these photographs remain suspended (with an array of other violent images) in a place in my mind where they simply exist awaiting for meaning. Surely this dissertation was an attempt at finding and constructing meaning and, I hope, it will join the group of texts and studies that have offered fragments of a history. But my search for an understanding

---

<sup>1</sup> Refer to the appendix for images.

(innumerable times I have thought it to be a naive and idealistic goal) led me to what now I believe to be a better way of *understanding* understanding. That I should approach the violence *in* and *of* those photographs and events without removing their violence for, as soon as shock and horror are set aside, those images become bearable and the events explained. My dissertation became, then, a reflection on how to keep the shock, the violation of our mind, senses, and body, that watching violence and pain are capable of triggering. A reflection on what other ways of knowing intersect in the act of watching violence and the pain of others.

I have organized my reflections in the form of an academic text. What follows is a contextualization of these personal sensations and reflections in light of analyses and methodologies engaging notions and concepts in order to construct my discussion. In this doctoral dissertation, I approach the representation of violence and suffering in American culture as a significant site in which racial and gender categories are constructed. Because the thematic of violence and suffering can render emotional reactions, this study focuses on how affects and emotions inform the narratives we all create.

This dissertation is divided in two parts. The first part consists of the presentation of my theoretical discussion on the possibility of being affected by representations of violence and of the suffering of others. I depart from cultural analyses that discuss how media practices and discourses have desensitized viewers. This is followed by a discussion on the representation of racial violence in the United States. In both instances my argument is illustrated with non-literary narratives in order to contrast media to literary representations. The latter are proposed as sites for the creation of new ways of being, of becoming, in the world (O'Sullivan 2001: 130).

In the second part, I present Black women's literature in order to illustrate and argue my thesis. Certainly there are many other literary texts in American literature that offer that sort of aesthetic antidote to desensitization; yet I have chosen to focus on Black women's thought and writing. I have selected three novels as part of my corpus: *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison, *Push* (1996) by Sapphire, and *The Dew Breaker* (2004) by Edwidge Danticat. Even though these novels address many themes, my focus (and reason for their selection) is on how they address the theme of violence. The three novels tell the stories of characters surrounded by physical and psychological violence and their

everlasting shattering physical and psychic effects.

Before we move to the theoretical discussion, I would like to present how this study approaches key notions, such as, the theme of violence and of watching human suffering and concepts of representation and identity. Following that, there is an initial discussion on how these concepts inform the discussion on categories of identification, such as racial and gender categories, that constitute social and cultural relationships in the Western world and, particularly, in the United States. Finally, I present literature and my object of study within this context.

### 1.1 Representing Violence and Human Suffering

avonius's *Violence* (2009) identifies three kinds of violence in the globalized world: subjective, systemic, and symbolic violence. The first one entails the visible acts of violence in which violence is "performed and made to be felt" ( ) crimes and terrorism are in this category. The other two are types of what he terms objective violence. Systemic violence consists of the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems ( ) and, contrary to subjective violence, it is invisible and often perceived as inherent to society and culture. Symbolic violence works in the same invisible manner and consists of the violence "embedded in language and discourse" ( ) that is, the violence of discourse, or better, the violence of hegemonic discourses.

According to the three types of violence or simultaneously so that the experiences of crimes and terrorism are understood as a violent and destructive disruption of a non-violent peaceful state of things. This idea is sustained by the symbolic and systemic types of violence, which create the non-violent dimension against the ease of violence. Systemic violence consists of the "need to perceive the contours of the background which generates such outbursts. A step back enables us to identify a violence that sustains our very efforts to get violence and to promote to era" ( ) at the violence is established against a standard of a "non-violent state" ( ) and, therefore, postulates a standard of a "state" the highest form of violence" and the reason for the violence (embedded in non-violence) is the "violence" ( ) or

instance, using reactions to *Without Sanctuary* as an example, we could say that both indifferent and shocking reactions to lynching photography are inserted in the realm of possibilities that American racial discourse (racist and anti-racist) has created. The necessity and acceptance of such exhibition as a key element of American memory and history are part of the cultural and political ideology behind American racial discourse. In the same manner, viewers' reactions of horror, indifference, or pleasure are a reflection of the symbolic and systemic violence that created the a gro d aga st t ose r es rr pted der e s perspective, one could say that the history of racial relations and the construction of racial discourse in the United States have rendered possible a kind of filtering mechanism that stops these horrific images from having a full impact in the viewers' symbolic dimension and part of the criticism <sup>2</sup> of the show departs from here.

In this way, we could say that empathy and indifference behind our reactions to the suffering of others are governed by the symbolic and systemic dimensions of violence (if we understand the three operating concurrently). Acts of violence (subjective violence) may horrify us and cause revolt if it disrupts what we consider a peaceful state of non-vo e e e s e a p e s strat ve ere

The cover story of *Time* aga e o e e as 'the Deadliest War in the World'. This offered detailed documentation on how around 4 million people died in the Democratic Republic of Congo as the result of political violence over the last decade. None of the usual humanitarian uproar followed, just a couple of readers' letters o p t t a *Time* picked the wrong victim in the struggle for the hegemony in suffering. It should have stuck to the list of usual suspects: Muslim women and their plight, or the families of 9/11 victims and how they have coped with t e r o s s e s e d e a t o a e s t a a e s t a a d not to mention an Israeli or an American, is mediatically worth thousands of times more than the death of a nameless o g o e s e ( e -03)

e s e a p e strates at t e a o r t e r a readership of *Time* magazine would conceive of as a disruption of a

---

<sup>2</sup> Check second section of part one for some of the criticism.

peaceful state of non-violence. Different cultures and societies and within the same culture and society this notion may vary. However, these arguments also represent the latter era democratic audience's reaction to their suffering and the suffering of others.

The media experience of watching violence and suffering renders the potential for several distinct human reactions. On opposite side we encounter a viewer's reaction of horror and disgust or a reaction of gleeful interest. Within this continuum lies the extreme reactions of blindness and refusal to see what happens in the daily lives of people; or a disavowal of reality; or even a fetishist attitude towards the individuals depicted (Eco 2006). All these reactions are possible and they involve certain emotions. However, it bears asking: which ones involve a greater participation of moral and ethical values? Or should we allow for the possibility of all of them or a blend of some as authentic human reaction to anything?

The appeal of the "open readers letters" signals to what, in media studies, is termed *compassion fatigue*. This concept describes the audience's indifference towards distant suffering (Moeller 1999; Chouliaraki 2006). In *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (2006), Lilie Chouliaraki questions whether the media today can "mediate a distance or a de-gate to the area of other" ( ) or rather mediated as practiced at the time so images can further a "ethical sense" ( ) spectators (Chouliaraki, the experience of watching human suffering on TV becomes domesticated because contemporary media's discursive practices have opened a "distance" ( ) opened to the area as a "intermediate" ( ) of the divide between the West and the East"<sup>3</sup> (05). This type of mediation turns reaction to the area of spectators appears "to a horror of reaction" ( ) of today's spectators" (05). Once images can fail to trigger the spectators "ethical sense" ( )

---

<sup>3</sup> Chouliaraki argues that the media's politics of discourse is a reformulation of historical critical accounts of world divisions and economic and political relationships of subordination. Echoing Stuart Hall's work on white power and colonialism, Chouliaraki states that to practice the area of "as a result" ( ) of the power of the "advertising" ( )

Chouliaraki argues that the overexposure to human suffering via television as “aesthetic gesture” ( )

In this way, for example, it is used as a tool to mobilize various mechanisms that render us, viewers, (ethically) insensitive to the most brutal acts of physical violence against other people. So, the fight against violence is pointless when those who combat it are committing systemic and symbolic violence that generated the first one (174). The ultimate cause of violence lies in the phenomena of the threat of the other, the different other that is not-me. This fear is founded and sustained by language itself. “The violence of television” ( )

These analyses are reiterated in the theoretical analyses of violence that constitute the theoretical basis of this study. According to these analyses of contemporary violence, we could say that inasmuch as the visible (subjective) kind of violence remains the one that shocks us, the one that disrupts our sense of peace, desensitization and indifference will continue to be our most common reaction. Also, these analyses suggest that the way to stop physical violence and suffering is to address the systemic and symbolic violence that create the background for the first one.

Having said that, I want to posit here the focus of this doctoral study: the potential effects of our encounters with images and narratives of violence and suffering of others. This study is an examination of what other affective investments are possible in the experience of watching the suffering of others that are not numbness and indifference. If language plays a significant role in the creation of physical violence and, at the same time, is also the medium through which a non-violent state can be achieved, perhaps we should look at means through which language can affect us, how language can become violent to the point that it triggers empathy, compassion, transformation, and why not non-violence. Albeit I do not dismiss the importance of addressing the systemic and symbolic modes of violence behind the common reaction of numbness in the experience of watching the suffering of others, I focus my study on what may seem like the surface level of violence in which violence destroys bodies, the violence that is heard in cries of pain or expressed in the silence of destruction. And, because of that, I focus on the potential reactions of horror or pleasure, and, more importantly, on the



possibility of transformation that lies in human emotions - a potential I locate in the aesthetic experience of reading literature.

In the narratives analyzed here violence kills, destroys, and denigrates individuals, families, and communities. It is brutal and terrible. It is verbal, physical, and psychological. Also, violence creates a corrosive pain that, when unsuccessful in destroying the body, it destroys one's mind, senses, and selfhood. Because violence and suffering articulate aspects of racial, gendered, and class structures, they become sites for the (re)construction of identities.

My discussion is centered around the experience of violence in the United States and the fictionalization of past and present ideology and crimes. I find in Black women's literature great examples of works that illustrate my argument. However, that does not mean I restrict the notion of violent encounters with art to this tradition. On the contrary, this is not a characteristic of one or few literary traditions, but an aspect of the aesthetic quality of texts. Apart from the obvious restriction of a doctoral study, my choice was also based on Black women's literary tradition of dwelling over aspects of black women's social positioning: one of struggle against racism and sexism, and the violence and pain potentially involved in that experience (Keizer 2007: 155).

Whilst what e a s objective violence certainly appear in the background of my discussion and analyses of the novels, this study does not go further into an examination of the systemic and symbolic dimensions of violence in the United States. This study has benefited from the extensive literature available for research and the chosen methodology is the examination of racial and gender relations through the lenses of Feminist Criticism, Critical Race Theory, and Cultural Studies. Having said that, due to these diverse literature and scholarly criticism, I believe it is necessary that I explain how this study approaches basic concepts such as the notion of race, racialized and gendered bodies, and racial and gendered identities.

## 1.2 The Construction and Representation of Identities

This study examines literary representations of violence and suffering and how these can affect readers. It also thinks of these a e t v e e o t e r s t a t e r a t e t a s t e s o r t e r e a t o o “ e a s o t g a d e e g” ( eleuze 1991: 16). With that in mind, it is important to define how notions of identity and subjectivity come to articulate meanings *in* and *through* representations of violence and

suffering.

As the first section of part one shows, the analysis of systems of representation (here the representation of violence and suffering in Western media) always approaches meanings within the culture that produces them. Within Western culture, for example, certain subject positions are produced and we, as subjects, learn how to position ourselves within them. As Kathryn Woodward (1997) explains:

Representation includes the signifying practices and symbolic systems through which meanings are produced and which position us as subjects. Representations produce meanings through which we can make sense of our experience and of ourselves. These systems create the possibilities of what we are and what we can become. (14)

Consequently, individual and collective identities are established and discourses are created as sites from which individuals and groups can position themselves and from which they can speak. In this way, Woodward defines *identification* as “the process of dealing with others, either through lack of awareness of difference or separation, or as a result of perceived similarities” ( ) to generate a common set of possibilities or “dealings with others” *we* *imagine* our belonging to a shared idea or characteristic (Anderson 1991). That is to say that within a united group or community there are different ways in which their identity is imagined. For Stuart Hall (1997), such *cultural identity* may be best understood in two ways.

The first one understands *cultural identity* as a single authentic self shared by people of a same history, place, and ancestry. This notion views other selves as less important in uniting these people, and stands as a retroactive tradition of a sense of “oneness” as a notion that shaped post-colonial cultural practices such as *Negritude* poetry (Hall 1997: 111), the *Pan-Africanism* of Du Bois early in the twentieth century and “other to the empowered and reactive force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalized peoples” ( ) as a state of production here is rendered through a detailed “passionate” research over and over again the past. However, as expected, an imaginary coherence is enforced in various experiences in an attempt to construct unity. For example, the image of Africa as the “other” and “other” of a population or the fate of suffering of black people through the representation of





American individuals have been based on concepts and ideologies of race, racialism and racism, rendering them a mixture of pain, struggle, fight, solidarity, and pride. In a racially dichotomous society<sup>4</sup> such as the United States, individuals have identified themselves through their differences in skin tone, and have, therefore, constructed their subjectivities and identities through resistance and assimilation, through violent and peaceful social practices. The first decades of the twentieth century witnessed the invocation of the ideal of the American nation and people *we, the people*. By recalling the rhetoric of the founding fathers in moments of instability, an individual was given the chance of group identification, a sense of collectiveness, thus diminishing ethnic and class borders. The ideal of *Americanness* as a gathering principle influenced the work of artists, writers, and historians. While *the people* was being constructed and represented literally and visually, the limits of *whiteness* and *blackness* were simultaneously being established. Part of the heritage of the ideal of *Americanness* is identified by Richard Wright as “that part” of his character Jigger as *Native Son* (1940):

that part of him which we get from our seeing and hearing, from school, from the hopes and dreams of our friends; that part of him which the common people of America never talk of but take for granted ( ) even a dea s t at makes us believe that the Constitution is a good document of government, that the Bill of Rights is a good legal and humane principle to safeguard our civil liberties, that every man and woman should have the opportunity to realize himself, to seek his own individual fate and goal, his own peculiar and untranslatable destiny. (Wright 1991: 871)

“opportunity to realize” of these to see oneself as a “divided and a goal” as a good value dear to the American culture and inseparable from the ideal of freedom. This American identity is based on the idea of individuality and the realization of one’s individuality.

---

<sup>4</sup> Racially dichotomous society is understood as one in which there are two main races, black and white, contrary to racially continuous societies in which there is some gradation between the two extremes of black and white. For instance, Puerto Rico and Brazil are considered racially continuous societies. Notwithstanding, both types of societies can be racist and segregate their individuals (Rose 1993).

identity. The theme of freedom has also guided literary representations of blackness as opposed to whiteness. In this way, black characters were left struggling for their - Wright would say - *part* of the American identity.

This search for freedom and self-realization took place, many times, through violence, once most attempts were regarded as rebellious and unlawful. Suppression of any illegal action was legitimate, for peace and order ought to be maintained. Wright talks about the common destination devoted to as "the whites who restricted their lives made them pay a terrible price. They were shot, hanged, maimed, lynched, and generally hounded until they were either dead or transported" (Wright 1957).

These acts of violence and the accompanied tension and fear sustained racial relations in the United States. Their media and literary representation have been means through which racial and gendered identities and subjectivities are constructed in the American society. This study examines literary narratives as one of the sites where the production of cultural identities and the practice and representation of racial and gender alterity take place (Morrison 1993). Literature and the production of literature are valuable objects of study in the examination of social relations, cultural imaginary, and historical changes of a given *imagined community* (Anderson 1991). For Toni Morrison (1993), the access to the imaginative, to the creative minds of a period and place is achieved through the narratives and texts written at the time. A sense of belonging, of fellowships, and union is produced by the narration of a common past, and the wishing for and dreaming of a better future for everyone. Writers may engage in the writing of memory and/or the revision of history, and literature can become a key feature of how cultural identities are created and maintained.

In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993) Toni Morrison begins by pointing to the vulnerability, in her opinion, of a collection of traditional assumptions, accepted by the storied tradition, related as "edge" of the American literature. The presence of the first Africans, and later of the African-Americans, in the construction of the national literature. The main assumption establishes *Americanness* as a way of being and a sentiment that would have shaped the characteristics of the national literature and this would not have been directly informed or influenced by the Africanist presence

in the American culture and society. Morrison searches for the social and historical origin of *Americanness* in young America. She asks questions about the reasons why the first immigrants – the pilgrims – flew to the New World; why they abandoned their lives with the desire to start a new one; and, more importantly, what they left behind as opposed to what promises they dreamed of in the New World. According to Morrison, it was the escape from poverty, oppression, social ostracism, to name a few, and the search for richness, power, and community that shaped the imaginary of those first Americans. In the same breath those immigrants also sought a *counterpart* for their own oppression in their newly discovered chance to oppress *others*, as Morrison argues:

One could move from discipline and punishment to disciplining and punishing; from being socially ostracized to being socially ostracizing. The place produced by the young nation is one place it inscribed these fears, forces, and hopes. (Morrison 37)

Following this argument, racialism and the idea of the hierarchy of race found in slavery – the ideal *counterpart* for the concept of freedom. Specifically in the American context, the construction of blackness and enslavement as the not-free, but also the Other, turned out to be ideal for the imaginary.<sup>5</sup> Africanism, therefore, was the result of collective needs to alleviate internal fears and to rationalize the exploitation of other human beings.

What Edward Said (2004) has termed (the process of) *othering* – by representing an image of the other you can possess it and from that construct yourself – has prevailed in cultural and artistic forms and became an influential idea in the United States deliberately controlled by certain institutions and people. The development of racist ideas into what one can call common-sense knowledge is a clear example of cultural hegemony in place in American society. Morrison sees cultural hegemony as part of an intricate system of economic, historical and cultural elements happening at once in a society. The theoretical basis of racialism and a hierarchy of races was elaborated at the same time slaveholders and plantation owners needed a justification for bringing their workforce from Africa. However, Morrison stresses that hegemony

---

<sup>5</sup> Morrison points out the European Africanism with its counterpart in colonial literature.

is only effective because it is a reaction against its own productive instability. As Said stresses in *Orientalism* (2004):

My point is to say that we can better understand the persistence and the durability of saturating hegemonic systems like culture when we realize that their internal constraints upon writers and thinkers were *productive*, not unilaterally inhibiting. (Said 14)

...orr so ... o d agree t a d s g g t g o t e productive quality of hegemonic systems upon artistic creation, for she e eves t at a r t e r s a g a t o a d r e a t v t s e e d t e r t e r s t e a d p a e a s o r t o o e t v e o s o s o a e r t a s o e t e o s t r t o o t e t e a s d e t t what would become the American identity was elaborated through a discourse based on racial and gender difference.

This study acknowledges the cultural and social existence of races rather than the biological concept of race. Although the latter has been scientifically proven to be untrue, its effect, a *race effect* has been felt and experienced in every day life. In this way, as suggested by a a t r p v a s “strateg esse t a s ” ( ) t e o s t r t o a d (self-)definition of racial identity is understood as a political strategy, as a means toward agency and social change in spite of its essentialism and reduction of subjectivity and of the complexity of human experience.

In *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self* (2006) Linda Alcoff states the political importance of identity in the fight against racism and sexism. For Alcoff, claims on the pernicious side of difference, as represented by group identities, and the incompatibility of multiculturalism with unity and universalism tend to repeat conservative arguments heirs to the Enlightenment ideal of individual freedom. Individual freedom and the power of creativity as the basic human condition are deeply ingrained in Western philosophical and political traditions. Any threat to the autonomy of the individual is seen as constraint. In this way, groups and organizations based on a shared identity would on several levels hurt the basic human right of freedom: it would imply conformity, intolerance, external imposition, and the absence of authentic human action on the level of the individual; and it would undermine any attempt of a broader goal such as democracy or utopian views of universalism.

In the United States, the ideal of the melting-pot illustrates very



well a national effort to be seen and constructed as a new nation of individuals based on equal rights and democratic values. Ethnic differences would be smoothed over resulting in an all-inclusive nation. However, as Alcoff point out, these arguments have worked more in theory or with slow changes in politics and justice, and it is clear how urgent social changes are. The dissolution of difference resulting in a neutral universal individual will not bring equality and solidarity among people, as it was first thought. It is by accepting difference as a constitutive part of human condition that measures towards equal rights a d s o d a r t a e t a e o s r e e t o s e g r s t a e p t g the complexity of social identities. On the one hand, there is the o p e t o d e g o e s identity as fixed and fully visible. On the other hand, we face the fundamental heterogeneity of identity groups. Secondly, it is necessary recognition - by experience of political and social work - that identities matter; especially in order to fight for a political cause. The claim of a unity, of a shared essence and community, is necessary for the development and articulation of a political agenda even if that claim of homogeneity is recognized to be a strategic political move and not the actual reality of sameness (Spivak 1996).

Perceiving identities as constraint to the individual is mixing subjectivity with social identity, for the latter does not necessarily preclude self-identity. For Alcoff, the mental processes of constitution of the self do not necessarily imply conformity to a social identity. Identities of race and gender operate through bodily markers; they are constituted through the physical manifestation of difference among individuals. These bodily markers account for how one individual experiences the world, for they are visible to others and to oneself. s t d e t e r e s o t o t e o s t r t o o e s s e t v t t also political and economic status. Bodily markers are signs that operate within a system that structures groups of people believed to share a number of physical attributes. In this way, it is *expected* of individuals to behave according to notions of identity commonly held to be part of a certain group.

The conflict between inner and outer social demands as part of the modern individual was carefully developed by W.E.B. Du Bois at the turn of the twentieth century. For Du Bois, the African American individual carries the singularity of having two consciousnesses, of being a Negro and of being an American, and this duality a *double-consciousness* - one could never overcome. His consciousness of being

an American citizen would be always counterposed by his consciousness of inhabiting a black body, once American citizenship was defined as the privilege of a white man. As Fanon (1967) states, "the Negro is always a third person: always waiting to act as a Negro. He/she can only *be* if they embrace the Negro past, ancestors, history; for the Negro is the Other and that is the only position for the *being* of a Negro. For Fanon, the Negro is not the master of his consciousness: *being is unbeing* for the Negro because he is always *being* as someone who is not yet recognized (seen) to be. The Negro is thus trapped in his own body by the color of his skin and by what that color means in society (Fanon 109-140). In other words, the visibility of bodily markers cannot be dismissed because these are the signs prior to any social interaction. As Alcoff remarks:

The reality of identities often comes from the fact that they are visibly marked on the body itself, guiding if not determining the way we perceive and judge others and are perceived and judged by them. The road to freedom from the capriciousness of arbitrary identity designations lies not, as some class reductionists and postmodernists argue, in the attempt at a speedy dissolution of identity—a proposal that all too often conceals a willful ignorance about the real-world effects of identity—but through a careful exploration of identity, which can reveal its influence on what we can see and know, as well as its context dependence and its complex and fluid nature. (Alcoff 05)

Moreover, the visibility of physical markers is the means by which individuals not only segregate and oppress each other but also manifest unity and resistance. As Fanon named it, *the fact of blackness*, should account for not only reaction to a given oppression, but also for political unity and coalitions for action. Additionally, Alcoff stresses the role of the "racialized body" (Alcoff 194) that operates in a given society, that is, how racial markers become more visible through learned processes, consequently, how race becomes naturalized in a

culture.

#### 1.4 Representing African-American Identities

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the debate between W.E.B Du Bois and Booker T. Washington over political strategies shaped the dualism of Black thought in the now familiar categories of militancy/moderate protest and accommodation. The concept of *double consciousness* was appropriated on an equal basis by both approaches, Black intellectuals tended to follow one line in their analysis of black experience, their criticism of state policies on racial issues, and the proposition of their political strategies for the liberation of black people. In spite of the positions taken, Black intellectuals, writers and artists who engaged in the construction of Black tradition were inserted in historically specific modes of (political) discourse on race, class and gender and, as participants, their works reflected such time and place.

Above all, African-American thought reflected upon the very origin of African-American literature in the United States: the writings of slaves and ex-slaves in the eighteenth century. The European dream of civil liberty grounded these black writers to create a literature that represented the reason was represented, for slaves and ex-slaves, their humanity (and most times followed by their manumission) was proved in and through their texts (Gates and McKay: 1996-1997). Freedom, therefore, became the theme repeated and revised by generations of black writers.

In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. Du Bois presents his concept of *double consciousness* as the foundation of the uniqueness of being black in the United States. For Du Bois that essential difference should be valued for its contribution to the American society and country, a contribution that could only enrich an already diverse unique nation. For Du Bois, being black was not a reason for shame. On the contrary, it was through the discovery and value of those unique elements of black culture and soul that the past of oppression could be overcome, and with equal contributions from black, white, yellow and red cultures built a better nation.

In *The Future of the American Negro* (1899) Booker T. Washington states his social philosophy and racial strategy for black

advancement. It was a philosophy grounded in the traditional American philosophy of self-help and industry and a strategy based on mutual aid and education. Washington defended education as the basis for growth and prosperity, and praised love and justice in the mutual interdependence of whites and blacks, urging blacks to make themselves useful to whites in order to gain full civil and political rights, making

se a “ se o ora e a d des ra e t e ” ( as gto )

Washington was complimented for his detailed view of the social and economic status of the black population and criticized for his conservative view of the race problem. For many critics, Washington focused on love and justice among all instead of focusing on equality of treat e t der t e a e dep t o o t e “ se o ora e a d des ra e ” a t e ade as gto a ways resembles the patience and endurance of black characters in novels like *Uncle om s abin*, personified in the character of Uncle Tom. As James a d as oted “ e as to e e s a o t ro g s or e ara e a e s rv ve or tr p ” ( a dwin 1998: 14).

o s a r t o oo er as gto p s ed “ e

t d o t e egro ro e s” arg g or ore r t a

systematic and complete scientific studies on the Negro question. For Du Bois the problems affecting the Negro population in the United States were peculiar in two ways, and any serious study should address ot aspe ts separa e s de o t e e at o s t at “ egroes do not share the full national life because as a mass they have not reached a sufficiently high grade o t re” t e ot er s de s d e t e e ste e o “a o v t o varying in intensity, but always widespread that people of Negro blood should not be admitted into the group life of the at o o atter at t er o d t o g t e” ( os 2000: 17). To put it another way, in regard to the black population in the United States, a ord g to os “povert g ora e a d so a degradat o ” are complicated because of racism.

Before we can begin to study the Negro intelligently, we must realize definitely that not only is he affected by all the varying social forces that act on any nation at his stage of advancement, but that in addition to these there is reacting upon him the mighty power of a peculiar and unusual social environment which affects to some extent every other social force. (Du Bois 19)

add to the list of studies that “state” “rage” and “retreat” studies do not have not contributed to the development of measures and policies that would engender social change. Instead, scientific research had so far repeated same information from previous works, which were in most cases based on opinions and not facts. Even the researchers’ biased convictions guided their investigations. That is to say that African-Americans were the object of study and objectified even further through study and field.

Another problem for Du Bois is the lack of contextualization of each research – such as geographical and social aspects of each community –, an uncritical choice of the appropriate point of view to investigate the problems, and a selection of a specific aspect of Negro life without taking the past (the history of slavery) into account. For Du Bois, the Negro problem – a social problem of all Americans – could only be seriously addressed if the “do-over” is again the guiding principle of scientific research in academic institutions and government bureaus (23-27). Finally, any investigation must combine socioeconomic aspects with racial ones.

[to] study the tangible phenomena of Negro prejudice in all possible aspects of the Negro’s personal development, on his mental acquisitiveness, on his moral and social condition, as manifested in economic life, in legal sanctions and in crime and lawlessness. So, too, the influence of that same prejudice on American life and character would explain the otherwise inexplicable changes through which Negro prejudice has passed. (Du Bois 25-26)

As the “Negro problem” was echoed by writers and intellectuals throughout the twentieth century making Black thought and tradition, at the same time, an unified and divided field. On the one side, there are approaches towards the celebration of blackness as a unique feature; on the other, there are efforts to transcend race as a cultural and social divide. In either case, African-American intellectual tradition is rich in its efforts to approach society and culture with a careful consideration for their complexity.

The memory of the past of slavery and the profound consequences of bondage are part of African-American thought and tradition, and the slave narratives are placed in the origin of African-

er a terat re e er a g te e ts drea o vil  
 liberty and later the ideal of the American dream combined with  
 d v d a s eed a d des re o reedo a d e t o st t ed a  
 fertile ground for writers. Freedom and the escape from pain became  
 themes to be repeated and revised in African-American literature  
 (Baldwin 1998; Gates and McKay 1996-97; Franklin and Gates 2001).  
 The moral and physical struggle for freedom and what it represented in  
 different times in the history of the United States for the black  
 population is a constitutive part of African-American identity. The origin  
 of this fight for freedom goes back to slavery, to laws that did not  
 concede same rights to blacks, to persecution, to racial profiling, just to  
 give some examples. From fictional and autobiographical slave  
 narratives to t e “ r a er a ove ” t ere s a stor o  
 achievement and a cultural heritage a heritage constructed out of the  
 memory of slavery (Mulvey 2004; Fabi 2004).

Toni Morrison's life-long commitment to social change and her  
 prolific fictional and academic production offer a broad view of the race  
 issue in the American society and African-American thought. As  
 orr so sa d terv e s “ e do t eep to t t e  
 a estor e are a t ost ” eep g to t t e a estor s e  
 adds s t e or o re o str tve e or “ e or (t e de erate  
 act of remembering) is a form of willed creation. It is not an effort to  
 find out the way it really was that is research. The point is to dwell on  
 the way it appeared and why it appeared t at part ar a ” t s  
 a s e t e ds er or to “ ear t ess a d de t t at s  
 se ro t e past a d t at o g t to e d s arded” ( orr so  
 1984: 344; 1984: 385). In *Beloved*, we could say that with the  
 fictionalization of a true story Morrison invites readers to undertake a  
 process of creation (the revision of Margaret Garner's infanticide) in  
 order to look at the American past. As Morrison said in another  
 interview:

There is a necessity for remembering the horror [of slavery],  
 but of course there's a necessity for remembering it in a  
 manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which  
 memory is not destructive. The act of writing the book, in a  
 way, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to  
 remember. (Darling 1994: 247-248)

s “ e ess t or re e er g t e orror ” o s aver s

ost t t ve o at ara o o a ( ) ter s “ a deat ”  
 a d “ a d g” ( ) t at s t e r a -American's lingering and  
 knowing ways of dying due to a past of slavery, segregation, race riots,  
 racial violence, and oppression. Holloway argues that this notion  
 became a significant aspect of African-American identity; because of  
 untimely presence of death and suffering in the African-American  
 communities, a sensibility developed based on historical facts. This  
 t ra asso ato et ee o or a d deat rt red a “ ooperat ve  
 ve t re o a t o a d a e” ( ) t vat g d a  
 understandings with the presence of death and suffering (Cheng 20).

### 1.5 Black Women's Literature

The preface to the 2005 edition of *Beloved* (1987) illustrates a meeting of theory and practice, academia and politics, knowledge and experience so important to African-American thought. Morrison tells readers the inspiration to her novel: a true story covered by the press at t e t e o argaret ar er ses ape ro saver e t a d t e infanticide of one of her children. Morrison's fictionalization of Garner's story becomes a fertile context in which to recover the history of black women in the United States. In her words:

In the eighties, the debate was still roiling: equal pay, equal treat e t a ess to pro ess o s s oos a d o e without stigma. To marry or not. To have children or not. Inevitably these thoughts led me to the different history of black women in this country a history in which marriage was discouraged, impossible, or illegal; in which birthing dre as re red t “ av g” t e e g respo s e for them being, in other words, their parent was as out of the question as freedom. Assertions of parenthood under conditions peculiar to the logic of institutional enslavement were criminal. (Morrison 2005: x-xi)

The process of writing (Morrison's) and of reading become sites for this articulation of past and present. The issue of motherhood and maternal love involved in the event of Garner's infanticide and its aftermath, their meanings under institutionalized slavery, are reworked by Morrison in light of current issues (in the eighties) surrounding gender and racial inequality. Past and present meet in the fight towards equality. After all, the conservatism of the 1980s - following the a as o t e v g ts a eve e ts t e s set the

background for reflections on the results and effects of the movement. The 1960s and 1970s saw the restructuring of academic departments, the insertion of African American literature into the curriculum, the revision of syllabi, and a broader interest in marginal voices and stories. The 1980s, however, saw a revival of conservative views and discourses in politics and in the academy.

What Du Bois called the "African American tradition" (1988) is a literary tradition that like to draw the attention to this literary tradition - the voices of Black women. Authors such as Phillis Wheatley, Frances Harper, and Harriet Jacobs were the predecessors of a powerful literary voice that recreated and recorded a part of the American history that had been ignored. The narrative strategies of Black women had the potential to influence social-political attitudes while representing and revising the experience of previous generations (Gates 1988; Johnson 1998; Collins 2000). If nineteenth- and first part of twentieth-century Black women writers were largely invisible to the American literary canon, the second half of the twentieth century saw Black women writers addressing all of the issues (race, class, gender) that were previously considered "marginal" and no longer be perceived as marginal to the empowerment of all American women. The "African American tradition" is a tradition that is essential to the process of change that the entire society must undergo in order to transform itself (Collins 2000).

What Du Bois called the "African American tradition" (1988) is a tradition that is a tradition of a people that is a tradition of a continent (Du Bois 2000; 2005) is a founding notion of African-American sense of identity. Black women writers articulated the black woman's experience of violence, discrimination, and insult in ways that challenged African-American thought and anti-racist discourse from within the tradition.

Black women writers departed from their experience in order to imagine and forge new realities, new possibilities, new connections. Some of their works signal to a realm of experience (and of possibility) outside the male eurocentric point of view, to racial and gender experiences which are not straightforward and with clear delineated borders. On the contrary, writers like the ones whose novels are part of this corpus have challenged readers in their depictions of violence and suffering in their stories. Also, and because of that, these novels recurrently signal to the impossibility of representing the *truth* of Black



identity. Whilst violence and suffering are themes constitutive of the African-American shared history and sense of identity, these novels insist on the *deferral of truth*. This deferral can be understood as political—as it clearly is for many of Black women writers and intellectuals—and it can also be approached as a narrative strategy. In the idea of deferring truth or meaning, for that matter, lies the potential for change and transformation, for what Gilles Deleuze called the great work of art “the art of thinking and feeling” (1991, 10).

By embracing the *deferral of truth* as a narrative strategy, Toni Morrison, Sapphire, and Edwidge Danticat present violence, simultaneously, on two levels. On the level of the narrative, that is, on the level of the representation of acts of violence and/or violent events. And on the level of reading, that is, on the aesthetic encounter with the text. The aesthetic register creates a space in these narratives that is potentially violent. To put it another way, the aesthetic register carries the potential of turning the act of reading into a violent event itself. The narrative strategy (of deferral of truth) employed by these authors in the representation of violence carries the potential of rupturing the process of reading and, consequently, of destabilizing the process of making meaning. In this possibility of rupture and transformation inherent in the deferral of meaning I center this study.

## 1.6 Representing Violence and Human Suffering: the Aesthetic Register

A Foucaultian view of discourse and power would approach images of suffering and the power of visuality as a double economy of freedom and constraint. On the one hand, we can (re)act freely to an image of suffering (a technology of discourse) according to our will. On the other hand, our (re)action (our will) would happen within the limits of a “a reading of the text to store a data point” (Chouliaraki 50). In this view, the potential of affective encounters to defer meaning could not be approached outside representation. Images could not be disconnected from content—in the way done by the media, Chouliaraki suggests. Or to put it in traditional aesthetic terms: form is associated to the text so that the aesthetic is as been precisely a search in meaning for a higher form of knowledge, for that reason “the aesthetic is not a search for knowledge that can be created in the deferral or momentary suspension

of meaning.

o va “ e est et so e t g rt  
e o d eprese tatio ” ( ) est osted s p e o art stor s  
current tendencies of analyzing art objects either within their context of  
production or, conversely, through a deconstruction perspective of  
“st e( g)” t e stor a terpretatio (“ e st a t g t e r  
ge era e p a ator ra e or ” ( ) va terrogates

How could it happen that in thinking about art, in reading art objects, we missed what art does best? In fact, we missed that which defines art: the aesthetic because art is not an object among others, at least not an object of knowledge (or not only an object of knowledge). Rather, art does something else. deed art s pre se a tt et a to o edge  
Which is to say that art might be well *a part* of the world (after all it is a made thing), but at the same time it is *apart* from the world. And this apartness, however it is theorised, is what constit tes arts porta e a t to a t at this excess need not be theorised as transcendent; we can think the aesthetic power of art in an *immanent* sense through recourse to the notion of *affect* (125 italics in the original).

For O'Sullivan, although Marxism and deconstruction illuminate key elements of the art object and of the encounter with it, a ter t e r read g t e art o e t “st re a s” ( ) ts prod to o a e ts e dersta ds a e ts as “e tra-discursive and extra-te t a ” (126) elements of the art object and of experience, for that matter. Affects are not related to knowledge or meaning (in the discursive se se) or e states t e appe o a d ere t “as g g reg ster” (126). In fact, this operation on a different register is what differentiates art from language, or the aesthetic from the discursive. Although language and the production of meaning also have an affective register - “s g at o tse g t e derstood as st a o p e a e t ve function (meaning o d e t e e e t o a e ts)” ( ) for O'Sullivan, art is made up of affects (though not only of them).<sup>6</sup> In light

---

<sup>6</sup> Although O'Sullivan recognizes that, in a way, affects are only meaningful within discourse, his focus is on the asignifying register that affects operate. That is, here affects are derstood as at appe s “para e to s g at o ” ( ) I will return to this point of the importance of making affects meaningful in part one.

of Deleuzo-atar a t o g t e de es art as a “ o o se sat o s a t g to e rea t vated a spe tator or part pa t” ( ) That is to say that, once O'Sullivan approaches the aesthetic function as affect, the art object is understood as an event. In this way, art (affects) have to be experienced - the aesthetic experience is an affective experience. This is the crux of O'Sullivan's argument: the event that art is operates in a different register. The aesthetic quality constitutive of art objects works a “deterr tor a s g” reg ster ( ) t at dsr pts s e t v e experience. To put it in other words, we could say that the encounter with an art object carries the *potential* for disrupting the participant's s e t v t e d e r e t (“deterr tor a s g”) reg ster t e aesthetic operates, to use O'Sullivan's terms, offer the participant the opportunity to switch his/her register to an imaginatively one, to momentarily step aside oneself. He summarizes:

Art is less involved in making sense of the world and more involved in exploring the possibilities of being, of becoming, in the world. Less involved in knowledge and more involved in experience, in pushing forward the boundaries of what can be experienced. Finally, less involved in shielding us from death, but indeed precisely involved in actualising the possibilities of life. (130)

In this transformative experience new modes of being in the world are created (O'Sullivan 129; Abel 2007: 34). However, we should be wary of this autonomous and important function of art described by O'Sullivan. Although not stated clearly, he does not claim that art operates *only* a “deterr tor a s g” reg ster et t s s t e a t t at he emphasizes and which he believes is neglected by dominant methodologies and practices in the discipline of art history.

In literature, we should understand the affective and discursive dimensions of the literary text as constantly and inevitably overlapping each other. Perhaps here lies the singularity of the act of reading: the imaginative function emerges as the reader engages with the text, o e r t e aest e a t s o t “ a t g to e rea t vated” t depends on the reader's imagination and willingness in order to be created. That is also saying that in literature affects are constantly pushing to be named.

In regard to the theme of violence and suffering, and particularly, to the novels analyzed here, I believe the aesthetic quality

of operating in an alternative register might render the experience of watching the suffering of others in a novel way. Because literature operates in a rupturing register, we could think of the potential or the opening for sensitivity. If we read O'Sullivan's thesis as a diagnose to

o ara s a d e s a s o t e v e e r s d e s t a t o a s e d

by the mass media's mode of address, we could reflect upon some sort of transformation or change directed towards the aesthetic experience. What is missing (intentionally or not) in the experience of watching the suffering of others represented by mass media? For O'Sullivan, a "deterr for a s g" reg ster s ara ter st o t e aest et e per e e

Conversely, could we think of the absence of such register as intrinsic to the media's mode of address (after all art belongs to a different realm)? Which brings us to the question: in our experiences and interaction with other persons and things, what may engender transformation and change? Is it knowledge? Is it emotions? Is it the knowledge constructed through sensation?

I hope this study can shed some light towards starting to answer those questions or, at least, present paths worth taking.

## PART I

## 2. Imagining Pain: Reading, Affect, and the Representation of Violence

## Strange Fruit

Southern trees bear a strange fruit,  
 Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,  
 Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,  
 Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant south,  
 The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,  
 Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh,  
 Then the sudden smell of burning flesh.

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,  
 For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,  
 For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,  
 Here is a strange and bitter crop.

(by Lewis Allan sung by  
 Billie Holiday)<sup>7</sup>

The powerful lyrics of *Strange Fruit* evoke the sentience of vision, scent, and touch. As a metaphor for lynching and lynched bodies, the song verses create a strong image of the sight of bodies hanging. Such sight is loaded with the awful smell and texture of a dead human body, but a body that is analogous to a fruit that, although strange and bitter, can be plucked, gathered, sucked, rotten, dropped. First published as a poem by Abel Meeropol under the pen name of Lewis Allan, *Strange Fruit* expressed Meeropol/Allan's horror at lynchings. Later the poem was set to music and it was Billie Holiday's performance that made the song famous.

As a poem, then song lyrics, the verses of *Strange Fruit* illustrate a well-known scene of American history and condemn its

---

<sup>7</sup> Billie Holiday and Sonny White are said to have co-written the music to the song with Lewis Allan.



of aesthetic experience as an encounter loaded with affective force, we might open the possibilities of experiencing *seeing* and *picturing* as beyond the knowledge presented to us in a novel, or in verses, or in a sequence of images in a film. In the act of reading, the activity consists of a reader as a gate to a "process re-creative" (seriously) step of cognition does not contain the restraining quality of perception once the (imagined) object is not present. In this way, we could approach the act of reading as an event in which the indeterminacy of imagination and creativity render it an encounter loaded with affect. In what Iser would also name *process of ideation* I find the possibility of an affective encounter with a literary text.

In *Strange Fruit* the "affective force" (effect) and here I add the affective force of pain, are part of the aesthetic experience of our reading (and picturing) of the lyrics or listening to the song. How can the force of violence and of pain be experienced through mediation (in this case, the mediation of art)? We know that the intention of a writer, artist, or film director may not be successfully expressed in his/her work once communication (interpretation) depends as well on the reader and/or spectator. Also the possibilities offered by an aesthetic encounter are inexhaustible and the fact the reader/spectator interprets in one way is his/her acceptance of the infinite possibilities (Iser 1980: 126). How is pain and violence expressed in literary works? Or should I ask: how is the affective force of pain and violence experienced in literary works?

The *inexpressibility of pain* has been contended by writers, artists, academics, physicians, and psychologists. The argument goes around the idea that a sufferer of physical pain cannot express verbally his/her sentience, in this way, making pain a lonely and individual experience. According to Elaine Scarry (1985), physical pain is different from other psychic and bodily states and events for it has no object. Our senses have objects as does desire, fear, hunger, for example. Regarding physical pain, however, there is an absence of referential content, and this almost prevents it from being rendered in language: objectless, it cannot easily be objectified in any form, material or verbal (05). In spite of this, someone in the presence of another suffering physical pain would recognize it, albeit never being able to fully understand the exact bodily sensation and intensity. With the exception of psychiatric pathologies, most individuals can recognize physical pain in another

human being for cries of pain are recognizable in any human language and culture. Also, the intensity of the cry signals the intensity of the pain. The question of responding to someone's pain, of helping this person, is not necessarily the next step. For whatever reasons, one may choose to help, or to ignore, or even to cause more pain.

In this chapter I want to challenge the argument of the inexpressibility of physical pain in terms of its loneliness and individual experience. Undoubtedly the experience of physical pain happens in the privacy and the loneliness of one's body. Notwithstanding, the representation of that experience and of that body has been culturally constructed. It is in the cultural construction of the discourse of pain and its representation that I locate this study.

I question the limitations of Scarry's thesis through the notion of affect. I believe that affect theory can shed light on the *seeing* and *picturing* of violence and pain. However, affect theory also has limitations once *seeing* and *picturing* entail the need of making sense of affect. In this chapter, I argue on the potential of the act of reading as a site for an affective encounter with violence and suffering. Departing from Scarry's thesis, I argue that the act of reading is a creative process of (re-)imagining the possibility of expressing and communicating (through aesthetic mediation) pain and suffering. The argument of the inexpressibility of pain finds limitations; and it is through the affective encounter, that is also part of the aesthetic experience of literature, that I argue for the potential of being affected by the violence and suffering of others.

In order to examine my argument, I have divided this chapter in sections. Firstly, I present Scarry's thesis in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985). Secondly, I challenge her thesis with Wolfgang Iser's phenomenological approach to the act of reading (1980) and with the notion of affect. Finally, I discuss Marco Abel's (2007) approach to images of violence and suffering in literature through their affective force.

## 2.1 The Inexpressibility of Pain

In *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985) Elaine Scarry explores the relationship between the opposing human activities of creation and destruction articulated on the idea of embodiedness. On one side there is the destruction of the physical body



ado at arr a s "t e art a ts o v at o " strated er deconstruction of the structures of torture and war. On the other (opposite) side there is creation, the production of material culture, strated arr s a a s s o "t e str t re o ag g" ( a g) in the Judeo-Christian scriptures and the work of Karl Marx. Scarry approximates the making and unmaking of the body, and thus, of the world, in the idea of work and the production of the object of such work.

In the first part, *Unmaking*, Scarry argues about the relation of pain and power by showing how the infliction of pain through torture and in war not only achieves its effects by making the victim incapable of expressing his/her pain but also by the process of destroying language (therefore, creation) itself. Pain renders the victim speechless. However, when pain finds a voice, Scarry argues, it tells a story in which three subjects overlap: the inexpressibility of physical pain; the political consequences of pain's inexpressibility; and the nature of both material and verbal expressibility, or more simply, the nature of human creation ( ) e o t es " pa o es s ara to o r dst as at o e t at a o t e de ed a d t at a o t e o r ed" (04).

Whoever suffers from physical pain has the certainty of it. Whoever hears about another's physical pain can never fully grasp what the other feels. For the one who suffers pain, it can be amplified by the disbelief or doubt of the other, who cannot grasp one's suffering. As Scarry puts it, physical pain's unsharability destroys language by its reversion to a state prior to language, a state of sounds and cries. e a se t e s erer o pa s apa e o s g spee a " a g age or pa " s reated t ose o are ot s er g t o o e to speak on behalf of the person in pain. Although expressing another perso s d stress s pro e at arr arg es t at t ere are a so "ver great reasons why one might want to do so, and thus there come to be avenues by which this most radically private of experiences begins to enter the realm of p d s o rse" ( ) arr g ves t e e a p e s o medicine questionnaires devised to help patients express and locate their bodily pain, and doctors and nurses helping patients translate pain into a tangible condition or disease which could be addressed by medical procedures. She also refers to verbal documents such as the ones produced by Amnesty International; the transcripts of personal injury trials; the poems and narratives of individual artists all of these have translated pain into speech (09). Also the act of putting one's sentient

experience of pain into words comes as a validation or proof of what  
 o e s e r t a t o e e e g o r e o v e r t e r e s t e a s s p t o t a t "t e  
 a c t o f v e r b a l l y e x p r e s s i n g p a i n i s a n e c e s s a r y p r e l u d e t o t h e c o l l e c t i v e  
 t a s o d s g p a " ( )

By unveiling the structure of torture and the structure of war, Scarry shows how the problem of pain is connected to the problem of power. Scarry argues that the verbal representation of any given phenomenon is directly linked to how it will come to be politically represented: the easier to find a language to express a certain distress, t e e a s e r t e t o s o a t s e a s "a g a g e o a g e " ( - 18). When it comes to physical pain, the difficulty of articulating it leaves it open to misrepresentations, and thus, to political and perceptual complications. For instance, Scarry shows how misdescribing torture and war is possible because of the inherent difficulty of describing bodily pain. Language can be manipulated in ways that the actual physical pain and injuries are erased and the story that is told is not about that even if the central content of the story was the pain and injuries inflicted in a body.

Scarry draws her examples from speeches made by politicians about various twentieth-century wars and battles. I add here the descriptions of lynchings found in newspapers<sup>9</sup>.

Often news coverage of lynchings diverts the focus from the infliction of physical pain on the lynched victim to the emotional pain and psychological distress suffered by the community in which the lynching took place. The *work* of the executioners and the number of people the event mobilized take the focus away from the event of murdering to the event of keeping the (white) community safe and this notion of (white) community safety justifies the infliction of pain, torture, and murder. News reports rarely described the motives for the lynchings; instead, they centered attention on the procedures. In other words, news reports of lynchings based their story on an event of torture and murder. The victim's suffering is watched and heard. The agonizing pain of the tortured is represented through the focus on the precision of the steps of the lynching ritual. An abyss is created here by language: the victim, on one side, and the executioners and the crowd that watched, on the other, are separated the farthest they can be in their s e t v t a d s e t e e a r r a s s " o s t t a t o e p e r s o a

<sup>9</sup> a e s e " o t e s o t e p a t e s " *Without Sanctuary Lynching Photography in America*. Eds. James Allen et al. Santa Fe: New Palms Publishers, 2004. 165 201.

be in the presence of another person in pain and not know it not know  
 t to t e po t t at e se ts t a d goes o t g t” ( )  
 Later in the book Scarry answers this question relating it to the human  
 activity of imagining:<sup>10</sup>

If one imagines one human being seeing another human  
 being in pain, one human being perceiving in another  
 discomfort and in the same moment wishing the other to be  
 relieved of the discomfort, something in that fraction of a  
 second is occurring inside the first person's brain involving  
 the complex action of many neurons that it, importantly, not  
 just a perception of an actuality (the second person's pain) but  
 an alteration of that actuality (for embedded in the perception  
 is the sorrow that it is so, the wish that it were otherwise).  
 Though this interior event must be expressed as a conjunctive  
 d a t “see g t e pa a d s g t go e” t s a s g e  
 percipient event in which the reality of pain and the unreality  
 of imagining are already conflated. Neither can occur without  
 the other: if the person does not perceive the distress, neither  
 will he wish it gone; conversely, if he does not wish it gone,  
 he cannot have perceived the pain itself (he may at the  
 moment be experiencing something else, such as his own  
 physical advantage, or his own resistance to having to attend  
 to another person, but he cannot be perceiving the pain, for  
 pa s ts esse t a at re “avers ve ess” a d t s eve  
 within technical medical definitions is recognized as  
 something which cannot be felt without being wished unfelt).  
 (289-290)

or arr t ere s a “esse t a at re” o t e a respo se  
 to pain: aversiveness. In this way, it is a problem of perception, a failure  
 of imagination, not to recognize another person's pain. In a fixed  
 structure, pain has its natural reaction the elimination of it therefore,  
 any failed attempt at aversiveness is not what it should be. Scarry is  
 accounting for one person inflicting pain in another. However, she  
 de t es t e perpetrator as “e per e g so et g ese”  
 prevents the full and right perception of what is being inflicted.

In regard to racial violence in the United States, it is the  
 historical and racial schema that places black individuals in a position

---

<sup>10</sup> In order to avoid a misunderstanding of her argument and methodology, I quote the full  
 paragraph.

Fanon ( ) r g t d e t e d a s “ e g t r o g t e o t e r ” ( 0). In this context, Scarry's question can sound naive (or should we say that within her methodology and argument against torture and war, it is simply coherent?) In news reports of lynchings,<sup>11</sup> although the focus was on the procedures, the victim's suffering and pain was known by whoever was witnessing it. In the practice of lynching, it is precisely the fact torturers and executioners *know* the victim's pain that makes the lynching possible. The crowds of people that came to watch (often reported in numbers and origin by newspapers) knew what they came to witness. Moreover, the acceptance of the practice of lynching as synonymous with the practice of justice acknowledges the pain of the victim and this recognition renders it doable. A person may perfectly *know* the pain of another and decide not to do anything about it, or to stop it, or to go on inflicting it. I do not believe it is a question of recognition and awareness here, but of the conflation of power and pain - when the *being* of the sufferer is turned *invisible* at the same time the *body in pain* is made very visible.

Invisibility will not require one's sympathy, one's anger, and/or one's shame and, for this reason, turning pain invisible is a common issue of power and politics. For Scarry, invisibility is present in language. The language of agency can be both effective and helpful in one's attempts to objectify pain and thus share it with another (as in medicine and law), but it can also be used in perverse ways when it expresses anything but physical pain and suffering and the distress it causes on the victim. The conflation of pain with power can push the certainty and actuality of a body suffering to the realm of abstraction and doubt, creating a discourse on pain that is not about physical pain and suffering.

Susan Sontag in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) addresses the notion of invisibility through the media's managing of images of war victims. The conflation of pain with power in Sontag's argument links invisibility to individuality. Invisibility is achieved in the absence of visual recognition when the victims are *ours*<sup>12</sup>, that is, *our* pain and suffering is not shown, or when it is, it is shown within a narrative of individualization of that victim: who he/she was, his/her family, work, friends. However, regarding the recognition of *others*, their bodies and

---

<sup>11</sup> Refer to pages 82-84 for examples.

<sup>12</sup> Sontag refers to the American audience.

their faces are never portrayed as individual victims, but as a collectivity (a o e t o o v t s o a s a t e s o o d e s) s o t a g p t s t "t e scale of war's murderousness destroys what identifies people as d v d a s e v e a s a e g s" ( ) e r e p r e s e n t a t o o t e o t e r as a collectivity erases individuality when it does not grant pain and injury as individual suffering. In other words, one is made invisible by not being an individual.

For Scarry, in the structures of torture and of war we find the "d e o s t r t o o r e a t o " t o r t r e t e t a d e s t r t o o o e s ability to express sentience is followed (in the continuous infliction of pain) by the destruction of one's consciousness. One's subjectivity is effaced by the overpowering sentience of physical pain, and the very justification of torture renders the individual invisible. In war, that same structure acquires greater dimensions when a great number of people suffer injuries and destruction reaches the whole of civilization (the buildings and places in which life happens). It is also the justification given for the attacks and for the war itself that end up rendering that place and its inhabitants invisible. Through the infliction of physical p a a d r e s e a a e "o t e r p e r s o s e o e v s e t o s o r ease to e v s e t o s" or " e a e o r s e v e s ( a d t e o r g a interior facts of sentience) available to one another through verbal and m a t e r a a r t a t s" ( a r r ) d a s a r r o d e s t e "d e r e a a t o o a r t a t s a a s s t t a g a a a o t e r p e r s o s v s t" ( )

As briefly mentioned above, Scarry draws a parallel between the injuries caused in torture and in war. In torture, injuries are done to the body and the mind, to consciousness (language and imagination) and every sign and extension of one's subjectivity and self. In Scarry's o r d s " r t a s a v a g e a d a r a r t o r t r e ( e v e o s o s ) self-consciously and explicitly announces its own nature as an undoing of civilization, acts out the uncreating of the created contents of o s o s e s s" ( ) a r r e s a r e d o e t o o d e s a d t o t e s (buildings, factories, houses) - "t e a t e r a s g s a d e t e s i o n o f p e r s o o o d" ( )

In order to understand the connection between the unmaking and making of the body, of personhood, of civilization, we ought to d e r s t a d t e p o r t a e o a t e r a t r e a r r s t e s s e t s play a vital role in how we live, and the way we engage in and with material culture will inform our representation o u r v i s i b i l i t y o r

invisibility in and of the world. The body is the site of pain, and through structures of power, one may approximate one's existence closer to disembodiedness, and therefore away from pain. One way of doing it, for Scarry, is through the production of objects (the end result of a work), for our bodiliness and psyche can be projected towards objects.

The opposite counterpart of pain is imagining, and in the second part, *Making*, Scarry discusses the structure of imagining, of creation of material objects. Scarry constructs her argument on what she terms the structure of material making (of the human activity of imagining and its creation of material objects) identified by her in the Judeo-Christian scriptures and in the writings of Marx.

The making of material artifacts establishes, for Scarry, the transition from imagining (believing in God in the Hebrew scriptures) and an authoritarian order to creating (embodying, materializing God in the Christian scriptures) and a more democratic order. In this transition the human body is first projected in the artifact (imagining of the object) and the remaking of the human body is then reciprocated into an artifact (making of the object) (243). In her words:

The material artifacts appropriate to the human body, and the human body in turn becomes an artifact; in each, the object is a displacement of sentient pain by a materialized clarification of creation; in each, the object is the locus of a reciprocal action. (257)

The objectlessness of physical pain, Scarry argues, might give rise to the imagining and to the making of artifacts and symbols we live with and in. Pain is understood as the one form of sentience without an external referential object, without self-extension. However, when the object "to relate to the object proper to the agent" (which is like other forms of the capacity for self-extension), pain may be transformed, self-modified, and even self-eliminated. In other words, through imagining the once inexpressible sentience of bodily pain can be transformed into an object, a made artifact. And it is in the making of an object that pain and imagining also find a common ground:

Far more than any other intentional state, work approximates the framing events of pain and the imagination, for it consists of both an extremely embodied physical act (an act which, even in nonphysical labor, engages the whole psyche) and of

and that as of previous text or ad  
 its " or " (or or ad its o e t s art a t) are the as  
 that are given to the phenomena of pain and the imagination  
 as they begin to move from being a self-contained loop  
 within the body to becoming the equivalent loop now  
 projected into the external world. (Scarry 170)

Because pain is experienced within one's body, one's suffering is one's own unless projected outside. Language is destroyed by pain, and with it, a possibility of expressing one's sentience, one's imagination, one's individuality. However, in the process of creation, Scarry allows for the possibility of one's sentience being projected into an object. The imagination and then construction of an object requires the same project " to t e e t e r a or d" - the disembodiment of oneself into its projection outside. Referring to Marx's work, Scarry returns to her point about structures of power describing how whoever has power can be disembodied through the creation and use of objects. Like the invisibility of the sufferer of pain who cannot objectify and share his/her sentience, some people will not *disembody* themselves through work.

It is in this transformation of the private experience of bodily pain into imagination and to a " or " that a t to o ate  
 argument of the use of writing, of stories, of literature, and of (the activity and event of) reading as the site of translation, and thus of expression, of pain. Reading is an activity constituted of participants, symbols, codes, a narrative and stylistic form, and linguistic conventions. Texts may require distinct effort and engagement from readers, and readers may find distinct information and interpretations of the same text. In any case, in the event of reading there is the decoding, through words, of the most diverse forms of human sentience, and different stories and plots may translate a similar feeling or human emotion. Imagining is required as much from the writer and/or teller of the story as from the reader. And here I locate a possibility for the expression of bodily pain.

In *Beloved*, *Push* and *The Dew Breaker*, the sentience of pain happens simultaneously in the physical and psychic levels, with effects on the individual and on the community to which he/she belongs. Although bodily pain ceases with the termination of the violence or abuse inflicted and scars are the marks of that violence - the psychic pain resulting from the violent event has everlasting destructive and

denigrating effects. The violent event works in a similar fashion as a traumatic event in these narratives. Although characters are fully aware of what happened to them and narrating that event is part of the healing process the physical and psychic marks of that event reoccur in a manner akin to trauma.

“ppro ato ggest o a d a og ra s at g a to a g age” ( ) ed g det es tat o s arr s argument of the inexpressibility of pain, claiming that physical pain has been translated in literar arrat ves or ed g “pa a deed e e o d t e rea o dre t ategora a g age t t a perhaps be approached indirectly through analogy or through particular ds o arrat ve repre tat o ” ( )

Bending explores the notebooks of the French novelist Alphonse Daudet searching for a way of understanding the pain and fear of a person suffering from syphilis. In this exploration of Daudet's writings of his own experience of pain, Bending identifies Daudet's uneasiness with moving between

the abstract and the personal, the shift between a language that recognizes pain as a disembodied phenomenon about which one might converse or write, and what asserts itself as the antithesis of that abstraction, a pain felt in one's own body, a pain that damages the ability sanguinely to communicate its reality. (132-133)

Bending's analysis of Daudet's notebooks challenges Scarry's contention that metaphors to describe pain fall into two categories: one that “spe es a e ter a age to the pain, a weapon that is pictured as producing the pain; and the second specifies bodily damage that is p t red as a o pa g t e pa ” ( arr ) or ed g a det s descriptions go further than Scarry's categories allow, since restlessly searching for analogies and metaphors to capture the experience of od pa t o g pa s “ s ste t od ess” ds o dre t representation in words, Bending identifies in Daudet means of e press o t at o ve to so ee te t “t e at rea d t e te st ” o the physical sensation of pain (137). Bending defends writing and textuality's abilities to express one's sentience of bodily pain in its constant struggles for representation, incessantly moving from metaphors to analogies, which is, in great part, the process of literary creativity and production.



Wolfgang Iser defines the act of reading as a dynamic process in which the reader experiences the text as an event (*The Act of Reading* speaks to “the experience of reading as a process of interaction” (Iser 1976: 17)). The text, as a structure of possibilities, “first a repertoire of familiar themes, together with allusions to familiar social and historical contexts; second, techniques or strategies used to set the familiar against the unfamiliar” (Iser 1976: 17). The reader engages “the act of reading” as a series of perceptual and interpretative acts. Both components of the familiar and unfamiliar are vital to the dynamic of the process and owed to a reader’s individuality. A text, rendered with its infinite possibilities, meanings, and interpretations, “at the same time” (Iser 1976: 17) “is perceived as a first reading that is not perceived in a second one. Or what was perceived by one reader is not perceived by another one” (Iser 1976: 17). “The way in which it is received depends as much on the reader as on the text” (Iser 1976: 17) because meaning is not fixed but is a dynamic process loaded with affect. A narrative’s capacity to express sentiment is argued by Marco Abel (2007) in his studies on the affective force of violence. Because of the intersubjective structure of reading we could think of affect when we approach the experience of reading a novel (and of watching a film, in the case of Abel’s work) and how it provokes “specific affects” (Abel 2007: 10).

## 2.2 The Experience of Affect

One important dimension of affect studies is the attention to that which is essential to the practice of the “speaking self” (Blackman and Venn 2010: 15). I want to think of the *expressibility* of pain as excess standing outside verbal language. For this reason, Scarry’s argument has to be challenged in its consideration of what is proper communication: the idea that communication is only successful when it is verbal.

From the perspective of affect studies, perception and communication must be thought of as happening outside the boundaries of the human self-contained body, or outside human verbal language. By considering unconscious levels of expression and communication, the importance of affect in relational processes and practices can shed some



globalization. (65)

If the force of affect is pre-personal and outside consciousness and representation, it could be claimed that one dimension of our perception recognizes pain in another person and experiences pain when seeing suffering. However, the affect experienced is not necessarily one of horror and repulsion for a spectator might feel satisfaction at the sight of a person in pain. Brennan here presupposes a notion of mono-affect or hegemonic affect flowing within a group, which is not always the case for, in any given situation, individuals may experience varied and/or opposing affects in the same arena of flow. In either case, it could be said that unconscious awareness may not become an emotion and, for that matter, not become significant in terms of behaviour and action.

Are we back to Scarry and the impossibility of communicating pain? If an affect is not recognized by me as an emotion or a conscious awareness, is communication possible? What other ways of cognition are at stake here?

Papoulias and Callard point to the “operative space” that appears “shortly to the generalist” characterized by a certain kind of automaticity, this does not equal distress understood to be a “directed tendency about the world” ( )

Here we have two different approaches to cognition. For Scarry, cognition happens within the structure of language, in which human language is the system through which things are known and through which we can transform the world. Affect theorists, on the other hand, would accept the possibility of cognition happening as well outside subjective content. Embodied experience may contribute to a type of agency that is not the same, but no less important than the agency that comes from subjective reflection (Papoulias and Callard).

In Scarry there is a preoccupation with critique and interpretation, with emotions and subjectivity, with what is represented, what is imagined and created, what is displaced into the made object and, more importantly, with verbal language. In affect theory there is an attempt to get closer to what exceeds the limits of the body, to the unspoken and unaccountable by language, to what is unrepresented but is, nonetheless, there beneath our perception. Although the referred (above) discourses and structures of power are cultural representations, and we are looking at literary texts (cultural objects), what affect theory is concerned with is *how* we experience these objects.

In affect studies, Scarry's argument of the inexpressibility of pain finds limitations for it does not account for the non-verbal and what is unconscious but nonetheless effective and affective; images and situations affect us physiologically. However, Scarry could argue here that unconscious and physiological levels of awareness do not engender social and political change, or, in the case of torture and war, do not restrain the perpetrator of pain. Agency is, for Scarry, based on predicative cognition.

It is important to keep in mind the methodological differences of both approaches. One departs from the acceptance of a modern subject that is autonomous and self-contained. The other departs from a phenomenological view of the subject that is, at the same time, autonomous and dependent, immanent and transcendent, and all knowledge and constitution of the self happen in the relations of the subject with the world. Scarry understands that knowledge and actions will be constituted through and after self-reflection. Affect theorists understand that there are knowledge and actions that are embodied and constituted in pre-reflective ways.

are e gs rt e o a e t t e o r “ v o g e t t r a e o r a d t e t o o g a r ” ( ) s v e r s e e r e understanding the limitations of the approach. Hemmings argues that the *affective turn* is a wish to go beyond the social and the cultural, and e o d d e t e r s a d p e s s s a v o r o “ a o r e p r o d t i v e r a e o d ” ( ) e r r t e s e a s a t t e t o t o a p o r t a t a s p e t o a e t o d v d a s a e “ o v e r - a s s o a t e d t a e t ” processes of affective transfer (561).

Due to their positioning within racial and gender structures, some individuals become the object of affective transfer instead of attaching their affects freely and autonomously. Hemmings quotes Franz a o s d e r p t o o a t t e o s r e a t o (“ a e t v e r e s p o s e ”) t o s a e s s e r e a o s o d “ s p r e s e t e d t o v a t e t e o s a e t v e r e s p o s e ” ( ) s a o ( ) p o t s o t t e “ g a a o s t e r e o t p e s ” s t o r a r e a t e d - c a n n i b a l i s m a n d t h e p r o p e n s i t y t o v i o l e n c e , o v e r - s e x u a l i z e d b e h a v i o r , b a c k w a r d n e s s , s i m p l i c i t y , f r e e a n d l o o s e b e h a v i o r , e m o t i o n a l a n d m o r e h u m a n e m i n d o p p o s i t e t o r e a s o n a n d m e c h a n i z e d a t t i t u d e o f w h i t e s ( F a n o n 1 2 9 ) - p o s i t i o n s a b l a c k p e r s o n w i t h i n a s t r u c t u r e t h a t p r e c e d e s a n y i n d i v i d u a l a c t i o n f r o m e r e a p e r s o n e a v o r s a t p a t e d t a r a a a d g e n d e r i m a g i n a r y ; c o n s e q u e n t l y , h e / s h e l e a r n s a b o u t h i m / h e r s e l f v i a

another affective response.

She argues that the affect that “some codes are apt read and the affects structured precisely of the self affect itself not random, nor is the ability to choose to imagine affect of the self” ( ) or divided as postulated as “objects of affective display” “objects of affective transfer” ( ) the death affects should not be read but only experienced is not an option. More importantly, for the objects of affective transfer “depend upon their effects in the affective display” (562). Whether or not one wants to make sense of affects, the very process of racialization and racism depends on affects being read and understood. The discrimination of one by another happens because hate, disgust, or fear is recognized by the victim of discrimination. Also, the victim must make sense of it in order to react to it.

Here it is interesting to present Susan Sontag's (2003) and the terms ( ) discuss stages of violence and suffering. We could think of their arguments as meeting points between affect and representation. In *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Susan Sontag attempts to understand how and what meanings are constructed by the act of seeing images of suffering and pain. She departs from representations of physical suffering in paintings from sacred art to official commissioned paintings of battles to individual painter's views of war, torture and suffering and arrives at contemporary Western culture and media. For Sontag, news footage and journalistic photography talk less about suffering, destruction, and death than they do about individualism, whiteness, and imperialism. Subjectivity is constituted and constructed by the one who sees; he/she is physically away from that environment of destruction and pain, and could feel frustrated by images' ability to separate visual perception from sentience. Sontag asks if the overwhelming amount of images is capable of keeping reactions dormant, and ultimately: are these images conveying what happens in those places and to those people (as they claim to be doing: for the purpose of historical proof and of reality and truth)?

Against cultural analysis of *The Society of the Spectacle* (Sontag 95 -101), Sontag contends that these vast repository of images ought to haunt us, for being disillusioned, innocent and shocked at human destruction and atrocity is not a sign of someone who, Sontag responds and read “our advertisement” ( ) e

concludes:

Even if they are only tokens, and cannot possibly encompass most of the reality to which they refer, they still perform a vital function. The images say: This is what human beings are capable of doing — may volunteer to do, enthusiastically, self-righteously. Don't forget. (102)

or o tag t e a are ess o “ at a e gs are apa e  
o do g” o g t to or a a t at eeps s *thinking* about what  
appe s ever da t e or d o tags “do t orget” or s  
o verse to t e “ever orget” grounding the act of memory of  
particular violent events. Sontag reckons that, although ethically  
important, *remembering* or s as a a t dote to “a es a” ( ) a d  
ot e essar spar re e to ear g a d e a at o o “t e  
rationalizations for mass s er g o ered esta s ed po ers” ( )  
or o tag “ ora dg at o e o pass o ” ( ) ot  
engender action or a fight for change; instead, reflecting upon how and  
why those images came into being may work as the initial step towards  
a course of action.

The representation of bodily pain and injury in the images Sontag mentions operates within a structure of power and knowledge formation. Power is conferred to the one who sees but it disciplines *all* bodies: not only those bodies which are constantly visible, but also those who are made invisible by being protected in their private spheres, by the respect and propriety of media censorship and good taste, and ultimately, by their disembodiment as universal and as a mind. The deployment of power implicit in this structure disciplines the disembodied universal white body through the representation of the embodied non-white body. In the discourse and imagery of suffering and destruction the non-white other is metonymically linked to exoticism, savagery, ignorance, poverty. Whenever a specific context becomes a site for such structure of power those words will stand metonymically to black, or colonized, or Muslim, or third world peoples. With humanity fixed on the white body, the category of other can be easily deployed to whatever body stands on the opposite side.

Although violence and death are *destruction* (unmaking), photographs and images of violence and war are *making* for they are framed, and framing is selecting, is choosing what will be in and what will be out. Moreover, Sontag points to media conventions of propriety

and “good taste” is setting at the edge of a gulf the unmaking of suffering (and of mourning, of pity, and of disgust) still abide by conventions of us and them, the exotic others, the uncivilized places we fortunately do not inhabit. Also, their epic proportions of suffering, famine, and destruction tend to live one numb and inactive for there will not be anything one can do to avoid that. The creation of exoticism through the suffering of other peoples also increases the chasm of worlds in the likes identified by Edward Said. The surreal and impossible (because too extreme and gruesome) quality of these images creates a sense of them as savages and from another world. In this way, nothing can be done (by us) to diminish the pain those individuals are feeling. Individuality and individual pain are obliterated and replaced by the representation of collective suffering and how suffering constitutes those people. Chaos is notably the overall state of those images leaving viewers with an overwhelming sentiment that order is impossible when that state has been reached. Specially because images representing chaotic environments tend to be taken out of context, usually with causal facts and chronology erased. We do not learn what led to it, what happened before, but only learn how it presently is. Collective suffering and chaos become a characteristic of not-here and not-us:

The more remote and exotic the place, the more likely we are to have remote dead images. These sights carry a double message. They show a suffering that is outrageous, unjust, and should be repaired. They confirm that this is the sort of thing which happens in that place. They ubiquity of those photographs, and those horrors, cannot help but nourish belief in the inevitability of tragedy in the benighted or backward that is, poor parts of the world. (Sontag 63)

Narratives can help us understand, Sontag argues (80), and whatever images we choose to represent ourselves and others become part of a story structured as “objective story”

The familiarity of certain photographs builds our sense of the present and immediate past. Photographs lay down routes of reference, and serve as totems of causes: sentiment is more likely to crystallize around a photograph than around a verbal slogan. And photographs help construct and revise our sense of a more distant past, with the posthumous shocks

engineered by the circulation of hitherto unknown photographs. Photographs that everyone recognizes are now a constituent part of what a society chooses to think about, or declares that it has chosen to think about. It calls these ideas 'memories', and that is, over the long run, a fiction. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as collective memory part of the same family of spurious notions as collective guilt. But there is collective instruction. (Sontag 76)

As Sontag contends, the choice of what is remembered is based on the same structure of power and knowledge that aims at maintaining the notion of a world divided in Western and Eastern societies and peoples regard to the United States “the stereotype of already, in the nation's capital, which happens to be a city whose population is overwhelmingly African-American, a Museum of the slave” ( ) so even of a slave at a memory, according to Sontag, walks side-by-side with the acceptance that evil does not happen *in* the United States. In her words:

[Slavery] is a memory judged too dangerous to social stability to activate and to create. The Holocaust Memorial Museum and the future Armenian Genocide Museum and Memorial are about what didn't happen in America, so the memory doesn't risk arousing an embittered domestic population against authority. (78-79)

For Sontag, we must act on our capacity to be affected by the pain of others. She understands that although we are indeed affected, this affection might not become a conscious emotion once we are made to feel numb. Sontag believes that there are several elements, controlled by discourses of *othering*, that are responsible for the desensitization of individuals. These contribute to one's inability to feel empathy and/or other emotions towards other beings. In media studies, the notion of *compassion fatigue* describes the audience's indifference towards distant suffering (Moeller 1999; Chouliaraki 2006). Lilie Chouliaraki (2006) argues that the viewer sees and hears about human suffering through the television news address these direct messages “of a sort that add to” ( ) our awareness “that we act on what we know? and this *knowing* but not being able to act (or not knowing what to do) is “the most profound moral demand that television makes on its spectators today” ( ) Additionally, the overexposure to



human suffering has numbing effects and, instead of cultivating a sensibility, human suffering becomes domesticated by the experience of watching it on television. For Sontag, our capacity to be human and share human feelings towards each other is something to be desired and worked towards.

Judith Butler in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) reflects upon the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the American responses to suffering and violence. Instead of uniting people under a notion of human condition that is universally shared, Butler wants to think of unity under the notion of loss. For Butler, a notion of “a a o d t o t a t s v e r s a s a r e d” s “ o t e t t e a s e” s e a s s “ o o t s a s a o s e v e s o t a s l i v e s ? A n d , f i n a l l y , W h a t m a k e s f o r a g r i e a b l e l i f e ” (20, italics in the original). She believes that it is possible to think of a “ e” d e r t e o t o o o s s o e “ a o s a v e s o e o t o o a t t s t o a v e o s t s o e o d o s s a s a d e a t e o s “ e” o s a ” ( )

In the context of the aftermath of 9/11, Butler discusses the question of vulnerability, grief and mourning of Americans in opposition to the others, who stand as enemies. 9/11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq set the re-emergence of the notion of what it is to be human, what deaths are considered as loss, and how mourning is done collectively through the media coverage and responses to the terrorist attacks and to the American government decision to go to war.

For Butler, the threat of violence and the interdependency of one another posit the body as the site of human vulnerability. Our bodies are vulnerable to the touch of another: a touch that can terminate my life or provide the physical support for it. The basic condition of being human is, thus, the vulnerability of interdependency: how I come into the world already in a dependable and dependent relation to other people.

According to Butler, some bodies will be made unreal by the media once they are never present, never seen, and their lives are never mourned. Through the absence of images, lives are made less worthy of being protected, or even of being grievable. The violence of being made r e a a e d t e “ v o e e o d e r e a a t o ” t e r ( ) o r s p r o r to physical violence. Through media representations persons are made (potential) victims because their lives fall within the categories of lives less worthy of protection. In other words, their lives are first derealized by discourse.

Lauren Berlant (1999) argues that in the American society the more one is identified with bodiliness, the more likely one is placed in a historically subordinated group defined by its relation to normativity (the bodies that are absent, according to Butler). In the dynamics and effects of trauma saturation (via images of suffering and pain) Berlant stresses that the voices of the oppressed are muted and commodified by sentimental political discourse. In a melancholic recoding, the sufferers are represented as, in effect, dead; therefore domesticating the traumatic impact of pain upon a non-sufferer audience of spectators.

Butler talks about bodies that do not belong to the category of human prior to the infliction of pain they might be submitted to. Scarry sees the act of inflicting physical pain as the moment of the destruction of the self, whereas Butler and Sontag locate the destruction of the self in discourse prior to the event of pain. Sontag writes: "Violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives were already negated" (1978, 103).

If we take Hemmings' assertion that affect is "value present to the extent that it is not a tool" (1997, 10) and connect it to Sontag's argument that "the aesthetic is a response to affect" ("The Suffering Body" in *On Photography*, 64). Indeed this is what Sontag proposes as response to being desensitized, that is, giving meaning to our reactions in terms of how those images of absolute cruelty make us reflect and learn about the structures that have created them. An affect should be given an interpretative meaning, should become an emotion, and this emotion should, in turn, bounce back in a way that it affects the body and the mind. It is only within this process of affective response and interpretative meaning that one can *act* in the world. Sontag calls for an ethical response to images. Hemmings proposes the so-called "affective states and effects" (1997, 10) that make and give meaning to our bodies—meanings that we recognize as our own and value.

How can we think of affective force of violence and pain within social and cultural meaning? In the next section I discuss the proposal of an approach to "vocal images" that generate affective force.

### 2.3 The Affective Force of Images

Images have force and do things, but they do not—at least

not primarily bear or represent meaning. Images work by their constitutive intensities and affects rather than by representing something in a way that may or may not be just(ified). Hence the question to ask about an image is less, “ what does it do ” than “ what does it do ” and “ what does it do ” ( Baroque )

Marco Abel in *Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema, and Critique after Representation* (2007) attempts to write about his chosen subject matter, images of violence in literature and film, in a novel way: in terms of images “as going to the test” or “testing out” what violent images are and what they can do should be kept as a guiding principle to studies instead of assuming that violent images are, “each other” “representations” and “interpretations” as they *represent* or *mean* in our culture. Informed by a postmodern aesthetic, Abel works with examples of violent images taken from films and novels and proposes “affective engagement” that these images “that desire to encounter them on the level of their own *reality* rather than the level of representation” ( ) as well as “what does one do about affect - asignifying forces - if one has been trained to respond to literature and film on the level of representation, meaning, and truth” ( )

Abel believes that our desire to turn affect into understanding and representation is to the detriment of our “ability to respond” ( ) to “the affective or evocative” ( ) and our capacity to respond to violent art in general. The affective encounters provoked by a novel, a film, or a work of art, afford the opportunity for transformation, change and creation in the face of the unknown, the unfamiliar, something new and different may be produced. Abel argues in the light of Deleuze's work that judgment or any criticism that intends to find the truth of an event prevents transformation and change, for nothing is created but simply understood according to pre-established values “as if to be produced, not reproduced. In contrast, judgment reproduces value based on preexisting (moral) ground, thus perpetuating the same modes of existence rather than producing new ones” ( )

For this reason, violent events (images of violence, visual and textual narratives of extreme violent acts) should be perceived by their force or affect instead of immediately making sense of them within a discursive dimension. According to Abel, this process of perception and

interpretation turns events into something else and something more: because we assign a meaning to an event (or any object, for that matter), the logic of representation as resemblance is that it always positions the responding subject outside the event and so reduces the event to what it is for the subject. Deleuze and Guattari propose *masocriticism*<sup>13</sup>, that is, the logic of suspending judgment, of deferring judgment, so that violent events can be perceived in their singularity and irreducibility. This logic of uncertainty (rather than relieving it by providing an answer, however convincing) we were collectively forced to give ourselves over to as an embodiment of uncertainty, also referred to by Abel as the violence of sensation, is a (violent) affective encounter once it confronts our capacity to provide an answer, to respond verbally and to construct knowledge. In this way, the violent sensation of uncertainty which is a moment of violence that can happen within (the moment of violence of) the event confuses and upsets us, suspends our present and aims for a new experience, thus, for the future. In summary, Abel's *masocriticism* is a complete surrender of the subject to the experience is, for Deleuze, the precondition for something new to be created (1997).

---

<sup>13</sup> According to Deleuze in *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (1991), waiting, delay and suspense are part of the masochist experience. The suspension of judgment and the openness of the question "does it or does not it" are part of the masochist experience. He is not sure at the end whether he is one or two people, nor does he know during the episode what part his wife will play, but he is prepared for anything, a true dialectician who knows the opportune moment and seizes it" ( ) or the masochist to realize his/her desire, he/she depends on the acceptance of a partner (who will act according to the directions and guidelines of the masochist). The logic of masochism requires education and persuasion of another (the partner) through a contracted alliance. Contrary to that is the logic of sadism. Here there is no assertion of the sadist's desires, but a "suspense" of the sadist's desires. The advertisements are part of the language of masochism while they have no place in true sadism, and why the masochist draws up contracts while the sadist abominates and destroys the sadist's desire to be satisfied" (20)

In the second chapter of *Violent Affect* (“dg e t s ot a exit: toward an affective criticism of violence with *American Psycho*”) Abel compares the affective encounters with the violent events of *American Psycho*, the novel and the film. For Abel, a violent affect is present in the dynamic of boredom and violence that structures the novel *American Psycho*, by Bret Easton Ellis (1991), but it is absent in the adaptat o d re ted ar arro ( ) te “rt e logos” (the satirical component) is what the audience encounters and respo ds to es ar es “t ate te ea e o te for its humor, its ridiculing of its characters and their world, and all the while remain convinced that we are living in a better world, that we have progressed, and that we are neither the perpetrators nor the victims o v o e e a or ” ( ) to g a o edg g t at te was made surrounded by the critical discourse the novel created (inevitably aware of the responses and reception the novel had), Abel, nonetheless, posits that the film fell into the trap of most cliché-ridden a ts o respo se t at s “s arrat ves a et tse tr s to a cliché at the very moment it is territorialized onto merely visceral, p s a e ot o s” ( ) to t de g te importance of emotions Abel calls for an understanding of an affective encounter as loaded with the potential of destabilizing the position of the subject. Instead, in this case, judgment remains the primary mode of response and familiarity stands in the way of a new mode of existence.

Abel's comparison of the potential responses to both novel and film are thought of similarly to the desensitizing responses to images of suffering Sontag refers to in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003). The construction of a familiar plot within a discourse of truth gives the viewer a feeling of distance and detachment, of appreciation for what one has or for what one does not have (the other's pain and suffering).

o tag po ts o t t at e ar v t s are “oser to o e” “part a o ea e t” a dt e p otograp ers ds ret o are e pe ted or e se te ages e “s ppressed te a e o propr et or o patr ot s ” o e t s t e e e o “d sp a s t e dead” ( o tag ) Displaying *our* bodies and victims cause shock and outrage what Abel a es “revo t g a e ts” nonetheless, these first reactions are also transformed into a narrative.

What Abel proposes as a critical engagement with images an encounter experienced without mediated forms of critique or framed within a familiar plot e oes o tags arg e t t at te ed a s

mediation cost us the capacity to be affected by images of suffering and violence. Returning to Abel's question: are we trapped in our desire to turn affective responses into understanding, rationality, representation? If the answer is yes, are we, following Sontag's argument, trained to be desensitized by violent images and the pain of far others? Abel, paraphrasing Deleuze, asks:

the crucial question is not how to judge a body but how to find out what else a body is capable of, how a body can exist differently: how else can a body enter relationships with other bodies whose operative engine is *affective* force with the vector of this force (its weight and direction, that is, its intensity) determining the capacity of a body to be affected by and affect other bodies? (35)

stt at at e gs proposes assert g t at "a e t might in fact be valuable precisely to the extent that it is not a to o o s" (to t e e te t t at it cannot be separated from its social meaning) (Hemmings 565)? Both Sontag and Butler identify in discursive practices of othering the cost of our sensitivity: the cost of our ethical response (for Sontag), and of our sense of vulnerability and the experience of loss as ways of constructing a notion of community (for Butler).

I believe affective theory is one way of thinking about the inexpressibility of pain. If we could suspend judgment, as Abel suggests, in order to experience the force of images and narratives (violent events), if we could momentarily approach such events outside their discursive dimension, perhaps we would be affected in an unknown, therefore, new manner. However, I believe that different texts (events) render different affective encounters. The reading of certain texts allows for a delayed response, thus, for an opportunity to be also affected by the texts structure and style. I believe Iser's notion of ideation as inherent in the act of reading allows for the experience of modes of embodiment grounded in the potential of affective encounters. Reading consists of an activity in which the meaning of the text must be asse ed t e reader a "pro ess o re- reat ve d a e t s" ( ser ). Regarding the affective force of violence, it can operate on the level of the narrative and on the process of reading. To put it in another way, in violent events, violence operates on the level of plot, themes, characters, and on the encounter with the literary work a violent encounter

towards the reader as he/she engages in the act of assembling meaning, exploring an unfamiliar territory that constantly challenges the reader's position and response. For Abel, there is something to be gained, to be created, in an encounter with violent events. The problematic of violence and the horror it can cause is not supposed to be understood, “e resolved as r g ea g to so et g t at s a irreducible event in that it cannot be reassuringly reduced to a logic that can be said to have brought it a o t”( )

Contrary to that, events mediated by TV news (as pointed by Sontag) tend not to leave room for reflection once sensationalist journalism is about telling a story, informing the audience, unveiling *the truth* of an event. If violence is supposed to horrify people - and as Abel argues, we should be able to be affected by its force - it is the social meaning which the various types of violence have that shape our ability or inability to respond to it. Social and cultural meanings that, I believe, are embedded in the way news is structured and mediated.

## 2.4 Marco Abel's pedagogical experiment

etrod es sa a sso o e os “te so t e t re”<sup>14</sup> with his experience of teaching the lecture course entitled “oe e eteth- etr era tre” tea se ester of 2011. With a scheduled class on the morning of September 12, Abel's and his students' experience are a prelude to his critical analysis of DeLillo's essay<sup>15</sup> and an example of how representations of the horror of violence and suffering would benefit from a deferral of judgment.

Abel describes the morning after the terrorist attacks when st de ts a e to ass “a too eager to address t s v o e t eve t”( ) a de pe t g t e r tea er to “te *them* at t e eve t o ea ” (182 italics in the original). Surprised by his students' request and still

<sup>14</sup> An essay about the terrorist attacks of 9/11 commissioned by *Harper's Magazine* that appeared in the December 2011 edition.

<sup>15</sup> For Abel, DeLillo's narrative strategy of following no narrative in particular but many at once (through several different stories related to the attack on the World Trade Center and its aftermath) offers the reader a view of reality that is not asserted as real but constantly est o ed e reader s v ted to “s ape a d res ape rea t to d ere t press o s o equal value, which combine to a speculative series: this happened and this and this *and* ” (195). In other words, the stories offer the reader different ways of *seeing* what happened on the event of 9/11 without reducing it to a simple explanation. According to Abel, in the essay's lack of a resolution ultimately lies the potential to alter the reader's habitual mode of response.

stunned by the attacks the previous day Abel proposed that they together should take the opportunity to explore their “*collective inability* to articulate for ourselves as well as to one another in coherent as of the “*earthquake*” (the task of organizing) after they had been reading and discussing depictions of violence in varied texts that gave voice to it (“*about it is, what it does, why it appears*”) (the adopted responses were that of going to terms with the diverse versions of violence as a “*presence as of the affective events that are depicted in these texts*” (183).

Abel argued that the fact they did not know how to represent the 9/11 events in a coherent narrative was itself a way into developing a productive response. Moreover, they did not lack a response but had a read response that their “*collective sense of uncertainty*” (183); and that sensation of doubt was an instance of what Abel terms *the violence of sensation*. What Abel later found out was that this suspension of judgment, of a quick and fixed explanation (that tend to be a product of categories that are familiar to us),

shifts one's own intensive investments from one register to another – the violent rush experienced by asserting a stance of moral righteousness to the violent vertigo experienced by an encounter with one's self as not always already being in control (however illusory such a sense of control may actually be). It was the difference between these two levels of intensity and, perhaps, the very unfamiliarity with the latter that instilled in us a very real sense of (one's sense of self) being violated precisely because the event itself enforced upon us the violence of sensation. (184)

In other words, the affective state (the violence of sensation) induced by one's uncertainty, by one's deferring judgment, might create a feeling of violation of one's own control. This unfamiliar state carries the potential for new ways of seeing individuals and objects. The intensity of the violence of sensation – the moment of uncertainty – might offer a moment for reconfiguring one's most habitual responses, for creating something new.

However, Abel's brief pedagogical success proved itself fragile. The class' frequent sensation of uncertainty in face of violent images was now aggravated by their emotional and physical proximity to the



violence of 9/11. Fiction was now substituted by reality and, Abel reckons, such reality worked upon the students' pressing desires and demands for an explanation - which came soon with the president George W. Bush's address to the nation. In Abel words:

a r e t o r a p o e r s p e e c h i n w h i c h h e o f f e r e d w i t h r e m a r k a b l e c l a r i t y a n d f o r c e h i s r e s p o n s e t o m y s t u d e n t s' i n i t i a l d e s i r e t o b e t o l d w h a t t o m a k e o f 9/11. A c c o r d i n g t o t h e p r e s i d e n t, t h e m a t t e r w a s, a n d s t i l l i s, q u i t e s i m p l e: 9/11 i s n o t h i n g m o r e, a n d n o t h i n g l e s s, t h a n a m a t t e r o f g o o d a n d e v i l. A n d w h i l e i t m a y b e e a s y t o b e l i t t l e s u c h a s e e m i n g l y s i m p l i f y i n g r e s p o n s e t o t h e ( e i t h e r m e r e l y a s s u m e d o r r e a l) c o m p l e x i t y o f 9/11, i t i s i m p o s s i b l e t o d e n y t h e r h e t o r i c a l e f f e c t o f t h i s d e c l a r a t i o n, a s I q u i c k l y w i t n e s s e d i n t h e c o n t e x t o f m y c l a s s r o o m s p a c e. (186)

Abel says that, after the president's address to the nation, even the students who had let themselves participate in the class experiment of suspending judgment found conviction in Bush's response. Abel remarks that this pedagogical exercise also showed him how internalized our familiar modes of response are due to institutional processes (187); how difficult it is for any of us *not* to surrender "to the rhetorical seduction of the language of judgment that we are all exposed to a t e t e" ( )

Although I see the benefit of trying to avoid (re)turning to common sense modes of response, or falling into the respected liberal humanist discourse, in order to *see again*, I believe Abel's argument underestimates the political significance of taking a stance. Surely that is part of his *masocriticism*. For Abel, the ethical stance (what he terms *response-ability*) comes after being moved, after becoming affected, for such experience offers the possibility of thinking differently o " e g p r o v o e d t o o v e e s e e r e" ( ) s e t o d o l o g o s o t e e p r o c e s s o f s u s p e n d i n g j u d g m e n t, o n t h e h o w o f i m a g e s o f v i o l e n c e, h o w t h e y a r e d o n e a n d h o w t h e y c a n m o v e u s. A s A b e l r e m a r k s o f h i s m e t h o d o l o g y a n d h i s a n a l y s i s o f D e L i l l o ' s e s s a y:

a s o r t a r e g r o d g t e s t e t h e e t h i c a l " o " - o f r e s p o n s e s l o w s d o w n t h e i m p e t u s t o d e c l a r e w h a t a n e v e n t i s. T h i s i m p e t u s s u p p o s e s t h a t a n e v e n t s u c h a s 9/11 c o n t a i n s a n e s s e n c e, a r e p r e s e n t a t i o n a l t r u t h t h a t m u s t b e v o i c e d r e p r e s e n t e d b y t h e p e r c e i v i n g s u b j e c t. A n d s i n c e

truth, as Nietzsche teaches, mainly operates on a moral register, the demand to say what's what is inevitably a demand for a "correct" oratorical even in the absence of a language explicitly couched in the rhetoric of judgment. DeLillo's style of response, his aesthetic stance, refuses to hypothesize an essence of 9/11, toward which a subject must subsequently assume a clear position. Instead of constituting a correct standpoint to be defended, DeLillo's reconfiguration of response as an aesthetic stance as response-ability suggests that response is about mood, a rhythm, or a capacity to give oneself over to the primacy of the event. (217)

I believe that Abel's emphasis on a mode of response grounded on one's affective reactions underestimates what Clare Hemmings reminds us that a gesture sets us "steering toward the light" ( ) in the light of viewer's desensitization and the proliferation of hegemonic discourses that sound all too discouraging to individuals and groups' desires and demands for political and social change, as Sontag and Butler remark. Yet that very transformation rendered by a new mode of response must be named (represented) in order to sustain desires and demands for change. Abel's students eagerly taking side with Bush's narrative of good versus evil is an example of how naming their affective reactions may become useful as a tool for political action (whether efficient or not, or deemed right or wrong).

## 2.5 Affective Encounters in the Act of Reading

When we think of the act of reading and the picturing or process of ideation inherent in reading we ought to acknowledge the overlapping levels of engagement, action, and cognition involved in it. For Iser,

the reader is involved in proposing to the multifarious aspects of the text by unfolding them into a sequence of ideation and by integrating the resulting products along the time axis of reading. Thus the text and reader are linked together, the one permeating the other. We place our synthesizing faculties at the disposal of an unfamiliar reality, produce the meaning of that reality, and in doing so enter into a situation which we could not have created out of ourselves. Thus the meaning of the literary text can only be fulfilled in



important to point out that proposing deferral or suspension of judgment (meaning) is not to advocate moral relativism. As Abel remarks:

errand does not lead to “step outside” as one never could fully escape judgment's clutches. Rather, to defer, understood in the Aristotelian sense, is to *suspend*. Attending to the event's how suspends the event. Asking how the event works and what it does creates a suspenseful rhythm that might pedagogically function to slow down the rapid speed of judgment not in order to escape judgment, but in order to examine the value of value itself. (Abel 217-218 italics in the original)

In the same spirit, this study approaches deferral or suspension of judgment as creating the possibility of seeing again, of being affected by what should indeed affect us. By momentarily refraining from giving a familiar meaning to a visual and/ or verbal representation of human suffering, one may attempt to look at that image (the material and mental image) differently for new ways of seeing potentially render new responses. After all, the existing familiar ways of seeing and responses are the ones used in the “era of the stage and the tradition” (Abel 213) that made possible those crimes in the first place.

As it was presented in this chapter, both Iser's phenomenological approach to the act of reading and affect theory understand the potential of the act of reading to be “pre-reflective” and “sensual” (Serfaty). Serfaty's approach to reading of literary texts requires a type of cognition that accesses objects through imagination and creativity. Different from perception which requires the actual presence of the object itself “depends upon the object's presence or absence” (Serfaty) a good example of the definition of the experience of reading a literary text we find the importance given by affect theory to the non-verbal and non-conscious dimension of the experience as a space that “sustains the text's affective dimension” (Serfaty 34).

In the encounter of these two conceptualizations one may find a way for a reading of *Beloved*, *Push*, and *The Dew Breaker* in terms of how the *deferral of truth* involves or allows “to give ourselves over to a moment of violence, namely, the violence of the scene” (Serfaty) where the act of reading is essential to the

infliction of bodily pain, as Scarry suggests, is translated via the aesthetic register into a violent reading experience. By deferring truth and meaning, the literary narrative proposes new ways of seeing again and, hopefully, engages the reader's imagination and creativity towards reflection.



representation of particular male bodies, on the other (Carby 1998).

For Als, the photos do not reveal anything about the victims “e ept t e r o v o s p a ” a d t s t e p a stor o r a a terror that transforms Als existence and daily life. Ordinary episodes like being suspected of robbery, of hijacking a car simply for being a black man in the wrong place at the wrong time, or delaying his walking in order to avoid being closer to a white woman, whom he believes he might scare, are examples of how this painful history has shaped his behavior and choices. For Als, the history of lynching photography is a part of the history and the meaning of being an African-American man - “too ad e v o e t d e a t s d e e o o a r e” ( )

Als' reactions echoed the feelings of several writers, or as he a e s t “ r a v o e s” o a r e e p e t e d t o o a t s e r g s to know how racism affects one's life and relationships, and to be able to talk and write about it in a compelling passionate way. Als defines such requests (in his personal experience a request from white audiences and p e s e r s) a s t e d e a o “ e g a t e d” a s a “ g g e r”

In writing this, I have become a cliché, another colored perso r t g a o t a g g e r s e o d o g e e d g somewhat, into what the essayist George W. S. Trow has a e d “ t e e p o r a” s d e e d t e p e o p e e exercising their largesse in my face as they say, Tell me about o r s e e a g e e o o v e s e r e d s t t a t what you people do? Suffer nobly, poetically sometimes e v e o e s t s e r g d e e o a t e s e e g t s a d yet it is what I am meant to write, since I accepted the a s s g e t a “o t e g o o d” a d a t t o o t e s e pictures, let alone events, have caused me pain. (Als 40)

The lynchings killed, according to official records, 4,472 African Americans between 1892 and 1968. In 1890, 75% of lynching victims were black. In the beginning of the twentieth century, this

---

at understanding t e d e a o a r a e a e r o r d s “ a e o s o s e s s t e a s s e r t e d s o t t e o r o a g a t o r s o r s v e r s v e e e s i t i s f o r c e d u p o n N e g r o e s b y t h e v e r y f a c t o f t h e i r s e p a r a t e - s u b o r d i n a t e s t a t u s i n A m e r i c a n l i f e . ' S i n c e e m a n c i p a t i o n , D r a k e a n d C a y t o n a r g u e , b l a c k p e o p l e h a v e h a d t o p r o v e , a c t i v e l y a n d c o n s i s t e n t l y , t h a t t h e y w e r e n o t t h e i n f e r i o r b e i n g s t h a t t h e i r s t a t u s a s s e c o n d - c l a s s c i t i z e n s d e c l a r e d t h e m t o b e : h e n c e a n a g g r e s s i v e d e m o n s t r a t i o n o f t h e i r s u p e r i o r i t y i n s o m e f i e l d o f a c h i e v e m e n t , e i t h e r i n d i v i d u a l l y o r c o l l e c t i v e l y , w a s w h a t e s t a b l i s h e d r a c e p r i d e : ' t h e s u c c e s s o f o n e N e g r o ' a s i n t e r p r e t e d a s t e s e s s o a ” ( )

percentage increased to 90% or more - from 1899 to 1903, of the 543 recorded deaths, 27 were of whites. The practice of collective lynching targeted anyone against any individual who was accused of committing an unacceptable offense against the community, which ultimately became a form of racial terror (Fredrickson 2004: 124; Litwack 2004: 24-25):

Whereas private lynchings symbolized the prowess that individual white man enjoyed over all African Americans, communal lynching in the New South symbolized the collective domination of the white group over another. One of the most arresting aspects of communal lynching was the rare "omnipotence" displayed by lynch mobs confidently exerted in public spaces. Indeed, it is the *absence* of masks that stands out. Invariably claiming that they were defending themselves from "the East rapist" the Southerners approached the task of public murder with astonishing equanimity, confident that neither secular authorities nor their Christian God would take offense at their deeds. (Evans 2009: 08)

Ivan Evans in *Cultures of violence: Lynching and Racial Killing in South Africa and the American South* (2009) argues that albeit the inhumanity of slavery contributed to the practice of lynching of African Americans in the New South, a unique characteristic of it was the development of a "lynch tree" ( ) or "vestibule" are two important elements of racial violence in the United States, which shaped its peculiarity (as opposed to racial violence in South Africa or in other countries).

Firstly, prior to the Civil War, nearly all victims of lynching were white men. According to Vron Ware in *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (1992), in its origin, lynching had been devised by a Quaker political leader named Charles Lynch, during the era evolved to restrain a notorious " " was two hundred miles away from the nearest court of law" ( ) the accused person was given a chance to defend him/herself in a community trial, in which a group of people decided what punishment was appropriate to the crime. This was a practice common in the South and it was not until the end of the eighteenth century that the accused ones were killed (170-171).

The practice of killing untried suspects as a means of political



administration developed in the South twenty years after the end of the war "over part of a people" ( ). The social and economic disintegration of the New South, aggravated by the recession, reinforced racist ideas about black behavior, deprivation and pathology now informed by scientific theories of racial difference and, by the last decade of nineteenth century, lynchings of black individuals had become a regular practice of racial terror.

Secondly, according to Evans, it was not common for white people to punish and/or kill slaves who belonged to other slave owners. Slaves who were accused of crimes were "argued and admitted" Southern courts of law. Yet, as both Evans and Ware have shown, a practice of lynching as a form of racial terror developed after the end of the war "right to" "e a e a porta t eat re o Southern white men, and sheriffs and jailers would risk their lives whenever they attempted to break and stop lynch mobs. Personal encounters and reports were shaped a "treat" and its pervasiveness account for killings of people who were proved to be innocent or, even worse, rumours of a crime quickly mobilized people in search of a guilty person, who was taken by the lynch mob without any evidence of its participation or even presence in the location of the alleged crime.

Secondly, the presence of "treat" and its social African American literature is well illustrated by Richard Wright in the essay "The Negro as a" ( ) right states that the character Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* (1940) was based on many individuals and a "era prod t" (right 1991: 866) of Bigger Thomases.

Any Negro who has lived in the North or the South knows that times without number he has heard of some Negro boy being picked up on the streets and carted off to jail and argued to "rape" "st g appe s so o te t at to d t ad e o e a represe tat ve s o o t e negro s uncertain position in America. Never for a second was I in doubt as to what kind of social reality or dramatic situation depicted in, what kind of test-t e e d set p to evoke his deepest reactions. Life has made the plot over and over again, to the extent that I knew it by heart. (874)

The gruelling aspects of lynching rituals from justifications to

details of how the victims were tortured were told in the oral and written reports: the practice of severing body parts, including sexual organs that became *souvenirs* to participants and spectators. However, one aspect of the rituals, better revealed through the photographs, is the presence of crowds of spectators. Both the participants and spectators pose as respectable citizens filled with righteousness and satisfaction. Lynchings were often advertised a day or two in advance, sometimes even to surrounding towns. On some occasions, tickets to the event were sold, photographs were taken by a professional photographer (to be later sold as postcards), and spectators would fight to get a *souvenir*, that is, a piece cut off the victim's remains. The local press usually covered lynchings in detail (Ware 171; Litwack 08-12).

The notes on the plates by James Allen in the end of *Without Sanctuary* help to understand how and why the photographs were taken. The majority of the photographs were taken for commercial purposes to be sold as keepsakes and turned into postcards for the audience. The plates also refer to a police report and a newspaper's description of the reason stated to be to satisfy a people illustrate the participation of local authorities as well as their incapacity to avoid and punish the enraged crowds:

Local and state officials expressed mixed reaction to news of the lynching. District Attorney James Davis declared that he would do everything the law requires to apprehend members of the mob" On the other hand, the California attorney general, referring to the recently delayed execution of an accused murderer, stated that the "uncontrollable unrest" as a result of the "apathy of the Supreme Court of the United States" (see the original)

The *Enfaula Democrat* reported "The mobsters made no attempt to conceal their identity... but there were no prosecutions." (see original)

The authorities in North Carolina, alarmed at the scope of the violence, as a step to persuade the governor ordered the National Guard to restore order, local officials arrested more than two dozen suspected leaders. One of the killers, George Hall, was convicted and sentenced to fifteen years at hard labor in the state

penitentiary. The *New York Times* predicted that, by taking these eas res ort aro a s over or e as of improving his political prospects. (170)

District Judge Caruthers convened a grand jury in June 1911 to investigate the lynching of the Negro woman and her son.

s str t o s t e r e s a d “*The people of the state have said by recently adopted constitutional provision that the race to which the unfortunate victims belonged should in large measure be divorced from participation in our political contests, because of their known racial inferiority and their dependent credulity, which very characteristic made them mere tool of the designing and cunning. It is well known that I heartily concur in this constitutional ro ision of the eo les will. he more then does the duty devolve upon us of a superior race and of a greater intelligence to protect this weaker race from unjustifiable and lawless attacks.*” ( ta s t e o r g a )

er a s e spapers, while decrying the savage brutality of the lynch mobs, in general gave only a loosely detailed, ultimately sympathetic reports that absolved the communities and officials of any collusion or guilt.

e e t r a t r o a o a e s p a p e r “ e o r k o f t h e l y n c h i n g p a r t y w a s e x e c u t e d w i t h s i l e n t p r e c i s i o n t h a t m a k e s i t a p p e a r a s a m a s t e r p e e o p a g ” “ e t e g e e r a s e n t i m e n t i s a d v e r s e t o t h e m e t h o d , i t i s g e n e r a l l y t h o u g h t t h a t t h e N e g r o e s g o t w h a t w o u l d h a v e b e e n d u e t h e m u n d e r p r o c e s s o a ” ( )

The extracts above convey some of the various facets of g t e o e t v e a g a t o r o a s e s e o “ s t e t o e s o a d s ” t o t e e e t e s p e r o r t a d t e e r o r t o r a e s t o a p o t a s p o p a r t e g a t s t a e e s s o o r a s e d t o o e s a t e a d g s e r e a e a p e o o *black* became synonymous with danger. By the end of the nineteenth century, the practice of lynching became a form of racial terror and lynch victims came to be used as symbolic stand-ins for the community and ideals they were seen to represent (Evans 9-10). White fear was based on the assumption that most lynchings were a response to sexual assault, and it was this assumption that made people condone the action of lynch mobs, either verbally approving or by remaining silent (Ware 172).

However, in many cases, reports of sexual assault were proved baseless or possibly accurate. Reports revealed that "a white man had broken the rules of racial etiquette, had behaved in a manner construed as a racial insult, or had violated the bar in consensual intercourse" (Tamm) or asserted that "the effort to preserve a white man's status as a citizen is a struggle" (Kurz 2001). A collective hysteria is thus created when evil takes the form of human beings inhabiting or transiting in what were once believed to be safe communities (Alonso and Fuks 2005). After investigating reports of lynchings, Walter White called "the other side of the process to sterilize Negroes are ordered" the same as "agreed status of the actual sexual assaults. Illusory situations in which innocent white and black men were accused and murdered in the name of the sanctity of the word 'average' rather than the actual facts." (Tamm) "The other side of the process to sterilize Negroes are ordered" the same as "agreed status of the actual sexual assaults. Illusory situations in which innocent white and black men were accused and murdered in the name of the sanctity of the word 'average' rather than the actual facts." (Tamm)

In the foreword to *Without Sanctuary* the congressman John Lewis draws attention to the importance of displaying the photographs as rare and special to "steve and his generations, to be more compassionate, loving, and caring. We must prevent a tragedy to ever happen again" (Lewis). Nonetheless, against the will to remember part of a cruel past in order to elicit compassion in those who look at the pictures, other authors such as Hilton Als do not even try to support a general feeling or that such change might be relevant in some way. Brent Staples does not at "the attempt to average these pictures loose in the culture might be to normalize images that are in a terrible" (Redman) "The other side of the process to sterilize Negroes are ordered" the same as "agreed status of the actual sexual assaults. Illusory situations in which innocent white and black men were accused and murdered in the name of the sanctity of the word 'average' rather than the actual facts." (Tamm) "The other side of the process to sterilize Negroes are ordered" the same as "agreed status of the actual sexual assaults. Illusory situations in which innocent white and black men were accused and murdered in the name of the sanctity of the word 'average' rather than the actual facts." (Tamm)

George M. Fredrickson in a critical review of the catalogue *Without Sanctuary* recalls the arguments of the historian Leon F. Litwack about the nature and behavior of the crowd that watched the lynchings. For Litwack, the behavior of the audience reveals less a state of order and a sad reality than a system that defines one people as less human than others. Furthermore, the wish to display these photographs is placed between

“after going to your stomach” and “perpetrating atrocities” ( ) of necessity or redress (as seen as or seen and Staples), the artist (present to the catalog) does not address the issue of the relevance and consequence of exhibiting these photographs. For Fredrickson, it is possible that the representation of black people as unresisting victims “deprived forever of human dignity, sometimes literally emasculated, and ultimately reduced to dead meat at the end of a rope or to ashes” ( ) continues to devalue black people in the mind of those whites who cannot conceive of such horror and brutality on someone who did not somehow deserve it. Despite everything, they tend to “re-enter the past” to eat or taste questioning regarding the efficacy of this catalogue in helping to promote the moral progress of society.

In *Without Sanctuary*, a racialized subjectivity is brought into being through visual representation and verbal narration of extreme violent acts. As Hilton Als says, watching the photographs has caused him pain. And it is this pain that is asked to be translated, to be written about, to be represented in images, in music, in narratives.

I want to take this point and go back to Als questioning of his collaboration with the catalogue of *Without Sanctuary*. When Als is asked to write about black people's suffering, no one is assuming he has experienced physical pain, or that he has had a similar experience to the victims of the photographs. However, by asking Als to talk about black people's suffering, it is assumed that he can identify with the suffering and thus could talk about such experience because he is black which is the very point he makes regarding *authentication*. The task (also the job) Als accepted and his reaction to it illustrates how pain and suffering stand in as tropes for blackness.

Karla FC Holloway in *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories* (2003) analyzes stories of death and of dying in the African America of the twentieth century arguing about the important role played at sea as “a death” or a -American culture both represents itself and is represented. As Holloway puts it, black death is a cultural haunting, a collective cultural memory of the vulnerabilities of African-Americans inserted in a racial structure that erases or erodes a “color-coded death” ( ) the association of lynching with “a pre-emptive act of violence” ( ) associated with the violence of the past.

understanding of that vulnerability, whether one was directly affected by this violence or just afraid of it, that forged a cultural association between the living and the dead” ( )

that to take on a status as a discourse created departing from the memory of a past of suffering and pain, or as she describes stories were “so often oral and racial reality mediated through the veil of death” ( ) and she to state as strategic “trauma” to the ongoing discussion, I use the idea of affective attunement and affect aftereffects as methodological tools in order to critique the formation of racialized subjectivities.

### 3.2 Constructing Affectivity and Subjectivity

Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* (1977/2007) proposes two significant concepts that are present in the processes of identification: *selective tradition* and *structures of feeling*. Williams distinguishes three aspects of any cultural process - traditions, institutions, and formations - and he identifies *tradition* as e.g. “the most powerful practical element” ( ) however, as he stresses, it is not a tradition per se but a *selective tradition* that is “an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present” ( ) as a vital state processes so a cultural identification. In terms of African American identities, the notion of a selective version of the past does not turn, is based on a collectivity, is what is criticized by Als, Fredrickson, Staples.

most versions of “tradition” are so to be radically selective. From a whole possible area of past and present, in a particular culture, certain meanings and practices are selected for emphasis and certain other meanings and practices are neglected or excluded. Yet, within a particular hegemony, and as one of its decisive processes, this selection is presented and usually successfully passed off as “the tradition” “the single past” that as to be said about any tradition is that it is in this sense an aspect of *contemporary* social and cultural organization, in the interest of the dominance of a specific class. It is a version of the past which is intended to connect with and ratify the present. What it offers in practice is a sense of *predisposed continuity*. (Williams 1281)

It is the other of others who criticize the purpose of the exhibition. What is being selected is suffering and race as interchangeable signified and signifier that is not contextualized but simply authenticated by an individual's skin color. The general and collective overpower the personal and private, or better, it excludes the personal. Williams continues:

If the social is always past, in the sense that it is always formed, we have indeed to find other terms for the undeniable experience of the present: not only the temporal present, the realization of this and this instant, but the specificity of present being, the inalienably physical, within which we may indeed discern and acknowledge institutions, formations, positions, but not always as fixed products, defining products. And then if the social is the fixed and the explicit the known relationships, institutions, formations, positions all that is present and moving, all that escapes or seems to escape from the fixed and the explicit and the known, is grasped and defined as the personal: this, here, operative "setive" ( )

Williams brings forth the importance of what exceeds the fixed and defined in experience, which he identifies as the subjective. It is indeed this sense of movement and what is not yet formed that allows for changes and transformations. Because it is still happening, what is being lived is difficult to grasp or even to be identified. Nevertheless, the movement of the present, of the active experience of the lived present, renders small changes. These are, in Williams words,

social in two ways that distinguish them from reduced senses of the social as the institutional and the formal: first, in that they are *changes of presence* (while they are being lived this is obvious; when they have been lived it is still their substantial characteristic); second, in that although they are emergent or pre-emergent, they do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action. Such changes can be defined as changes in *structures of feeling*" ( )

And here I come to what I believe is crucial in my discussion.

What Williams names *structures of feeling* is a notion that allows for an analysis of culture and society that moves beyond fixed definitions of an ideally defined object of study. It refers to social experiences and how structures of feeling are changes still in process and perhaps not yet recognized, identified, named, or categorized. It allows for the inclusion of the dramatic goings and comings to "affective events and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and breathing world" (1986, 102).

Kathleen Stewart in *Ordinary Affects* (2007) proposes an approach to social events that is "or else it is to be felt as a shock, resonance or impact. *Something* throws itself together in a moment as an event and a sensation; a something both animated and alive" (10). Her work is a "reading of the present" as a "series of events" that are "present because, although they name real and pressing forces, they end up being like 'dead events' or 'ghosts' that are 'affecting' (10).

The ordinary is a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveness and exhaustion, a dream of escape or of the simple life. Ordinary affects are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences. They are things that happen. They happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment, and agency, and in public and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like *someting*" (102).

Stewart compiles brief personal stories in *Ordinary Affects* in order to reflect on how intimate experiences of emotion and public feelings circulate connecting bodies and individuals to the world (and vice versa) to a "series of events" that "do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action" (10). Her work is a "reading of the present" as a "series of events" that are "present because, although they name real and pressing forces, they end up being like 'dead events' or 'ghosts' that are 'affecting' (10).



to get the “tested” data at thoughts and feelings  
 to be possible” ( )

In the same spirit, I want to think of potential modes of knowing and relating to things and people that are not easily identified as objects or easily named as a structuring force but which are, nevertheless, materialized in bodies and interactions. Or better, what kinds of forces resonate in bodies and in relationships. However, before I move forward, it is important to posit the notion of the cultural politics of affect. Similar to Clare Hemmings (2005), Stewart draws attention to the cultural uses of affective attunement.

The politics of ordinary affect can be anything from the split second when police decide to shoot someone because he's black and standing in a dark doorway and has something in his hand, to a moment when someone falls in love with someone else who's just come into view. Obviously, the differences matter. The politics of any surge depends on where it might go. What happens. How it plays itself out and in whose hands.

Ideologies happen. Power snaps into place. Structures grow entrenched. Identities take place. Ways of knowing become habitual at the drop of a hat. But it's ordinary affects that give things the quality of a *something* to inhabit and animate. (15)

It is the making sense of affect (events) or of “a social geoeconomics” that do to determine the work, once it is what simultaneously maintains and breaks through the practices of racialization and racism. The cognitive force of violent affects are deeply ingrained in narratives which display the intricate relation between embodiment, affect and knowledge. In the cultural politics of racial identities, borrowing from Stewart's terminology, “order affects” resonate in a dialogical recognition of *something* shared. Such recognition might be momentary and its sensation of distinct forms. But either way, as Stewart highlights,

a charge passes through the body and lingers for a little while as an irritation, confusion, judgment, thrill, or musing. However it strikes us, its significance jumps. Its visceral force keys a search to make sense of it, to incorporate it into an order of meaning. But it lives first as an actual charge immanent to acts and scenes a relay (39).

I want to include Karyn Ball's critique of the academic field of trauma studies as a complement to the meeting of Williams' argument with the notion of affect. Ball understands that an affective response to a situation can be a structure of feeling, that is, it can be a small change in the way processes present "trauma adds itself to a structure" a structure of feeling or to other voices entitled *Trauma and Its Cultural Aftereffects* (2000) in which she makes a brief review of the field of trauma studies at the end of the nineties a moment in which she details a "rejection of pathologization" ( ) critics with the circulation of feelings and moods as a structural opposition to the social and traumatic experience" ( )

For Ball trauma studies since "a social or political aftereffect" a structure of feeling<sup>17</sup> that wishes to reflect on the "aftereffect" and do the arrangements that divide the subjective and objective dimensions of existence (28). In her discussion of the notion of structures of feeling, Ball stresses Williams' criticism at critical moments that stress the "importance of affect when it distinguishes the subjective from the objective, experience from belief, feeling from thought, the immediate from the general, and the personal from the social" ( ) instead she proposes that we draw our attention to how

residues of the past cling to the present in the form of particular moods and emotions that actively circulate and may become concentrated, articulated, and organized in a variety of interconnected discursive and cultural formations. The effects of these formations are subsequently materialized in the beliefs and bodies of individuals and groups, in the policies of institutions, as well as in the imagery circulated by popular culture and the media. (Ball 28)

---

<sup>17</sup> Ball refers to the debate within cultural studies between the proponents of identity politics and the "post-structuralist" theorists. She writes "I have argued that the apparent necessity of studying traumatic memory arose at a recent juncture in cultural studies when the multiculturalist proponents of identity politics found themselves at odds with the poststructuralist and post-Marxist perspectives that had partially enabled their own discourse. Following Williams, I want to name the affective response to this situation a 'structure of feeling' so as to generate a certain self-preservative recalcitrance among those of us who, for historical and personal reasons, were not willing to toss out the pre-assessment of the present" ( )

Ball finds in traumatic memory one way of talking about “a e t v e a t e r a t o o p p r e s s o t o t r e o r s e t o d e a s t o t o s o o e r e t d e t t a d “a t e t ” e p e r e e” ( ) s t e a d o o s g o n t h e e x p e r i e n c e o f o p p r e s s i o n , B a l l f o c u s e s o n m e m o r i e s a n d a c k n o w l e d g e s t h e i r r h e t o r i c a l f u n c t i o n a s s i g n s t h a t a r e s h a p e d b y t h e o t g e e s o t e r p r e t a t o t s a s e p r o p o s e s t a t “ h i g h l i g h t i n g t h e a f t e r e f f e c t s o f t h e p a s t a s t h e y p l a y t h e m s e l v e s o u t i n t h e c u l t u r a l s p h e r e , t h e i n s t i t u t i o n a l i z a t i o n o f t r a u m a s t u d i e s m a y p r o v i d e c u l t u r a l c r i t i c s w i t h a p a r a d i g m f o r a t t e n d i n g t o s t r u c t u r e s o f e e g” ( )

Ball acknowledges the significance of narrativization and interpretation of past events. In literature we have the fictionalization of known stories, of a shared memory and history of a people and of a nation. If we take Williams' notion of structures of feeling we could say that these known stories and shared memories are fictionalized with certain expectations from the audience of readers in the sense of what e e d t d e r s o a s a e d a “ a g e d o t ”<sup>18</sup>. The issue of identity politics plus the revision of history and memory put authors and readers along with characters in the same loop of affect.

Ron Eyerman in *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (2001) discusses the articulation of African-American identity in the end of the nineteenth century through the artistic representations of the memory of slavery. By looking at the past, Black intellectuals grounded African-American identity and institutionalized it in organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1909. In e r a s o r d s “ s a v e r a s t r a t o r t s g e e r a t o o i n t e l l e c t u a l s , i t w a s s o i n r e t r o s p e c t , m e d i a t e d t h r o u g h r e c o l l e c t i o n a n d r e f l e c t i o n , a n d , f o r s o m e , t i n g e d w i t h s o m e s t r a t e g i c , p r a c t i c a l , a n d p o t a t e r e s t ” ( ) .

In this way, Eyerman discusses the representation of the memory of slavery through the concept of cultural trauma. While the t e r s p s o g a a d p s a t r a a v o v e “a o d a d t e e p e r e e o g r e a t e o t o a a g s a d v d a” e r m a n

---

<sup>18</sup> Regarding African American memory and history, W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* helped creating a genealogy for an *imagined community*. As Hazel Carby has put it: “t r o g t s r e p r e s e n t a t o s o d v d a s o s s o o a s t o r g t o e g a c o m m u n i t y . I m a g i n a t i v e l y , h e f o r g e s a p e o p l e f r o m h i s a r t i c u l a t i o n o f t h e m a t e r i a l t e r m s o f t e r s t o r a e s t e e” ( a r )

derstands trauma as “a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion” ( ). Here the trauma is not experienced directly by any or all members of the community nor is it necessarily a traumatic event itself. Its traumatic meaning is realized and accepted by its representations and mediation in a process that might take time. The cultural trauma is, in this sense, “understood, explained and made coherent through public representation” ( ). Other words for a trauma are represented over and over again until it becomes instilled in the collective imaginary. This event, according to Eyerman - here the memory of slavery - is constituted by three elements: 1) it is charged with negative affect; 2) it is “represented as death” and 3) it is perceived as “traumatic” or “sovereign” or “vocal” or “core” of its fundamental cultural presuppositions or groups ( -03). It is the collective memory of slavery that defines an individual as a “trauma” as a concept.

Eyerman's understanding of cultural trauma can illuminate my argument. Because focused on the mediation and on the imaginative reconstruction and creation of the memory of slavery, Eyerman proposes that instead of referring to traumatic events, we should refer to traumatic affects, for key to cultural trauma is that it requires interpretation of the traumatic experience. Because in a cultural trauma the event was not experienced directly but, instead, it was mediated through the arts and/or the media as a “selective” or “strategic” representation” ( ). This trauma “addresses a ‘cultural’ or ‘group’” ( ). A traumatic event “addresses a ‘cultural’ or ‘group’” ( ). The notions of collective imaginary and of collective memory necessarily involve the interaction among individuals and the group. In this dialogic process individuals locate themselves, negotiating their position and territory in the world. The trauma “is represented” ( ) in the media and media of representation that connects individuals to the past experience (which they might never have experienced) and to its recollection.

Returning to Hilton Als, the exhibition *Without Sanctuary* is inserted in the production of a concept of identity of American racial identities informed by the social and cultural aftereffects of the national and historical trauma of slavery, the Jim Crow laws, and the

a terror s s t s ear s te t a d t e ore ord  
 by John Lewis the affective aftermath of racism and racial terror is one of the constitutive elements informing American identities. However, the polarity of whiteness and blackness is unbalanced in its constraint and fixity on blackness. The oppressed and the victim are made highly visible as a body (a black body) and the white counterpart is silenced in its request to let the victim (in the case of Als, an imagined vicarious victim) speak. Als is aware of that as we see in his reaction. As mentioned above, Als and Fredrickson feel that the images only domesticate what should shock people. Pain and suffering become imaginary sites for blackness and, although Als is not denying nor underestimating its significance in the construction of African-American memory and identity, he is nevertheless questioning its rigidity towards blackness. His interrogation at the purpose of the exhibition illustrates the idea of affects and emotions that, because structured in racial and gendered terms, loses its violent affective force, once there are no attempts at destabilizing structures. Pain and suffering become unchallenged phenomena in their repeated representation. If the way an event “s re e ered s t ate e t ed t o t s repre sed” (Eyerman 12), what Als asks for is a representation of the complexity and the wholeness of racism and racial violence; a recollection that addresses (or attempts to address) the effects of racial terror and racism in the American society. Or borrowing Eyerman's term: how is the exhibition of lyn g p otograp re err g to t e “tra at a e ts” of racial violence and institutionalized segregation? At stake here is the question of interpretation of a traumatic event, of viewer's reactions to such recollection and mediation, for memory is not located inside the d o d v d a s t rat er “ t t e d s o rse o peop e ta g toget er a o t t e past” ( ad e )

In the interface of memory, cultural trauma and affect, I understand interpretation as twofold: there is the rational, logical and dialectic dimension and there is the affective and pre-subjective one. This notion of interpretation is analogous to the constitution of a structure of feeling: the past and the present, the object and the subject, the personal and the collective come together.

### 3.3 Affective Encounters, Emotions, and Literary Representations

Kathleen Woodward in “ra at a e o orr so

Woodward articulates the affective dimensions of interpretation in her analysis of the cultural uses of the emotion of shame in literature and in mass culture. Shame, for Woodward, is an emotion experienced by both characters and the shamed or ashamed individuals and by the readers and those who witness it. While shame is performed in celebrity culture used as theme for tabloid news and live television entertainment, Woodward identifies in Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970) the potential for "the readers" engaged "to a deeper understanding of racism and thus an insight that is ultimately moral; a cultural poetics is at work as a trope of shame" (Woodward 213). By contrasting examples from mass media and Morrison's novel, Woodward asserts a deeper understanding of shame "as a social emotion, one that is not only interiorized psychologically but also circulates widely in popular culture" (213). Woodward wants to understand the relationship between shame and knowledge, that is, "the cognitive edge of shame" that focus on traumatic shame, that is, "shame at a distance to knowledge" (213).

Woodward initially discusses a passage from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* to illustrate her point of how shame can lead to knowledge. The passage narrates Woolf's experience at conducting research at the British Library and her distress at the realization of how much had been written on women by men. Her response to one part of Woolf's "The Mental, Moral, and Physical Inferiority of Women" by a Professor von X stresses a distance to anger:

[Anger] referred me unmistakably to the one book, to the one phrase, which had aroused the demon; it was the professor's statement about the mental, moral and physical inferiority of women. My heart had leapt. My cheeks had burnt. I had flushed with anger. There was nothing specially remarkable, however foolish, in that. One does not like to be told that one is naturally inferior of a little man. (Woolf quoted in Woodward 215)

For Woodward "the shame of the woman" and the writer is quickly followed by anger. Woolf's analysis of her emotional response (her shame and her anger) to Professor von X's book leads to knowledge. She acknowledges and expresses her heated emotional reaction and, when her anger subsides, she reflects channelling it

towards work - “the association of the proletariat” ( )

Shame is brought to consciousness through the medium of anger; the treatment of women, which results in the feeling of shame, is understood to be unjust. Woolf concludes that the attribution of inferiority to women, which is by imputation a condition of shame, serves to maintain male superiority. In this manner Woolf prefigures contemporary work by feminist philosophers who insist on the cognitive dimension of the emotions. (216)

Differently, in *The Bluest Eye*, Woodward does not find “the self-revelation of a degraded” arranged *A Room of One's Own*. The characters in Morrison's novel do not reach an understanding “of the position of the proletariat” through the experience of a degraded person “as a lead to a great voice or to the tragic depression” ( ) and so that the love “she takes on the intense form of racial humiliation or the numbing form of pervasive daily racism, resulting either in trauma or chronic despair of the other as a whole” ( ) starts “the racial structure of the proletariat as a whole” “virtually possible to overcome” ( ).

racial structures, can become as well a mode of being in the world. In this sense, shame is virtually inherent in how one lives and acts in everyday life – it is the experience of being in racial structure, for instance. Differently from the shame experienced through the “pervasive practice of a ‘g’” ( ) which is so deep ingrained that it is not recognized as a threat to be fought against. Albeit shame in Woolf was followed by anger (which triggered a reaction), one that is a reaction to a whole as a whole “registered as a dead end of the world” – instead of a steady state of being. The confusion of experiencing everyday racism at the same time not understood or predicted goes to the whole as a whole aspect of the experience of the world – racial structures are the tragedy of experiencing this split of the whole as a whole. The characters of Cholly and Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* “each character believes him or herself to be inadequate. Pecola, after all,

believes that she has finally been granted her wish of blue eyes. Yet, at the same time, both know that they are inadequate in the eyes of white

In psychoanalysis, trauma is defined as the numbing and shutting down of narrativization (Garland 1998). Psychic confusion, in turn, is an effect of trauma because the individual re-experiences so at o ro g t o t e o e e s s o e t a o s o ” ( o as 1992: 67). For Woodward neither Cholly nor Pecola are able to narrate their trauma - Cholly was forced to rape Darlene and Pecola was raped by her father ot re a g “trag a so ated” ( ) d t e confusion generated by shame disrupts any possibility of reflection and (re)a t o t s a ood ard o des t at “t e o s o entailed in shame is, thus, not only emotional, but cognitive as we Both the everyday shame of racism and the traumatic shame, or humiliation, which Morrison presents in the world of *The Bluest Eye*, res t a para s s o a a s s o t e part o t e ara ters” ( )

or ood ard t e poss t o “t e r ation of shame as a terar e per e e” es t e ro e o terar t e s s p a e d t e readers (228). The elegiac mood of the final pages of the novel its o p e t a d “deep se se o perspe tive” - “reates a og t ve emotional space where shame might be understood differently: as our collective failure in this country to live up to our ideals, or at least what s o d e o r dea s” ( ) porta t or ood ard orr so does not make the readers feel guilty or responsible for what happened, but shame circulates by shifting to the reader's present in which the literary e o t o o s a e a e derstood “as a t o sto e or dersta d g at e e p e t to a eve” ( )

One of the strategies identified by Woodward is Morrison's choice of the nine-year-old narrator, Claudia. In this choice of a child narrator who cannot understand what happens to Pecola, but who is a sensitive witness to her drama, Morrison makes the important point of affective attunement. Claudia and her ten-year-old sister, r e d a “are attuned to the moods and emotions that envelope them, but because of t e r o g a g e t e do ot dersta d t e “ e a g s” o s a e” ( ) Here, as Woodward shows, the cognitive dimension of affect is illustrated in the choice of a child narrator who learns about her surroundings through affect.

What I find fruitful in Woodward's thesis is her analysis of *The Bluest Eye* as a space for both the self-reflexivity of emotions and,



significantly, for an affective encounter with a literary text or, using her words “the possibility of the reader to see as a reader the experience” ( ) the reader to see as a reader the experience understood here as the “going to the narrative” ( ). The inability to narrate a trauma results in paralysis and isolation; the opposite offers the potential for transformation – the traumatic affect can block thought, thus, meaning. For Woodward the literary experience may be transformational to the reader who experiences the circulation of emotions by being part of the literary drama. The act of reading a literary text offers the reader (who is a literary witness) a space for reflection and for the experience of the cognitive edge of emotions.

Woodward's thesis is on the relation between emotion and the cognitive edge space – “the reader to see as a reader the experience” ( ) and to go to the experience to affective attunement as a narrative strategy, she does not clarify the role of affect in this relationship. Affect is defined by authors like Teresa Brennan (2004) and Brian Massumi (2002) as distinct from emotions – emotion is a named affect. So the ability to narrate what happened to oneself and, henceforth, to understand one's feelings would constitute the transformation of an affect into an emotion. The literary experience can offer a reader both the circulation of affect and the circulation of emotions. Cognition is distinct in both instances and we can argue that affective attunement alone will not bring knowledge. As Clare Hemmings (2005) has argued, it is precisely in the making sense of affect that lies the potential for transformation and change. For Woodward, the literary experience allows transformation precisely in the act of making meaning of the narrative. Although traumatic shame “affect is related to the edge” ( ) or the characters the love that to affect the affective “affect is poet so the effect” ( ) here the affective objects of a knowledge in the reading of literature.

Woodward “affect is so a text that the reader represents” ( ) proposes an approach to read that the greatest affective or the art “over and above its existence as a cultural object” that is not part of the order of the “essence” of the affective “affect is poet so the effect” ( ) she proposes, through the notion of affect, to think of this *excess* as not a transference to art that is the “affect of the reader” ( ) you are the experience of the “affect” ( ) of the art objects “affect” ( )

visceral force keys a search to make sense of it, to incorporate it into an order of meaning. But it lives first as an actual charge immanent to acts and scenes a re a " ( ) o g t s to O'Sullivan's approach, we could say that in the aesthetic experience lies a potential for change for such experience offers unique levels of cognition and communication.

In trauma, the shutting down of narrativization is a strategy of survival, an unconscious effort of hiding what *cannot* be known and what should exist only as an affect but not as meaning. In literature, the traumatic event erupts as an uncontrollable surge. It is there to be *seen*. Characters and readers must see and confront what was thought impossible to have happened, what was deemed inconceivable. However, seeing here requires a specific type of cognition, for it is not only seeing what is there in front of us, but also, and more importantly, *a seeing that is felt*. In other words, it is seeing and being bodily affected by what is there in front of us; it is a visual perception and a sensation, a sensed perception. One might feel anaesthetized against pain, that is, one is unable of self-recognition and of recognizing the suffering of others ( o tag t e r e o o d a r d) s g o e s s e s e s a r e o t o t p e s t e d e s e s t a t o o a t e a e d " r e v o t g a e t s" a d t e o v e r o a d o v o e r s t p e a s r e a e t a r g e d with sensation, such affect does not render what Sontag highlighted as an ethical response.

In literature a poetics of emotions might engender modes of embodiment capable of affecting and being affected affect is carried and transmitted aesthetically. In this way, literary narratives work as sites for the making sense of the unbearable, the unspeakable that urges to become known so that a possibility of existence and of freedom become available, Woodward would say, to characters, readers, and to the society as a whole.

I would like to take Woodward's reflections on the cognitive dimension of emotions and analysis of *The Bluest Eye* and think of them in terms of Als' essay. For Als, his emotions of shame and anger are made to be felt and articulated into words. His emotions are transformed into an ethical and political reflection and, like in *A Room of One's Own*, to " o r " ( t e e s s a r t t e o r t e a t a o g) o e v e r t s o r requires that Als reflect upon his relation to suffering, more specifically, the suffering related to what Holloway called " a d e a t " o r s t e j o b h e t o o k i m p l i c i t l y r e q u e s t e d h i s s p e a k i n g a s a r e p r e s e n t a t i v e o f b l a c k p e o p l e t o a w h i t e a u d i e n c e. On the one side, affective attunement and

identification with the victims of racial violence and crimes are expected from Als. On the other side, a white audience is expected to feel compassion and horror. As congressman John Lewis stresses: the purpose is for people to see and hear and “prevent that great sorrow ever appearing again” (1963, 10). The purpose is to make that knowledge is expected to be reached through emotions. Firstly the emotions of Als and the contributors to the catalog. Secondly, and as a consequence of the first, the emotions evoked in the viewers of the exhibition and readers of the catalog. In *Without Sanctuary*, structures of thought and feeling are set in place so that a viewer makes him attuned to the violent affect of racism. However, white people are also attuned to racist and violent affects, after all, white and black people are part of the same flow of affect whether they choose it or not. Crucial here is that these affects are directed towards the victim of racism erasing the existence of the oppressor. The making sense of the pain those photographs might cause in viewers acts as a possible imaginative resolution to racial problems and racial fears. Furthermore, blackness becomes a defining element in one's identity/self. The color of one's skin supersedes any behavior or action: it does not matter what one *does* but what one *is* in this case, a black man in the United States.

Woodward's response to the past is “detouring the past” (Woodward 2005: 556) does not enable him to produce himself anew, as a new kind of subject. On the contrary, his subjectivity is first and foremost racialized and segmented “a story” and “a race” the cultural uses of violence and suffering maintain racial and gender structures. However, as Woodward's reflections have shown, the poetics of emotions can engender change. Violence, suffering, individual and collective pain interact in imaginings of the past and the present of the world of the novel with the potential for a new imagining of the future the future of the novel and the future of us readers.

In the second part, I present a brief introduction on Black women's literary tradition of representing violence and pain. I follow the tradition of the poet or the poetess a “poetess” operates through the deferral of truth or, in Abel's terms, through a momentary suspension of meaning. Different from Woodward's argument, in my analyses of *Beloved*, *Push*, and *The Dew Breaker* I explore the operative edge of the part of the “poetess” operating in the text and in the act of reading.

## PART II

**4. Black Women's Literary Narratives of Violence**

In the previous chapters I have presented a methodology that approaches violence and suffering in the intensity of the encounter with art. This aesthetic experience is perceived as violent - in the space created by literature a new mode of being in the world might emerge. As I have argued, a Western-centered representation of violence and suffering has desensitized audiences, and our ethical capacity to react to horror and pain has been questioned (Sontag; Butler; Chouliaraki).

In this chapter I present Black women's literature and Black feminist criticism as texts and methodologies that endeavor to evade binary perspectives but without denying their effect nor pretending to transcend them. Some of these literary texts portray the complexity and ambiguities of experience imaginatively forging new and/or other realities, connections, and possibilities. Complementary to the literature, Black feminist criticism aims at reading texts with attention to what er res a as o ed “ terse to a t ” ategores o identity (race, gender, sexuality, class, religion) are complicated in the texts, and reading them intersectionally signals to difference and the possibility of new modes of understanding our lives and social practices.

I believe that Black women's literature, a theory that reads intersectionally, and a method that approaches works in their potential for violent encounters and intensity all share the need to bring the study of affect and pre-subjective levels of cognition to our analysis and criticism. I present a brief history of Black women's literature<sup>19</sup> and Black feminist criticism, pointing out the aspects I find to be relevant to my discussion of the representation of violence and suffering. I follow with the analyses of *Beloved*, *Push*, and *The Dew Breaker* with focus on the fictionalization of violence and pain and the use of the *deferral of truth* as a narrative strategy. That is, in terms of these literary text's potential to represent a violent event and, simultaneously, create the *violence of sensation* in the act of reading. As Abel proposes, a reading attentive to *how* the representation of violence renders the text as a site for new modes of responding to violence to emerge.

**4.1 Black Women's Literature and Black Feminism**


---

<sup>19</sup> My use of the term *Black women's literature* encompasses as well the literature produced by black women from outside the United States who share similar themes and experiences.

The black feminist movement in the United States in the final decades of the twentieth century has focused in establishing connections between the cultural and literary themes and discussions of Black thought and feminism from slavery to the present. As an effect of the academic institutionalization of African-American studies and the greater commercial demand for African-American fiction, Black women's literature published in the 1970s herald a new generation of Black women writers. The coming of age of writers such as Edwidge Danticat and Sapphire was marked by the publishing market availability of and the increase in scholarly studies on novels by writers like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Toni Cade Bambara, and Maya Angelou (Griffin 2004: 167-169). These works were “characterized by striking, complicated, nonlinear narratives, beautiful, rich, sensuous language, and devoted to a range of characters” ( ) and were a response directly to “a white-centered politics of the Black power and Black arts movements” ( ) Black women writers (re)articulated past and current themes and discussions in their fictional narratives creating a site for the meeting of feminist and literary criticism (Keizer 2007). Simultaneously we saw the work of literary recovery - establishing, thus, the idea of Black women's literary tradition - and the development of theory that articulated Black women's social positioning and the literary representations of their experience (Keizer 164; Griffin 168-169). According to Arlene R. Keizer, the major issues articulated in Black women's writings are:

the need for sexual self-determination and economic empowerment, the struggle against the psychic pain of racism and sexism, the possibility of coalition across the lines of race, gender, sexual orientation and class, and black women's strategies of self-formation, self-recovery and self-expression. (Keizer 2007: 155)

In this way, Black women writers have exposed the conformity to social, gender, and racial roles enforced by white male Western-centered knowledge. Firstly, in their writings they explore the intersection of categories such as race, class, and gender in the articulation of their character's existence. For instance, Celie in *The Color Purple* (1982) and Precious in *Push* are perceived as powerless and closely to non-existent or, as in Precious' comparing of herself to

vampires in a movie: perceived as invisible, as those who, after the photograph is developed, are not there in the image (30). They are  
 o e a a d poor as ster s o ts at e e “ oo at o o  
 a o pore o g o a o a odda o ot g at a ”  
 Therefore, within the world view Mister speaks from, her powerlessness would grant her existence worthless, close to a nonexistence.

Secondly, Black women's literary texts bring to light the articulation of knowledge possessed and constructed by the characters who live and affirm their existences in the intersection of those  
 “ ategores o ot g ess” ( r st a 90: 20). For instance, as Celie rep es to ster “ pore a a e g a d a t oo  
 t ere” a d as re o s respo se to er per e ved v s t

I big, I talk, I eats, I cooks, I laugh, I watch TV, do what my muver say. But I can see when the picture come back I don't exist. Don't nobody want me. Don't nobody need me. I know who I am. I know who they say I am vampire sucking the system's blood. Ugly black grease to be wipe away, punish,  
 t a ged ded a o or ] But I don't care now what anybody see. I see something, somebody. (32-33)

or ar ara r st a a “pers ste t ot ” a o e s  
 terat re s “t e at g o t at s per e ved ot ers as ot  
 e st g at a ” ( ) d t o t denying the power of such categories, characters like Celie and Precious affirm not only their  
 e ste e t a so as r st a stresses “so e esse t a tr t s a o t  
 t ose “ te e t a ” ategores gender, race, class of which all human beings partake” ( ) so t s sg a t to g g t t at t e  
 construction of such knowledge embraces the intellect, emotions, pass o s a d t e se ses “as e a e et ve a s o o g”  
 (Christian 1989: 15).

epart g ro t e arg e ts o t e “pres pt ve a e ess”  
 of African- er a st des a d t e “pres pt ve te ess” ( a e e  
 Smith, 1998: xiv) of feminist studies, Black feminist thought identified the interplay of both as suppressing Black women's experiences, which,  
 t r ted “o r dersta ding of certain models of cultural and  
 stor a st d a d a a s s” ( v) e e ort a e et odo og as  
 required: one that revised and re-conceptualized contexts, histories, and traditions in light of black women's contributions and lives. Such reconceptualization was proposed by Barbara Christian in her essay

“... or ...” ( ) ... -known essay sparked a controversy<sup>20</sup> among African American literary critics and the debate reverberated well into the nineties. Her essay was attacked mainly for its essentialist aspect and claimed to be antitheoretical, while the two main arguments of the essay were: 1) proposing an expanded definition of theory, and 2) an articulation of Christian's own critical methodology one which theorized through literature “... edge represented by writers and their characters as a basis for thinking about ... ( )” ( ) ... women's texts did not easily fit into the available theoretical frameworks; such incompatibility or difference ought not silence or ... “... edge” ( ) to prevail ... a critical methodology was required even if that meant an essentialist one. What Christian proposed was an interrogation of the prevailing narrative conventions, histories, and traditions.

In the same manner, Black feminist thought questions the ability of hegemonic master narratives to explain identities marked with the historically constructed meanings of subordinated positions. Connected to that questioning was the assumption that the categories of analysis (for instance, of gender, race, sexuality) were mutually dependent cultural and social constructions. Studying these categories meant reading them intersectionally and using strategies of reading simultaneity. The various studies that deploy black feminist criticism as methodology show how the dominance of one category masks the operation of other categories and how they interconnect.

Black women's literary texts reflected the lives, communities and experiences of black women and families, what Karla F.C. ... “... ” and the ... knowledge ... ( ) ... “... ” and ...

---

<sup>20</sup> Christian's essay challenged the turn towards continental theory initiated in the late 1970s by theorists such as Robert Stepto, Henry Louis Gates, Hortense Spillers, and Mae Henderson, among others (Griffin 2004: 167). These theorists brought insights from Poststructuralism into the study of African American literature. Christian argued that the privilege given to European Poststructuralism ignored the existing theorizing of Black thought and tradition, and created a bias regarding what constituted theory. Furthermore, for Christian, this favoring towards formalistic theorizing acted in detriment of politics (168).

communicated signal to types of cognition and of communication that are not necessarily grounded in Western-centered systems of thought.

Reading these texts is a process in which the word is shared by reader, author, narrator, and characters. In this collective construction of meaning, the story and the character's sense of self are weaved together. These texts and reading experience are distinct from black men's texts, are or o o a o e trated o "t e po er o reat ve a t ors p" a d " d v d a a s o e av g" ( ) e adds

The massive emotional purges in black males' literature, the activity attached to those emotions, their passions, and the e av ors t a t o p a t e o s t e r o s o "a t g o t" eve e d s t a g t e a t o r a a d t e a r r a t v e response (voices) from the emotional and spiritual pressure t t e t e t o t r a s t a o e t v e "s p e a g o t" a the voices gathered within the text, authorial, narrative, characters, and even the implicated reader, is the responsive strategy in black women's literature. (11)

Black women's literature is identified as a discrete tradition that requires not only intertextual relationships between categories of experiences and the use of narrative strategies that will give voice to such intersection, but also methods and analytic tools capable of perceiving and understanding, for instance, gendered spheres of o o e g e s o o a p o t s o t "t e e t a p o r s t a t d e t a traditions of literary theory are those that reach outside of Western stor o r t e r s o r e" ( ) a o e s t e r a r t r a d t o e g black and being a woman is a unity that foregrounds the imagination and creativity of writers; through literature its spiritual unity is recovered and celebrated. Furthermore, the process of writing in the English language also requires a process of revision due to the sociocultural history of the English words. Holloway argues that the history of the English language would be repressive to any creativity from oppressed subjects. For the possibility of ownership of the word and authorship of the texts, Black women writers had to re-make the words, thus the language or " t r a a d g e d e r e d a s t a t d e r e" t e e g e o o t e te- and male-centered discourses (27). Because of the rigidity of oppression and the discipline of racism, literacy walks hand-in-hand with memory and creativity with revision. The ambiguity of racial identity, the uncertainty of life, and the



instability of constructing one's self converge in a narrative that points to the importance of memory. Also, writers endeavor to imagine a space where fantasy, language, and reality meet other than the dominant mode of binary categories. In such spaces the role of the reader is crucial.

The reader's attention is directed to the act of reading from the very grammatical structure of the narrative, the narrator's use of words and punctuation, to being implicated in the world narrated in the stories. Writers create an intimacy between the narrator and the reader, who could be given permission to read one's diary or letters, or who could be implicated in the narrative itself. For example, in the final paragraphs of *The Bluest Eye* the repetitive use of the pronouns "e" and "o r" suggests the reader's complicity in Pecola's demise:

All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us. All of us all who knew her felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used to silence our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength. (162-163)

Claudia (the narrator) understands how she and her community were complicitous in Pecola's descent into madness. However, the final paragraphs of the novel direct that awareness towards the reader as well. "o s a o e er" reads the reader o s er participation in this story and it exposes how familiar what happened to Pecola is in society as a whole. In the novel, the reader ventured into a space:

where economic depravity dictates when and how people love, where taboos of rape and incest traumatize and sabotage black girlhood, where racism in the larger world shapes and constrains the options men and women have to imagine themselves as a whole, acceptable human beings, and where people both in and outside the community exploit the most

vulnerable. (McKenzie 2004: 223)

As McKenzie points out such space is not unfamiliar to the reader. Also, the way Morrison writes the conclusion of the novel shifts the reader's role of spectator to participant inviting him/her to come to terms with his/ her complicity in the demise of innocent and vulnerable children. The reader experiences the text's aesthetic and cultural politics. By not being a passive experience, we could also think of how such reading experience might invoke types of cognition and understanding that open space for affect and emotions; consequently, encompassing the unity of mind and body and the interdependence of the individual to his/her community.

As Holloway stresses, the Hegelian privilege and value given to objective consciousness illustrates the focus of Euro-American thought. In Holloway words:

Within these parameters, any kind of collective, even a metaphorical one, loses value when viewed as an alternative to the subject's willingness to objectify its experience. In this comparison, a collective consciousness the enterprise of a successfully collaborative group of subjects is not a commodity of significant value (31).

Holloway stresses that the Hegelian notion of objectivity and individuality valued as "the enterprise of a subject should objectify his/her experience. Individuality was valued in detriment of collectivity and these binary oppositions would inform the Euro-American mode of thinking. Holloway points out that in Black women's literature such oppositions are obliterated. Polarities are reconstructed to support a more dialogic communication between author and character, reader and text (subject and object) ( ) thus a dialogue to the other ( other ) notion of polarity happens in several fronts.

Firstly, one must acknowledge the privilege and value given to rationality and objectivity in detriment to an experience that is sensually felt and shared collectively. Whatever way such sharing and perception might take, one must accept the pre-personal and affective level of experience and the knowledge that is constructed by it a knowledge that, in some instances, is constructed collectively.

Secondly, the engagement of the reader with the text and the stor e g to d s part o t e “ o a orat ve o ity of author, ara ter a d reader a o e r ters te ts” ( o o a ) a at o o a a s t e “re ra t ve p rpose” ( ) o terat re t e pote ta to ag at ve a ter “t e o rse o o r deas o er g experiences that are (for e a p e) t ra or ge dered” ( ) is a quality of literary texts that enable hegemonic literary criticism methods to be challenged. Farah J. Griffin (2004) remarked that growing up reading African-American fiction facilitated her dreams, gave her visions, and sparked her imagination; and the fact that such reading “e o raged t e ag at o ” ( ) s o d e ept t e ore ro to our minds. For Griffin, those literary texts carry the potential for the readers ag g o “a rad a d ere t ture and engaging in str gg es to r g t ose v s o s to e g” a d o a o g readers to ag e “a past re orded t e stor oo s ot a ro a t ed or g or ed past t a ore o p ated o e a d a t re ort struggling for or str gg g aga st” ( )

These characteristics identified by Holloway and Griffin work in a similar fashion to the potential of creating new modes of response advo ated e s ot o o aest et e o ters t “vo et eve ts”

#### 4.2 Black Women's Writing and the Representation of Violence

Black women writers and intellectuals grounded their works in the experience of being black and female in a society that denigrates women of African descent. The commonality of this experience suggests that certain themes will be constant in their texts. One prominent theme in Black women's literature is the legacy of struggle against sexism and racism. The vulnerability to racism and poverty and to rape as a gender-specific form of sexual violence is constitutive of t ese r ters sensibility. This is a core element of Black women's writings and Black feminist thought (Hill Collins 2000: 406-408).

Valerie Smith (1998), Patricia J. Williams (2000), and Ladelle McWhorter (2009) <sup>21</sup> have shown how the tremendous violence and

---

<sup>21</sup> Smith and Williams set to read the news coverage intersectionally whereas McWhorter does not. Her reading of racial and homophobic violence and murder is grounded on o a ts or o or a ato orter rt es “terse to a a a ses” ort e do ot apt re “t e o p e t o t e po er re at o s ro g t to g t ere” or orter “terse to a a a ses t d to o s a a t atte to pr ar o de t tes rather than on institutions, discourses, and disciplinary regimes; but even when they do

crimes committed against individuals of minority groups tend to get lost in the coverage of facts. News reports progressively move from the monstrosity of the crime to the description of the facts required before “e per e e gets to e a e e d tr t” ( a s ) o p t t a o t e r way, the experience of violence and physical pain (that, at times, escape our comprehension) are broken into stories: from examinations on the victim's past and morality, his/her family background, personal relationships, and any sort of association, to the lawyer's professional credibility. These stories tend to mitigate the spectator's initial experience of shock, gradually transforming outrage and fear into understandable (acceptable) facts. Moreover, these stories connect ideological constructions of race, gender, class, and sexuality complicating anti-racist and feminist responses to rape and abuse against women (Smith).

As I have argued earlier, in media coverage the suffering of others and the representation of violence have maintained the same positions of domination and subordination of individuals and groups because narrative here is used to reduce experience. Differently, the potential displacement rendered by art could destabilize the ideology and arbitrariness of categories once the shock of violence would appeal to common humanity of us all (Butler). The theme of struggle in some black women's literary texts is presented via extreme acts of violence and endurance of pain that challenge comprehension. In these literary narratives, the experience of violence and pain are not reduced to objective descriptions nor offer easy resolutions.

Abel proposes a momentary suspension of judgment, a momentary pause before transforming an experience of violence into a representation of violence. In this act lies the potential for new ways of being in the world. Black feminists have argued that Black women's literature creates spaces where conventional binarisms are destabilized and reveals how their interrelation not only produce relations of power, but also operate as sites for social change (Holloway, Smith). In these spaces new ways of being in the world are forged. However, as Barbara Christian stressed, analysis and criticism of Black women's literary texts re re a e a o read g e preva g “or s o r a d

---

venture beyond accounts of identity construction, they still implicitly assume that racism, sexism, and heterosexism could and do operate sometimes in isolation from one another. My contention here is that in the twe tet e tr t e do of” ( ) sp te o t e r methodological choices, their claims regarding the media coverage of facts are similar.

rt a de to s” s ord ate a o e rters “ ag at ve s sta e” ( o o a ) or a o e ave t eor ed “ arrat ve forms, in stories, riddles and proverbs, and in the pa t a g age” (Smith 22).

Both Abel's and Black feminists' methodologies incorporate the significance of affective levels of experience. The prevailing domain of reason and thought, of mind in detriment of body, are in both arguments pointing to the failure of understanding and sensitivity because rationality is the domain of discipline and binary categories of experience. Black feminist criticism and Black women's literature ask or “a a o edg e to t e eed to s t t e parad g s e o str t to dersta dt o g t” ( o o a ) s e e g g ts o Morrison's novels:

[they] challenge the reader to move from familiar to unfamiliar interpretations of life and living. Rendering the novel through a lens of complex narrative aesthetics, she invites readers into the cultural politics of race, gender, class, age, and even religion to entertain new readings of the text of t e r o v e s t e a t o a d t e g o a o t  
 Inside the space of her novels is a form of uneasy rest, therefore, encouraging readers to return to their lives with new ways of making meaning of them. (231)

Challenging the reader to encounter unfamiliar representations a d reat g a ee g o d s o ort (“ eas rest”) are e e e ts t at welcome the reader's affective investments. If we approach the process of feeling as intrinsic to the process of thinking, modes of thinking that divide the mental and sensual responses we have cannot account for one's experience and knowledge. It is necessary to create a space in which a new mode of thinking can challenge and displace the prevailing o e or r sta “ a e or eor ” t at pote t a or d sp a e e t was one of the most important qualities of the literary text.

I refer to Christian's well-known essay and the controversy generated by it in order to illuminate, once again, the argument on the potential of art to affect us. In other words, to emphasize that the encounter with a literary narrative can be a *violent event* loaded with the potential of creating a new mode of experience. As it has been argued in this study, a new mode of experiencing violence and suffering a mode capable of sensitization and change necessarily requires the

acceptance of ways of knowing that are pre-subjective and/or collective. Once again, one that embraces the intellect, emotions, passions, and the senses “as a collective as a whole” (Kristeva)

Although criticized for an essentialist position, Christian's proposal of a critical methodology theorized *through* literature, emerging from the texts and characters, points towards the potential of a new mode of experience. Such methodology, I believe, can contribute significantly to the themes of violence and suffering in literature. In Black women's narratives, pain is felt physically and psychically (for example, racism and the threat of racial terror are predominantly psychic). If we recall Sontag and Butler's arguments, hegemonic discourses are failing us regarding our ethical capacities to be affected by outrageous, horrific and traumatic scenes. Perhaps the question should be rephrased: how can we create new modes of being in the world that are constituted by our rational and sensual experiences, our psychic and physical constitutions? One possibility is challenging the hegemonic experience and perception of violence and suffering by creating a narrative that presents such experience in its complexity and ambiguity.

Before moving to the literary texts I would like to explain my methodological choices. I do not want to draw any comparison nor appropriate to a heterosexual gender they both position themselves against the limitations, therefore, conformity of white male Western discourse, I recognize that their searches for freedom and autonomy originate from very distinct places and present distinct agendas.

I believe an approach to violence and pain that embraces affect's potential for displacements and mobility can shed new light on the representation of suffering. In addition to that, this study stresses the importance of arguing that a text's “value is presented to the reader at its own terms” (Adams) should be given an interpretative meaning. In other words, we should use “a text states a desire” (Tate) to argue that we should recognize as our own.

Furthermore, it is perhaps important to remember that the logic of suspension (of judgment) depending on a virtual partnership arrangement are aspects present in Wolfgang Iser's *act of reading*. Put differently, Marco Abel's *masocriticism* claims the same element of intersubjectivity present in the aesthetic experience of

reading literature.

Also I concur with Barbara Christian's (1987) and Namita Goswami's (2008) assertions on the *actual* contribution of Black women's writing that "pre-dates deconstruction, postcolonial theory, second-wave feminism, French Feminism, as well as post-structuralism" (105) of authors argue that a women's writing there are a reading that "or so reading writing and theory" (105) of (105) In Christian's words:

[the Western dualistic frame of thought] sees the rest of the world as minor, and tries to convince the rest of the world that it *is* major, usually through force and then through language, even as it claims many of the ideas that we, its "others" otherwise would not or so. For many of us have never conceived of ourselves only as somebody's *other*. (43)

or so a text of controversy generated "the other" as a gesture to establish a relationship that is a "text" of "the other" boundaries that are both premised on and create that very understanding of "the other" (105) at the same time, the "text" of "the other" sheer audacity of the *in-spite-of-it-all*" (105) of "the other" creates sender and receiver in a future community where the present impossibilities of giving and receiving are transformed into the very "text" of "the other" (105) of the use of *the deferral of truth* as a narrative strategy by Black women writers, we could think of it as a force to challenge eurocentric views of the world and to "re-orient" and to re-orient

In summary, here violence and suffering are approached as *shock* as "something that does not speak" (105) and simultaneously, as something that is felt in the materiality of bodies holding everlasting effects on individual psyches and whole communities. In this way, literary narratives can become a site for aesthetic encounters with violence and pain in which readers may be confronted by the violence of sensation that forms of thought, of imagination, and of creation are capable of. As Claudia, the narrator in *The Bluest Eye*, orders the pre-destined "there is really nothing more to say except why. But since *why* is difficult to handle,

one must take refuge in *how*" (04). In the representation of violence and suffering, even "death to a deed" are translated as powerless once explanations and justifications have not stopped the infliction of pain nor have they changed the position of the oppressed. Perhaps the force of change lies in the *how*.

Looking back at the process of creation of *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison reckons her intention was to tell a story that would move people, "to open up a space for readers to read the story of Pecola's suffering rather than an interrogation of themselves or the social conditions" (v). These spaces, what Peter Brook proposed as a literary narrative's potential to "bring about a settlement of the property of the novel" (Brooks), should read as a reading of *The Bluest Eye*, the emotion of shame is brought to be part of the reading experience of the novel. The different levels in which shame appears conflate in order to create a new experience, or better, a new way of experiencing racial hatred and self-loathing.

Instead of seeking a particular answer (to the *why*), what is proposed here is an approach to these narratives "as opening up a space for a possible way of being" (20). This is what she proposes as an approach to "voice the shame" that is so at the heart of a sorrowful depiction of shame as an emotion in *The Bluest Eye*. And finally, it is what I believe is done in *Beloved* in the question of judging Sethe's infanticide and the presence of pain as a violent affect waiting to be named; in *Push* in the conflation of sexual violence and sexual pleasure; and in *The Dew Breaker* in the afterlife of the torturer's actions and history. Of course, it should be said that a focus on affect, although translating the representation of violence and pain into other terms or, at least, allowing a rearticulation of it on another plane, it ends up introducing "the presence of a desire" (Beasley-Murray and Moreiras 2001: 04).



## 5. *Beloved*

*Beloved* is set during the Reconstruction era in 1873, in Cincinnati, Ohio. It is centered in a house, 124 Bluestone Road, where a mother, Sethe, and her 18 year-old daughter, Denver, share their home with a ghost. In the present of the story, Sethe's older sons, Howard and Buglar, had run away when living in a haunted house became unbearable. Denver likes the ghost and believes, like the others, that it is the ghost of her older sister, the baby girl her mother killed in order to save her from slavery. Eighteen years earlier, Sethe escaped Sweet Home, the plantation she lived in Kentucky, pregnant of Denver and after having sent the children ahead of her. After a traumatic escape, Sethe arrived at 124, which was, at the time, the house of her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs. With Denver on her arms, she was finally reunited with her children.

Before her escape and arrival at 124 Sethe was violated. Anticipating the slaves' plan to escape, schoolteacher (Sweet Home's new master) and his nephews choose to frighten Sethe stealing her baby daughter's milk from her body. Sethe then reports to Mrs. Garner and ends up severely whipped by schoolteacher as punishment. Scarred and hurt, without her children and feeling abandoned by her husband, Halle, Sethe runs away. During her escape Sethe delivers her child with the help of a white girl, Amy Denver, and crosses the river with the help of Stamp Paid. At last safe with her family, Sethe spends the next twenty-eight days recovering and healing from the beating with Baby Suggs' help. She meets other women, her neighbors, and life begins to settle down peacefully and safely. However, schoolteacher discovers where she is and breaks into 124 determined to take Sethe and her children back to Sweet Home. For Sethe, going back to slavery is unthinkable and she decides to kill her children before schoolteacher could take a hold of them. She only had time to kill her older girl before they entered the woodshed in the back of 124. The murder became a crime destruction of property (the slaveholder owns the child) - and Sethe is arrested. She took baby Denver with her to jail and left her two boys with their grandma. After a short while, Sethe was released from prison due to requests and pressure from women and abolitionists in the community. Life is resumed with Baby Suggs and her children but 124 e o es a "sp te " p a e (*Beloved* 03). The murder of the older daughter disrupts living in 124: the women would go on living a life in isolation from the community, focusing on the present and trying not to

remember the past. Baby Suggs falls into debilitating depression and dies ten years later.

On the day the novel begins Sethe receives a visit from one of the former Sweet Home men, Paul D, who, after escaping prison, kept moving around unable to settle in one place. Paul D's presence sparks a new possibility of life for Sethe and Denver: he chases the ghost away from the house and the three begin to fashion a new family. Sethe begins to feel glimpses of courage to make life plans and let herself *feel* again. However, this brief contentment is interrupted with the arrival of a mysterious woman. She called herself Beloved the single word written on the baby girl's tombstone and seemed to know nothing about herself and her life previous to arriving at 124. She arrived weak and sick but stayed after recovering. Life in the house begins to change due to Beloved's attachment, devotion, and obsession with Sethe. Both mother and daughter believe her to be the embodiment of the baby ghost and enjoy her presence in the house: Sethe feels redeemed and Denver finds friendship and companionship. Paul D is gradually driven out of the house by Beloved, until the day he learns about the infanticide and leaves Sethe for good.

The love and loyalty of the three women turn their isolation into madness until Denver realizes they need help to stop her mother's physical and psychological deterioration. It is with the help of black women in the community that Beloved is sent out of 124 for good. She disappears and is gradually forgotten by everyone. The story ends with Paul D's return to 124 to find Sethe mourning Beloved. He offers her a partnership for a life they can build together.

*Beloved* is a third person narrative interwoven with flashbacks narrated by the major characters. Through these fragments we learn about the events of the past and how 124 and its inhabitants came to be haunted. We learn about their past as slaves in a thought to be benevolent kind of slavery practiced by the Garners. Sweet Home becomes an abusive and violent place when the widowed Mrs. Garner asks her brother-in-law, schoolteacher, to help her run the farm. We also learn about their arrivals at 124, their struggle not to remember the past of slavery, and how the life they had reconstructed with freedom turned into violence, death, and isolation.

As the literary criticism on the novel has pointed out, *Beloved* e gages t e t e e o o e o er a s "pa o d" t e e o r o "t e great so a ro go t e e s ave e t o r a s" ( a

03). The story of the inhabitants of 124 explores issues of black identity, self-love, and self-hatred generated by racial and gender violence experienced by black people under slavery. The material and psychological effects of slavery *the dirtiness of slavery* (*Beloved* 295-296) - left life in 124 suspended. Unyielding in their decision to not remember the brutal and inhuman experience of slavery, Baby Suggs, Sethe, Paul D, and Stamp Paid practice a kind of existence that diminishes their selfhood once feeling is interrupted. As Nellie Y. McKay notes, in *Beloved* the "a to re e er g as r s s a e a d da gero s" ( ) add to a po ts o t t at orr so s o er t "pro ess as prod t" tra sates te o s "o te ea g process that returns dignity to a people from whom it had been unceremoniously stripped. But only in remembering, recounting, listening to, and accepting their individual and collective pasts does ea g ta e pa e" ( ) ea g *Beloved* is a process both the characters and the readers undergo in order to exorcise the ghost of *Beloved* out of 124. In psychoanalytical terms, by reclaiming their pasts the characters can heal their psychic wounds. Through the act of reading, readers can imagine and reconsider the collective and national wounds of a shameful past.

In an interview Toni Morrison said that one of her goals in writing novels was to translate the historical into the personal. In her words "do t a t to r te oo s t at ou can close... and walk off and read another one right away like a television show, you know, ere o te a e" ( ar g ) *Beloved*, I suggest, her intention of causing a momentary pause for reflection or, borrowing from Abel's terminology, for a suspension of judgment, is achieved in the violent encounter of the reader with Sethe's crime.

Sethe's decision to murder her children in order to save them ro s aver "a ate se o s dered orse t a deat" ( a ) poses to the reader the dilemma of how to judge Sethe's action. While *Beloved* does not present a moral justification for Sethe's crime in spite of the inhumanity of slavery, the reader is left to ponder whether her crime was worst than a mother's turning her children to a living death.

According to Ashraf H. A. Rushdy (1999), Morrison was careful to establish a context for the infanticide (47-48). We learn in the story that Sethe's mother had killed all the children fathered by white e o raped er " et re te a a a t o" (*Beloved* 62), Nan, Sethe's grandmother tells her. Also, later in the story we learn

about Ella's past - who is the woman that initiates the exorcism of Beloved:

It was Ella more than anyone who convinced the others that rescue was in order. She was a practical woman who believed there was a root either to chew or avoid for every ailment. Cogitation, as she called it, clouded things and prevented action. Nobody loved her and she wouldn't have liked it if they had, for she considered love a serious disability. Her puberty was spent in a house where she was shared by father a d so o s e a e d "t e o e s t e t" t a s "t e o e s t e t" o g a v e e r a d s g s t o r s e a d a g a s t o s e e measured all atrocities. [...] Whatever Sethe had done, Ella didn't like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present. (*Beloved* 301-302)

Ella had been beaten every way but down. She remembered the bottom teeth she had lost to the brake and the scars from the belt were thick as rope around her waist. She had delivered, but would not nurse, a hairy white thing, fathered "t e o e s t e t" t v e d v e d a s e v e r a g a s o d The idea of that pup coming back to whip her too set her jaw or g (*Beloved* 305)

For Rushdy, the larger framework Morrison put around Sethe's a t d e o r s t o d e r d g e t o "a a t o t o t r e e r e e t o the terms of its enactment the wrongness of assuming a transhistorical e t o t s d e a p a r t a r s t o r a o e t" ( ) o e v e r t s o t e t does not offer a justification for Sethe's action. Instead, for Rushdy, o r r s o t e s t e s t o r "t r o g t e e e s t a t a s e a d e r a e t r o g a p e r s p e t v e t a t r t e s e t r e o e s" ( )

The violent event of killing her child poses a dilemma and one of uneasy resolution: the reader must learn the different versions of the crime and listen to the different voices that claim the story of what happened in the woodshed with the arrival of schoolteacher.

For the inhabitants of 124 a resolution is reached when they reclaim their memories and, consequently, exorcise Beloved. Or as a a s p o t e d o t a r e s o t o s r e a e d e e t e "a e p t (s) her action and take(s) responsibility for it by recognizing why it happened and by understanding it in a framework larger than one of d v d a o e r" ( a ) o r t e r e a d e r a r e s o t o a e reached, hoped for, or simply remain suspended.

*Beloved* has been read, interpreted, and studied through the lenses of different methodologies and criticism. For instance, the materialization of the murdered child in *Beloved* has been explained in psychoanalytical readings through the notion of the return of the repressed (Henderson 1999; Christian, McDowell, and McKay 1999: 204). It has also been read in light of Caribbean storytelling and folklore which believes that people, who die in brutal manners that are not understandable to them, come back as children (Christian, McDowell, and McKay 1999: 204). Because Toni Morrison engages many cultural references and blends different modes of thought in her texts, the reading of *Beloved* is a rich and challenging experience. As Nellie Askegaard suggests, "The text suggests a deeper and deeper reading of the text so many ways and from so many different cultural references that she destabilizes our tendencies toward safe one-dimensional readings" (Christian, McDowell, and McKay 2007). In *Beloved* the "textured reading" that constitutes the narrative defers a final meaning and offers the reader the possibility to fill in the gaps with his/her own culture and ways of thinking.

I locate my analysis of *Beloved* in the interaction of the reader with the theme of violence. I focus on the violent event of Sethe's murdering of her child in the first part of my discussion, and on the effects of violence in the constitution of selfhood, in the second part. I approach this latter point through the notion of invisibility (of how individuals are made invisible in practices of violence) and how that invisibility is sustained by the deferral of meaning.

I believe the encounter with violence in *Beloved* is loaded with what Marco Abel names the violence of sensation. In Abel's perspective, a text that is aesthetically and thematically violent holds the potential to "invite the reader to engage with different levels of cognition in his/her process of making meaning. For Abel, this experience of a momentary suspension of judgment is the precondition for the creation of new modes of being in the world."

I center my attention on one movement of suspension: the deferred judgment on Sethe's act due to the narrative's articulation of notions of love, freedom, and violence. Because violence overtook freedom and resignified love, it is only through the recovery of the past

that characters and, thus, readers can begin to forge new meanings.

Debora McDowell draws attention to how the act of “re-member” *Beloved*, signifies that “ever revisited to a certain event recreates and re-members, puts back together that which was, but that putting back together doesn't bear a uniform relation to what was there before: memory is a creative process” (Christa Osoy and McKay 210). To put it in other words, when the third person narrator gives voice to the characters, who tell us of their memories, the reader is not only learning how they have become who they are and how they have been affected by being destitute of freedom and of control over one's own body and mind. The reader is also following the character forging her own self. The act of re-memory is a creative process for the character is creating herself at the very moment she is remembering her past. In the process of re-remembering not only the past is reinserted into the present but also the fractured self is healed through the telling of past stories. In *Beloved*, re-remembering is part of the process of healing painful wounds and the path to fashioning a sense of self.

### 5.1 The Choices of Margaret Garner and Sethe

The story of Margaret Garner was reported thoroughly by newspapers at the time and Garner became a symbol for the abolitionist cause. In a speech celebrating the twenty-third anniversary of West Indian Emancipation, Frederick Douglass called upon what he believed Garner symbolized:

We never get free from the oppressors and wrongs heaped upon us, we must pay for their removal. We must do this by labor, by suffering, by sacrifice, and if needs be, by our lives and the lives of others.

Hence, my friends, every mother who, like Margaret Garner, plunges a knife into the bosom of her infant to save it from the hell of our Christian Slavery, should be held and honored as a heroine” (quoted in [unclear]).

At the time it happened, Margaret Garner's story represented the extreme measures a victim of racist ideology under the institution of slavery would take to escape it. Although news reports gave different details of the story - probably motivated by the exoticism of it (Rushdy 42) - most accounts say that on 27<sup>th</sup> January, 1856, at Cincinnati, Ohio, a fugitive slave killed her child after being found by the slaveholder and

officials. They had arrived at a scene of a woman holding a bloody knife, a small child with her throat cut, bleeding to death, and other three scared and injured children. A report by the American Anti-Slavery Society described her as "a devoted mother of the children, and said that she had killed one and would like to kill the three others rather than see them again" (Garner 26). The story circulated in newspapers and people followed Margaret Garner's trial with expectations and puzzlement - "For once, reality surpassed the description" (Hollaway 71). Reports described that during the trial Garner seemed serene and conscious of her situation. To most people's surprise, she did not regret her action, instead, she stated that her intention was to kill her four children and then herself. She was charged for murder and sent to prison. Accounts of an interview with her assistant a report that she said "she asserted a host to address herself to the father" (Garner 26). "I was cool as I now am; and would much rather kill them at once, and thus end their suffering, then have them taken back to slavery and be murdered by piece-meal" (Garner 26).

Newspapers coverage of the case seemed to convey the public's sympathy with the story of a mother's selflessness and love, simultaneous with their surprise and disbelief of her determination, sanity, and remorselessness.

Garner's choice of murdering her children in order to save them from slavery, or as Morrison's put it, the act of claiming her own freedom (*Beloved* xi), subverts Western epistemology by blending freedom and reason with the negativity of death (Hollaway 1990; Gilroy 1993; Cheng 2001). This narrative in which death is the true escape from slavery is an example of black cultural production of narratives that aesthetically address the past stress "oppression is good so as to address the negative" (Gilroy 217). The appropriation of the history of slavery has engaged the African-Americans' experience of fear and vulnerability, the lingering and knowing ways of dying due to the daily presence of violence in their lives (Hollaway 71-79), and the relationship between terror and memory, between the desire to forget a painful past and the impossibility of forgetting it (Gilroy 217). In Gilroy words:

The turn towards death also points to the ways in which black cultural forms have hosted and even cultivated a dynamic rapport with the presence of death and suffering. This has

generated specific modes of expression and some vernacular philosophical preoccupations that are absolutely antagonistic to the enlightenment assumptions with which they have had to compete or attempt to integrate. Integral, for example, to the narratives of loss, exile, and journeying which, like particular elements of musical performance, serve a mnemonic function: directing the consciousness of the group back to significant, nodal points in its common history and its social memory. The telling and retelling of these stories plays a special role, organizing the various elements of the group's social and cultural life into an important balance between inside and outside activity. The different practices, cognitive, habitual, and performative, that are required to invent, maintain, and renew identity. These have constituted the black Atlantic as a non-traditional tradition, an irreducibly modern, ex-centric, unstable, and asymmetrical cultural ensemble that cannot be apprehended through the Manichean logic of binary coding. (Gilroy 198)

The story of Margaret Garner and the fictionalization of that event by Toni Morrison are examples that disrupt enlightenment rationality, which approaches death as negativity and legitimates slavery and brutality. The choices of Margaret Garner and Sethe require new ways of thinking about what agency means for individuals stripped of it. Under the institution of slavery freedom is found in death (Cheng 20-4), therefore, Garner's and Sethe's action also illustrate their power to assert their human agency.

As Gilroy proposes referring to the work of Frederic Douglass and to the story of Margaret Garner: "the slave's act of self-assertion in a context in which he/she is devoid of will. In other words, under the extreme conditions of slavery, distinctions between emotions and the notion of survival are blurred. The vernacular understanding of agency, of what it means to take control of one's own life, is thus redefined." (Gilroy 198) Gilroy as the slave's act of self-assertion in a context in which he/she is devoid of will. In other words, under the extreme conditions of slavery, distinctions between emotions and the notion of survival are blurred. The vernacular understanding of agency, of what it means to take control of one's own life, is thus redefined." (Gilroy 198) Garner's and Sethe's choices are translated as an act of will and a choice of freedom.

Furthermore, as Mae G. Henderson (1999) argued, Sethe's action should also be interpreted as her radical opposition to the dominant white American narrative of the "heroic" slave.



perspective" ( ) represented so that she is able to arrest the effects of the attack and the "tearful" ( ) so that she is able to "go on" ( ) despite the mishandling of the nephew who'd overbeat her and made her cut and run" (*Beloved* 176). For the sheriff, the event should teach a lesson "testimony to the results of a little so-called freedom imposed on people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the same error" ( )

Sethe's action competes with these narratives for she "reconstitutes herself" ( ) so that she is able to "deconstruct" ( ) to a narrative of "otherhood" ( ) after a "love" ( ) so that she is able to "become a story of liberation; a story of inhumanity has been overwritten as a story of 'herstory'" ( ) so that she is able to "reconstitute herself within the context of black women's experience" ( ) so that she is able to "fit" ( ) the larger framework of racial history in the United States.

Although Sethe's counter-narrative represents a radical opposition to the master's discourse and an assertion of her humanity, I disagree with Henderson's argument that Sethe reconstitutes herself with this counter-narrative. As we see in the novel, Sethe substitutes the master's discourse for the black maternal love metaphor as the basis for her "self" ( ) so that she is able to "become a story of liberation; a story of inhumanity has been overwritten as a story of 'herstory'" ( ) so that she is able to "reconstitute herself within the context of black women's experience" ( ) so that she is able to "fit" ( ) the larger framework of racial history in the United States.

For Gilroy, Cheng, and Holloway, the murder committed by Margaret Garner and Sethe belong to narratives in which their decision is a refusal to concede legitimacy to slavery, and a step out of the "territory" ( ) so that she is able to "become a story of liberation; a story of inhumanity has been overwritten as a story of 'herstory'" ( ) so that she is able to "reconstitute herself within the context of black women's experience" ( ) so that she is able to "fit" ( ) the larger framework of racial history in the United States.

lies in her positive choice of death as the discontinuity of servitude, oppression, and violence. As the narrator reminds us, worse than what it “too to drag t e teet o t at sa der t e tte ” (*Beloved* 295) of Sethe's baby was

what Baby Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what Stamp Paid saw and what made Paul D tremble. That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up. And though she [Sethe] and others lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own. The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty *her* all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing the part of her that as ea d o e o o d o t seart o d st her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper. et e ad re sed and refused still. (*Beloved* 295-296)

## 5.2 The Force of Invisibility and Pain

For Sethe, the dirtiness of slavery would, borrowing from Elaine Scarry's terminology, unmake the consciousness of her children. Unable to know, remember, and imagine who you were/are renders a life not only without thought but also without feeling. This unmaking of consciousness and, consequently of the world, inflicted by the violent practices and imprisonment of slavery renders life unlivable. Sethe realizes she is made *invisible* when she overhears one of schoolteacher's lessons.

I couldn't help listening to what I heard that day. He was ta g to sp p s a d eard sa “ o e are o do g ” d o e o t e o s s a d “ et e ” ats e stopped because I heard my name, and then I took a few steps to where I could see what they was doing. Schoolteacher was standing over one of them with one hand behind his back. He licked a forefinger a couple of times and turned a few pages. Slow. I was about to turn around and keep on my way to where the muslin was, when I heard him sa “ o o ats ot t e a to d o to p t e r a characteristics on the left; her animal one on the right. And do t or get to et e p ” (*Beloved* 228)

Sethe walks away confused and nauseated by what she has heard. Uncertain of what they meant with left and right columns, she as s rs ar er t e ea go “ ara ter st s” “ ara ter st s a eat re t g t ats at ra to a t g” (*Beloved* 231). In this moment, Sethe understands why she had been measured by schoolteacher and also why she had to take her children away from Sweet Home, even if without her. We could say that this is Sethe's realization of how powerful those lists are and how doomed she and her children are under those definitions. Sethe tells *Beloved*:

So I sent you all to the wagon with the woman who waited in the corn. Ha ha. No notebook for my babies and no measuring string neither. What I had to get through later I got through because of you. Passed right by those boys hanging in the trees. One had Paul A's shirt on but not his feet or his head. I walked right on by because only me had your milk, and God do what He would, I was going to get it to you. You remember that, don't you; that I did? That when I got here I had milk enough for all? (*Beloved* 233)

The fragment above illustrates two sides of being made invisible. On the external side, Sethe is fully aware of her position within a system that will never let her be who she is, no matter how much she tries or how empathetic her master is. Sethe is made invisible, as Susan Sontag pointed out, by having her individuality erased.

On the internal side, invisibility is rendered by the depth of racism and the institution of slavery: Sethe's own belief that her existence lied in the milk she was carrying. The traumatic violation of having her milk stolen by schoolteacher's nephews, and her obsessive belief that her milk was the most valuable thing about herself, unable a construction of a sense of self away from the characteristics on the pupils' lists. Sethe is struggling with a past (her past) that is narrated through schoolteacher (that is, white/male historical) discourse (Henderson 84-91). To put it in another way, she lacks a discourse of her own and, until she claims her own history (by narrating her painful memories), a sense of self remains in suspension.

This two-dimensional invisibility is constructed by the historical blending of the discourses of slavery and racism. The sociologist Orlando Patterson in *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries* (1998) proposed that the origin for

what he believes to be a contemporary dissonant behavior and attitude troubling gender relations amongst African-American men and women is in slavery and the following racial segregation of Jim Crow. For Patterson “today a tremendous degradation, male emasculation, childhood neglect, legal nonexistence (in which being raped by anyone Euro-American was not a crime), and general racist oppression” ( ) either devastate gender roles. While Patterson examines different sources of American census data and sociological and medical researches in order to find patterns and continuities, here I want to center on his initial review of the effects of slavery in the self-fashioning of subjectivity and identity. Patterson defines slavery as:

... the use of brute force and the legalized violence of his government, absolute power and authority over another. The slave was reduced in law and civic life to a nonperson. He or she was socially dead as a legal entity (a person with independent capacities or rights or powers) and as a civic being (a recognized member of the sociopolitical order). As a person in law and civil society, the slave did not exist but instead was a mere surrogate of the master. (Patterson 1998: 27)

Under this system not only personhood was unattainable, turning one invisible to the law and civil society, as Patterson points, but also one was unable to forge a sense of self. Similarly in the novel, although Baby Suggs lived in the benevolent Sweet Home, and later free for years, she never knew who she was.

... as they were buried or what they looked like if alive, fact was she knew more about them than she knew about herself, having never had the map to discover what she was like. Could she sing? (Was it nice to hear when she did?) Was she pretty? Was she a good friend? Could she have been a loving mother? A faithful wife? Have I got a sister and does she favor me? If my mother knew me would she like me? (*Beloved* 165)

Slavery, in *Beloved*, is destructive in every possible manner for it not only violates one's body and rights but it, significantly, violates

one's mind and its ability to imagine and create meaning. We could think of invisibility here in terms of an individual's virtual existence in a world in which emotions are not a constitutive part of their being. For instance, mothers learn to not get attached to their children, relationships are understood as pairing up without a prospect of continuity, the idea of having family members and relatives is rendered impossible for the slaves practice forgetting people's faces, voices, scent, and gestures. If one cannot recall with one's mind's eyes, it means one cannot long for that presence.

In the novel, loving as a slave, according to Paul D, meant protecting yourself and loving small (*Beloved* 191).

Picked the tiniest stars out of the sky to own; lay down with head twisted in order to see the loved one over the rim of the trench before you slept. Stole shy glances at her between the trees and chain-up. Grass blades, salamanders, spiders, woodpeckers, beetles, a kingdom of ants. Anything bigger wouldn't do. A woman, a child, a brother a big love like that would split you wide open in Alfred, Georgia. (*Beloved* 191)

Paul D's advice to love small to love a little and to channel your affection towards things that you cannot keep closer to you like stars and insects and his practice of putting his memories and past in a tobacco tin work as coping mechanisms for a person deprived of reedo or a e t at reedo ea t e g “ a p a e ere you could love anything you chose ot to eed per ss o or des re” (*Beloved* 191).

This unwilling submission of one's feelings and affection to the control of another was characteristic of institutionalized slavery in its effort to render meaningless familial ties like husband-wife and mother-child relationships. The constant threat of absence leaves the self suspended, always deferred, awaiting to be forged by another. This process of obliteration of self-created meaning is also characteristic of racist encounters as discussed by Clare Hemmings under the notion of affective encounters.

In *Beloved* s aver as ade t e se a “ o se ” (*Beloved* 165) and Toni Morrison creates a narrative in which the impact of slavery upon the forging of the self are also played in affective exchanges in

embodied encounters <sup>22</sup>. For example, Sethe's reaction to overhearing someone say "over a tree" even though she does not immediately understand the meaning of the word "over a tree"

I commenced to walk backward, didn't even look behind me to find out where I was headed. I just kept lifting my feet and pushing back. When I bumped against a tree my scalp was prickly. One of the dogs was licking out a pan in the yard. I got to the grape arbor fast enough, but I didn't have the muslin. Flies settled all over your face, rubbing their hands. My head itched like the devil. Like somebody was sticking fine needles in my scalp. I never told Halle or nobody. (*Beloved* 228)

Here each reading of a text "places it on the body, and is played out with the other" (Edelman) at different levels operating simultaneously in the construction of meaning in *Beloved*. The fragment above illustrates Sethe's making sense of her self within institutionalized slavery. Because she is positioned as an object of affective displacement, she awaits for the other to define who she is. As I have pointed out, Sethe's infanticide

---

<sup>22</sup> Sara Ahmed in *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000) presents a concept of embodiment as lived experience with other bodies in which identity is constituted through and in encounters. Her definition of *meetings* and *encounters* is similar to what Hemmings and Abel term *affective encounters*. It does not necessarily presuppose the meeting of human beings "a meeting or at least one of them" (Ahmed identifies *surprise* as a meeting of other or "surprised one" (08). She states that while attempting to read another body, a subject may be frustrated by the impossibility of reading a given body. When unable to recognize a body, a subject will place that strange body against other already recognized as strange bodies. In other words, it is part of the nature of encounters with embodied subjects the impossibility of fixing meaning, for a thought to be fixed meaning in one situation may be disrupted in another. Importantly, because the particularity of one's body is achieved by its encounter with another body and/or other bodies, one's inability to be affected resides in the maintenance of the integrity of such body and, therefore, one's self remains intact. Looking at what Edelman points out by Susan Sontag about how discourses of this-is-how-they-are and/or how-they-live are constructed to explain what has happened to the distant other. Such discourses help define the *familiar* against the *strange* bodies. Ahmed names "strange ones" that are structured as representative of a strange or as a disorderly or a disorderly "seen to be a strange one" (Ahmed 54).

could be interpreted as a counter-narrative to the dominant and oppressive master's discourse. By resignifying schoolteacher's narrative of wildness and animality into a narrative of black maternal love, Sethe asserted her mind and stopped schoolteacher. Nonetheless, as I have also stated, this counter-narrative does not work as an end to the impact of the master's discourse in Sethe's life. I also want to argue that the impact of slavery suspends meaning, thus living, in the story.

Pain overwhelms the characters' lives as an everlasting affect. Here pain works as affect: present as deep depression and in the loss of colors (Baby Suggs), inside a tobacco tin (Paul D), and as a ghost in the lives of the women of 124. And what is significant here is that pain remains as affect by the very choice of Baby Suggs, Paul D, and Sethe. This acceptance of a "va e e" (*Beloved* 204) is a reflection of the devastating and demoralizing effect of the violence of slavery. It is only with the arrival of *Beloved* and her destructive presence, that Paul D and Sethe are forced to make sense of their past and, therefore, of who they are. As Barbara Christian suggested, the process of re-memory in *Beloved* works as the creation of herself as one that is not a commodity (Christian, McDowell, and McKay 218). Sethe is not her milk and only when she allows the past to be remembered that she begins to imagine a desire to delete herself as a "strange" she has been positioned.

Although meaning is suspended, it does not mean there is no knowledge. Elaine Scarry argued that the infliction of pain destroys consciousness, consequently hindering the imagining of one's self-consciously and explicitly announces its own nature as an undoing of civilization, acts out the uncreating of the created

What we see in *Beloved* is that the infliction of pain indeed destroyed imagination and creation. For some characters, existence becomes a type of default living in which imagining (thus remembering) has no space in their lives. For others, like Halle, witnessing the infliction of violence against another person (Sethe) destroyed his senses as a testament to the role of the mother as a mother. Watching schoolteacher's nephews steal Sethe's milk paralyzed Halle's senses deteriorating his mind and soul to the point of madness. At last

knowing why Halle did not meet her as arranged, Sethe is wary of not letting her brain ask for more of the past.

s e o d st a a g e t e e s a r o g t a d  
the news he kept to himself. Just manage it. Not break, fall or cry each time a hateful picture drifted in front of her face. Not develop some permanent craziness like Baby Sugg's friend, a young woman in a bonnet whose food was always full of tears. Like Aunt Phyllis, who slept with her eyes wide open. Like Jackson Till, who slept under the bed. All she wanted was to go on. As she had. Alone with her daughter in a haunted house she managed every damn thing. (*Beloved* 115)

Furthermore, in *Beloved* the termination of physical violence offers no respite - pain continues as affect. Everlasting effects of violence corrode the lives and relationships of its victims. While physical pain ceases with the healing of injuries turned into scars, it becomes an enduring affect that disables one's capacity to feel. That is to say that pain remains as affect. Initially in the form of a ghost  
a t g t t " s t s t s e a t o r e a t " t e o r o  
*Beloved* (Holloway 1990: 522).

While bodily pain was the only sensation they allowed themselves to feel and to heal from, their grief was put into the place of undesirable emotions along with passion, desire, and love. Baby Suggs, Sethe, and Paul D knew how to heal their body and turn their pain into scars, but they did not know how to heal anything else. Slavery had taught them how to live an unlivable life for, as Baby Suggs reminded  
e t e " e r e s o r e o s t e d r o e d t a t e r e s a o t e e v e r  
lived from the start of time. Lay down your sword. This ain't a battle; t s a r o t " (*Beloved* 287).

Scarry argues that physical pain destroys language, therefore, one's imagination and ability to feel. As illustrated in the fragment above, that is also true in *Beloved*. However, when turned into affect, pain forces creation (re-memory) for the choice of numbness, or an isolated existence in a haunted house, proves unsustainable. Affect erupts in a desperate cry to be named - *Beloved* arrives unrelentingly asking to be named and to become the center and control of life in 124.

The dirtiness of slavery had suppressed the creation of oneself. However, destruction should be understood differently from Scarry's



thesis. In *Beloved* the self was not destroyed by violence. It was violence that obliterated its existence in the first place. Language and *work* could not mediate and/or reconstruct what was destroyed by torture, whipping, and the violation of one's body. Instead, the process of re-memory forges a self and a mode of being in the world that never knew how to exist outside the discourse of schoolteacher.

For Scarry, the activities of torture and war destroy the self and civilization; and only through imagination (*work*) that what was once inexpressible can find existence again. For Morrison, in *Beloved*, violence operates in the prevention of any form of creation and, therefore, of existence. Here we should be wary of Scarry's understanding of existence and subjectivity. According to her notion, the subject exists only through language and can, thus, be destroyed once that language is unmade (by violence). However, in *Beloved*, this notion of subjectivity is challenged by the continuing effect of pain. Although refusing to be placed on the animal side of the list, Sethe struggles to conceive of herself as not a commodity, as not the milk of her baby. In spite of choosing to not remember the past, pain is never eliminated. It exists as affect—the “speaking to the spirit” (*Beloved* 235).

Pain exists in the spite of 124, in the questionable existence of the loved—the avowed—the storied—the “dead negroes” passed over—“the other” (*Beloved* 06). Making sense of such pain initially meant madness. Beloved acted as a mediator between affect and emotion. Saying her name—“the loved—she—daughter—” ( ) “the loved—sister” ( )—as Valda tells the “valuable” event—had. Meaning that had previously escaped the characters in their refusal to make sense of their pain is now named. Before the arrival of Beloved, we could think of pain as disembodied, without form or meaning, that is, as affect. Beloved's presence acts as powerful force insisting that Sethe represents the “speaking to the spirit” as a gesture—staying at Sethe's tells her (their) story, affect is transformed into feeling.

In *Beloved* this process of narrating re-memories was nearly as painful and difficult. In the beginning of the story, Paul D's arrival signaled a new possibility, a new mode of being in the world in which feeling is part of being. Although Paul D sent the ghost out of the house, it came back in the form of Beloved. Feeling, then, enslaved them: Sethe's initial enjoyment of Beloved's company and love turn into possessiveness and Sethe's complete devotion to Beloved's whims and

desires; Denver's care, friendship, and loyalty becomes neurotic protection and jealousy. As Rushdy summarizes:

Beloved is more than just a character in the novel, though. She is the embodiment of the past that must be remembered in order to be forgotten; she symbolizes what must be re-arranged in order to be re-ordered properly. "Ever old" knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, "no one is able to do to her a thing" (141)

Through the act of re-memory pain that lingered as affect for eighteen years and materialized itself in the form of Beloved is given meaning in the process of narrating the past. These narratives initially seemed to have the destructive power of unmaking the self because remembering for Sethe was not an act of imagining and self-creation. The ubiquity of schoolteacher's lesson that returns years later in Paul D's judgment of her decision to kill her children - "no good to eat and eat of" (*Beloved* 194) - translated into a suspension of living and of meaning because she was still fashioning a life and a sense of self in light of that invisibility.

As I have said above, isolation and invisibility become unsustainable. Beloved arrives at 124 asking for an explanation (a narrative) and "she is the arranged one or she is the girl" (Rushdy 47). Only when Sethe confronts her action and accepts her responsibility for it, while also recognizing the reasons for the infanticide within the larger framework of the impact of slavery upon the lives of her family and community, that she is able to mourn her daughter and healing occurs. Meaning here is constructed in terms of the individual position and role within the family, community, and history. The invisibility rendered by slavery and racism has to be confronted in the dialogical relationship between individual and collective; and the sense of self fashioned in its relationship with the other, but outside the discourse of the other, for Sethe has to narrate her own history and create her own discourse.

In *Beloved*, meaning is suspended, deferred, in the issue of judging Sethe's infanticide and, as a consequence of that, in the use of pain as affect impeding sensation and feeling from nurturing a sense of

self and freedom.

## 6. *Push*

In *Push* we read the story of Claireece Precious Jones, told by herself, in her journal and through her poems. Precious, as she likes to be called, is an 18 year-old pregnant black girl from Harlem. She is obese, illiterate and has been expelled from school for her pregnancy has started to show. This is her second baby by her father. In 1983, she as t e v e a d a d t t e o g o a g r t o s s d r o e o s raised by her maternal grandmother. This second child is a boy, Abdul. Precious has been raped by her father since she was three and abused in every manner by her mother, whom she lives with. After Abdul is born, Precious learns she is HIV positive but fortunately her children do not have the virus.

e stor e g s t r e o s r strat o a d a ger at being expelled from school for being pregnant, what she reckons to be unfair since *she* has done nothing wrong:

a e s a r e e r e o s o e s d o t o a  
 t e g o t a t e s s a s e d o t o o a r  
 g o n n a g o w i t h t h i s s t o r y o r e t e r t s e v e a s t o r o r  
 t a e t e r g o a s t a r t r o t e e g g o r  
 r i g h t f r o m h e r e o r t w o w e e k s f r o m n o w . T w o w e e k s f r o m  
 n o w ? S u r e y o u c a n d o a n y t h i n g w h e n y o u t a l k i n g o r w r i t i n g .  
 t s o t e v g e o a o d o a t y o u d o i n g .  
 o e p e o p l e t e a s t o r t d o t a e o s e s e o r e t r e  
 t g o a t r t o a e s e s e a d t e t e t r t e s e  
 a t s t e g s e e o g e s a d s t o t t e r e  
 a l r e a d y ? ( 0 3 - 0 4 )

Precious is at 9<sup>th</sup> grade at school but she should be at 12<sup>th</sup>.  
 t o g “a t e p a g e s o o a e” ( ) t o r e o s e r g r a d e s a r e g o o d  
 a n d t e a c h e r s c o m p l i m e n t h e r b e h a v i o r a n d p e r f o r m a n c e i n c l a s s . S h e i s  
 a l w a y s s e a t e d i n t h e l a s t r o w o f d e s k s a n d r e m a i n s s i l e n t d u r i n g t h e  
 w h o l e p e r i o d o f c l a s s e s . S h e i s o s t r a c i z e d a n d b u l l i e d b y t h e o t h e r  
 s t u d e n t s a n d r e a c t s a g g r e s s i v e l y a s s e r t i n g h e r s e l f b y b e a t i n g a n d  
 t h r e a t e n i n g w h o e v e r a s s a u l t s h e r .

Everyday I tell myself something gonna happen, some shit  
 e o g o a r e a t r o g o r s o e o d g o a  
 b r e a k t h r o u g h t o m e g o a e a r a t p e o r a  
 c h a n g e m y s e a t t o t h e f r o n t o f t h e c l a s s . B u t a g a i n , i t h a s n o t  
 b e e n t h a t d a y . ( 0 5 )

When Precious starts to see the school principal, Mrs. Lichenstein, suspends her for being pregnant and for her attitude of “total cooperation” ( ) after she sees her mother recommend Precious to an alternative school, Higher Education Alternative/ Each One Teach One. This is a school for girls focused on improving their reading and math skills so they can take the G.E.D. (high school equivalency). At Each One Teach One, Precious meets Blue Rain (Ms. Rain), the teacher, and makes friends for the first time with her classmates. She learns how to read and write and part of her journal the students also exchange messages with Ms. Rain messages that are corrected for syntax and spelling mistakes, but also replied by the teacher, thus, establishing a space for conversation.

At Each One Teach One Precious finds the support to break away from her mother's abuse. After her second child is born and her mother threatens to kill her, Precious moves to Advancement House a place for battered women with babies or, as Precious describes it a ½ way house: a place you stay “a little bit of a home” ( ) There she is able to take care of Abdul, who stays at a nursery while Precious attends school.

From early on in the story Precious tells us about her wish and need to break away from the life she has sometimes in the form of her daydreaming and fantasies of being a loved and desired girl like in music videos. Yet *Push* is neither a sentimental narrative nor a victim's narrative of her dismal condition. Precious is a loving witty girl aware of the abuse she has suffered at home and at school, and in search of a way out of her current life. Her welfare money is collected by her mother, who lies to the inspectors about raising Little Mongo, as she has the custody of Precious and her grandchild. Precious is doubtful of anyone's sincerity and efforts to help her: Mrs. Lichenstein's recommendation of Each One Teach One; the police at the hospital inquiring about the father of her baby and her denunciation of being raped by her father; Ms. Rain and the social services' counselor asking Precious to remember her past. Her automatic reaction is to remain silent and ignore questions asked. Precious believes that this is the smartest thing to do and the only way to avoid being characterized, typified, in files saying *what* she is (07).

I wonder what exactly do file say. I know it say I got a baby. Do it say who daddy? What kinda baby? Do it say how pages the same for me, how much I weigh, fights I done had? I don't know what file say. I do know every time they wants to fuck wif me or decide something in my life, here they come wif the mutherfucking file. Well, OK, they got file, know every motherfucking thing. So what's the big deal, let's get it on. (28)

In order to enter the G.E.D class a student should be able to read on a eighth-grade level. Although Precious was on ninth grade, as she informed the placement test instructor at Each One Teach One, she failed the test, which was no surprise to her.

For me this nuffin' new. There has always been something wrong wif the tesses. The tesses paint a picture of me wif no brain. The tesses paint a picture of me an' my muver my whole family, we more than dumb, we invisible. One time I see so e so e o t e as peoples a d so e of them was vampire peoples. But the real peoples did not o t t t as part t e o t s v e o e s t t go the couch; and one of 'em sitting on the couch; and one of 'em git up and take a picture. Got it? When picture develop (it's instamatic) only *one* person on the couch. The other peoples did not exist. They vampires. They eats, drinks, wear clothes, talks, fucks, and stuff but when you git right down to it they don't exist.

I big, I talk, I eats, I cooks, I laugh, I watch TV, do what my muver say. But I can see when the picture come back I don't e s t o o a o o t e s a a vampire sucking the system's blood. Ugly black grease to be wipe away, punish, kilt, changed, finded a job for.

t e p e o s o p e t e p t r e o e a and they are pritty people, girls with little titties like buttons and legs like long white straws. Do all white people look like pictures? No, 'cause the white people at school is fat and cruel like evil witches from fairy tales but they exist. Is it because they white? If Mrs. Lichenstein who have elephant stomach and garbage smell from her pussy exist, why don't I? Why can't I see myself, *feel* where I end and begin. [...] My fahver don't see me really. If he did he would know I was like a white girl, a *real* person, inside. He would not climb on me

from forever and stick his dick in me 'n get me inside on fire, bleed, I bleed then he slap me. Can't he see I am a girl for flowers and thin straw legs and a place in the picture. I been out the picture so long I am used to it. But that don't mean it do t rt What tess say? I don't give a fuck. I look bitch teacher woman in face, trying to see do she see *me* or the tess. But I don't care now what anybody see. I see something, somebody. I got baby. So what. I feel proud 'cept it's baby by my fahver and that make me not in picture again. (30-33)

The a g s t o e g d e s r e d s o o s a d s o a s e r v e s e s s a o o a d r e r r e t o e a t s a s a s s r e o s classmates know too well the consequences of what such files say about them. That is, the representation of themselves, due to a life of physical violence and all types of abuse, signify what form of help will be made available to them, as well as directions for their future. Here the story of t e s e g r s v e s o t o d e e s ( r e d e s ) o t e a r e t a s o o e r s a dismal view of their potentials and future. Memories and telling their history seem like submitting to views the girls in Ms. Rain's class refuse to a e p t a s t e r s o r e t t e r a s t r e e e r a e r t e s “ a r e t ”

I never told that part of my story before because I hate to see t e r s a r e e s g t p t “ t a t s ! d e r s t a d n o w ! I s e e - ” o ! o d o t s e e ! e o r e a s s a t e d o t t h e a i r l i k e a b u t t e r f l y , w i n g s t o r n o f f m e . B E F O R E a n y a l l t h a t I h a d s l i d m y f i n g e r s u p t h e s w e e t s t i n k o f a n o t h e r c h i l d a n d k n e l t d o w n t o l i c k h e r t h i g h s . M e n d i d n o t m a k e m e t h i s w a y . N o t h i n g h a p p e n e d t o m a k e m e t h i s w a y . I w a s b o r n t ! ” ( *Life Stories. Our Class Book* appendix)

The readers are confronted by Precious and her classmates' voices and by the teachers, nurses, and counselors' voices and diagnostics. Violence and subjugation are at the core of the stories informing the control and stigma of these girls' lives. However, they refuse to accept the fate of victims of violence or their fate so far. The often accepted view of the effects of a lifetime of domestic, mental, and sexual abuse is challenged by these girls' voices and verdicts on abuse and victimization. Although being victims and consciously aware of the effects of violence and suffering, in their narratives they are empowered as subjects and agents of their stories.

ter arrat ves a despe a re o s age a d t e  
 construction of subjectivity does not operate in a movement from feeling to knowing, from what was expressed emotionally and physically to verbal (written) expression. Instead, it is impossible to differentiate where feeling and knowing start, where affect terminates and language begins.

Precious must learn how to read and write in order to understand what was written about her, the what-she-is. Although she already wondered and *knew* what was said, Precious urges to read those files. She steals her counselor's file and, with the help of Jermaine, is able to read, on her own, the descriptions of her personality and of her capabilities and working skill.

I have just finished a session with Claireece Precious Jones. Precious, as she likes to be called (I guess so bitch it's my name) is an eighteen-year-old African American female. According to her teachers at Each One Teach One where she attends school she is a (I don't know what that word is!) p-h-e-n-o-m-e-n-a- s ess " e e t t a s a o t e r desire to get her G.E.D. and go to college.

" e t e a d r e s o r e s t o d r e r e o r t s o g woman to get a G.E.D. or into college would be considerable. Although she is in school now, it is not a job readiness program. Almost all instruction seems to revolve around language a-c-" ( e r a e s p e g o ) " a-kwi-si-tion a s t o !" (" at t at " as " o ow, to get. a g a g e a s t o to get so e a g a g e") " e t e a e r Ms Rain, places great emphasis on writing and reading books. Little work is done with computers or the variety of multiple choice pre-G.E.D. And G.E.D. Workbooks available at low cost to JPTA programs.

" r e o s s a p a e o g o g t o o r o e e p g with the new initiative on welfare reform I feel Precious would benefit from any of the various workfare programs in existence. Despite her obvious intellectual limitations she is q t e a p a e o o r g a s a o e a t t e d a t " (" o e attendant? I don't wanna be no mutherfucking home attendant! I wanna be -" " !" e r a e s a )

" e e t s e e s t o v e t e s o a s e r v e s t e a d t s proponents as her enemies, and yet while she mentions independent living, seems to envision social services, AFDC, as t a g a r e o e r o r e v e r " ( -120)



She comes to know herself through the discourse of social services and counseling, which, although intent on helping her, defines and stigmatizes her experience. This is another point in which readers might be frustrated by the narrative. Readers might share similar views and prospects that could empower and help her. One's familiar response or point of view might be similar to the social services' habitual way of addressing the help needed from pensioners. However, Precious shifts that knowledge each time she tells us about her past. Significantly, as she makes sense of the violence she has suffered and her pain, the reader is given more and more meanings, creating a complex and irreducible experience. As she says, "for' others too often serves as a disguise for speaking one's own point of view" (108). In other words, what Precious' narrative does is to suggest that readers (and social services) need to transform their frame of familiar response; that, although intent on helping and empowering Precious, this discourse is placing the singularity of her existence within a structure of othering.

In *Push*, violence, abuse, and subjugation bewilder characters and readers. Precious struggles with trust and is confused by her mother's complicity regarding the sexual abuse happening at her home; by the school's denial and dismissal of domestic abuse; by her teacher's denial of her illiteracy and his lies regarding her good grades and compliments to the principal; by the hospital and police deciding not to investigate the case of rape and the doctor's decision of ignoring her pregnancies and the beatings from her mother. A multidimensional system of violence and subjugation is revealed to readers at the same time that Precious herself is capable of narrating what has happened to her. As she writes about her past, she is able to react to such violence and subjugation. In this process of making meaning and having the power to describe herself, the complex interrelation of mind and body, reason and feeling are exposed. In the narrating of her history of rape and abuse we find the split of these opposites impossible. Precious is tricked by her own body when raped by her father. She is simultaneously terrorized and repelled by the act, capable of dissociating herself from the present moment, and along with the bodily pain she also feels sexual pleasure.

This time I know Mama know. Umm hmmm, she know. She bring him to me. I ain' crazy, that stinky hoe give me to him.

Probably thas' what he require to fuck her, some of me. Got to where he jus' come in my room any ole time, not jus' night. He climb on me. Shut up! he say. He slap my ass, You wide as the Mississippi, don't tell me a little bit of dick hurt you heifer. Git usta it, he laff, you *is* usta it. I fall back on bed, he fall right on top of me. Then I change stations, change *bodies*, I be dancing in videos! In movies! I be breaking, *fly*, jus' a dancing! Umm hmm heating up at the stage at the Apollo for Doug E. Fresh and Al B. Shure. They love me! Say I'm one of the best dancers ain' no doubt of or about that!

“ go a arr o ” e e s a g r r p gger s t  
 up! He mess up dream talkin' 'n gruntin'. First he mess up my life fucking me, then he mess up the fucking talkin'. I wanna scream. Oh shut up! Nigger, how you gonna marry me and you is my daddy! I'm your daughter, fucking me illegal. But I keep my mouf shut so's the fucking don't turn into beating. I start to feel good; stop being a video dancer and start coming. I try to go back to video but coming now, rocking under Carl now, my twat jumping juicy, it feel good. I feel ashamed. “See, see,” e s a p t g e o o s do orses o  
 the he squeeze my nipple, bite down on it. I come some  
 ore “See, you LIKE it! You jus' like your mama you die  
 or t!” e p s d o t t e t e s t pour out my  
 hole wet up the sheets. (24-25)

I try to forget I got baby in me. I hate borning the first one. No fun. Hurt. Now again. I think my daddy. He stink, the white shit drip off his dick. Lick it lick it. I HATE that. But then I feel the hot sauce hot cha cha feeling when he be fucking me. I get so confuse. I HATE him. But my pussy be popp g e s a t at “ g a a o r p s s s popp g!”  
 HATE myself when I feel good. (57-58)

I tell counselor I can't talk about Daddy. Daddy sick me, *disgust* me, but still he sex me up. I nawshus in my stomach but hot tight in my twat and I think I want it back, the smell of the bedroom, the hurt he slap my face till it sting and my ears sing separate songs from each other, call me names, pump my pussy in out in out in out awww I come. He bite me *hard*. A hump! He slam his hips into me HARD. I scream pain he come. He slap my thighs like cowboys do horses on TV. Shiver. Orgasm in me, his body shaking, grab me, call me Fat Mama, Big Hole! You LOVE it! Say you love it! I wanna say I DON'T. I wanna say I'm a chile. But my pussy

popping like grease in frying pan. He slam in me again. His dick soft. He start sucking my tittie.

I wait for him get off me. Lay there stare at wall till wall is a movie, *Wizard of Oz*, I can make that one play anytime. Michael Jackson, scarecrow. Then my body take me over again, like shocks after earthquake, shiver me, I come again. My body not mine, I hate it coming.

Afterward I go bafrum. I smear shit on my face. Feel good. Don't know why but it do. I never tell nobody about that before. But I would do that. (111-112)

The extracts above illustrate the recurrence and intensity of re o s tra a e episodes o se a v o e e are arrated t a combination of fantasy and reality Precious' dissociation and the reality of the rape and/or beating. Bodily sensations confuse her and a startled reader is made to refrain from drawing the obvious conclusion: that rape is horrific, painful, and traumatic. We, readers, must suspend our judgments and conclusions momentarily, perhaps secretly hoping her confusion will end, or perhaps hoping other episodes in the narrative will focus solely on the violence and horror of rape. Yes, rape here is horrific, painful, and traumatic, but not only that - there is an element of sexual pleasure. Precious names it as orgasm, which poses new questions and brings uncertainty to a theme thought to be very definite (on its negativity).

Additionally, it is through rape and incest the only sexual experiences Precious has had that she forges her views on love, sex, and pleasure. When she wonders about having a romantic relationship she calls her physical sensations as something she would like to feel again with a lover. re o s v e s o ove se a t a d p e a s re challenge notions of normalcy when rape and incest do not seem to have a fixed signified (Levinson 2001). Her experience of sex (one of violence, abuse, and dissociation) is a source of knowledge complicated by sensations and affect. Here rape and incest also come to signify what is unacceptable in the American discourse of morality and normalcy (sanity). The confusion generated by the victim's sexual pleasure in the act of rape is a feature of Precious' narrative. On the one hand, she is influenced by acceptable and normative standards of heterosexuality and romantic views of sex coming from the music videos and TV shows she watches. On the other hand, her own experience of sexual abuse exceeds conventional narratives of not only rape but also of love and hate, of

pleasure and desire.

The re-signification of rape, sexuality, and love here do not stem strictly from Precious' agency, but also from forces that *push* Precious about without fixing the meanings being created. There are no resolution nor the reinstating of binaries. At the same time we follow Precious' attempts at forging her own destiny, we also follow the re-signification of meanings. We follow her relentless struggle against being defined by what is written on files as she writes about her experience — one that calls for new words, new meanings, once the ones available to Precious and to readers cannot *represent* what has happened to her. There is the frustration of an explanatory narrative. Readers are not offered an end in which Precious' mother is punished or somehow forgiven. Neither a resolution regarding her father, whom we learn died of aids after Abdul was born.

By reading Precious' journal and poems we are forced to confront individual feelings (Precious' and ours) and affective investments involved in our constructions of the world. The literary text becomes a site wherein readers are able to put themselves imaginatively in the character's place (Brooks 2009) and, hopefully, allowing for a reflection that, as Morrison intended, would *move* readers.

## 7. *The Dew Breaker*

*The Dew Breaker* is Edwidge Danticat's imaginative world of a former government sanctioned torturer and his victims during Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti.<sup>23</sup> The title refers to the protagonist who was a *choukèt lawoze* translated from Creole by Danticat as *dew breaker* (Danticat 2010: 11). In Haitian Creole it refers to the men that would “rea to o r o se ost t as at g t t o t e t e d a so come before dawn, as the dew was settling on the leaves, and they'd take o a a ” (*The Dew Breaker* 131). It was the president himself who a ed s pr vate t a “a ter t e t g re o t e o to Macoute, a bogeyman who abducted naughty children at night and put t e s apsa ” (*The Dew Breaker* 216). In this story, it refers to a Tonton Macoute in charge of arresting, torturing, and killing civilians who were against the dictator.

The narrative alternates between its present time set in modern-day Brooklyn, New York, a short trip to Florida, and in Haiti in the 1960s. The novel is structured in nine nonlinear chapters; as Danticat as re ar ed o er te to t s oo s “ e t e r a o v e o r a s t o r o e t o t s o e t g e t e e ” ( a t a t ) e a chapter, readers are presented the story of a character through an ordinary episode in his/her life, which is interrupted as the next chapter begins. This fragmented structure is pieced together by seemingly small details that, when connected by the reader, unite the title protagonist and his actions to all the other characters and their stories.

e rst apter “ e oo o t e ead” s arrated a We are introduced to the title protagonist, his wife, Anne, and his daughter, Ka the Bienaimé family. Both father and mother had immigrated from Haiti but had always refused to or offered incomplete information to answer Ka's questions about their past lives and the family they had left. In the present time of the narrative, father and daughter are on a trip to Florida, where Ka is delivering one of her sculptures to a client. It is a sculpture of her father as “s g e s e t

---

<sup>23</sup> The Duvalier dictatorship began in 1957 and lasted 30 years. The first 15 years were under t e pres de o ra o s “ a p a o ” v a e r t e r s d e a t s s o e a a d e v a e r a s o o a s “ o ” e a e p r e s d e t d e r t e r r e g e s t e private militia known as Tonton Macoutes were responsible for abductions, tortures, and killings of thousands of civilians. Even after Jean Claude Duvalier was ousted in 1986 (and forced into exile), Tonton Macoutes threatened the population and attempts at general elections, leading a military regime until 1990. In December that year, Jean Bertrand Aristide became Haiti's first democratically elected leader.

“t s ar” ( ) which does not please him for he believes to be unworthy of it. One morning, he disappears with the sculpture and after revealing to Ka why he threw it in a lake, he tells her the real reason he left Haiti:

“ a do t deserve a stat e” e sa s aga t s t e  
 ore so “ ot a o e o e at east o see a o r  
 at er as t e ter e as ot t e pre ave o  
 choice t to as “ at are o ta ga o t ”

I immediately regret the question. Is he going to explain why he and mother have no close friends, why they've never had anyone over to the house, why they never speak of any relatives in Haiti or anywhere else, or have never returned there or, even after I learned Creole from them, have never taught me anything else about the country beyond what I could find out on my own, on the television, in newspapers, in books? Is he about to tell me why Manman is so pious? Wh s e goes to da ass ( -21)

Ka's father tells her he was never in prison but working in the prison, and that his face was cut by a prisoner, whom he killed as he had killed many other people. Confused and shocked at his revelations, she asks:

“ d t ose g t ares o ere a a s av g at ere  
 t e ”

“ at ” e sa s “ o r at er d d to t ers ”

Another image of my mother now fills my head, of her as a young woman, a woman my age, taking my father in her arms. At what point did she decide that she loved him? When did she know that she was supposed to have despised him?

“ oes a a o ” as

“ es” e sa s “ e pa ed a ter o ere or ” “ a  
 no matter what, I'm still your father, still you mother's  
 husband. I would never do t ese t gs o ” ( -24)

The belief that what is in the past is over and that the present is different - “ o d ever do t ese t gs o ” - is the novel's greatest moral dilemma posed to the reader. Could the torturer ever be forgiven and redeemed from his past actions? Is it possible to reinvent oneself far away? How does one place violent acts and murders in the past and move on, or better, can one place them in the past and move on? Ka

listens to her father's narrative of his life and she ponders upon her mother's role in this:

“ a a o do o ove ” “ do t o  
 a ” “ o a d e e save e eet t  
 made him stop hurt the people. This is how I see it. He a seed  
 thrown in rock. You, me, we make him take root ” ( -25)

Learning about her father's secret somehow escapes Ka's understanding; and her mother's narrative of their miraculous encounter is no better explanation. She is forced to rewrite her narrative of her parents' immigration to the United States from a vision of how novelty could be threatening to one that offered unimaginable comfort to both of them.

Ka's family reappears in the narrative twice again: in the fourth and the last chapters. In the first chapter “ e oo o ra es” the three of them are attending Christmas Eve Mass - “t e o t e s e a d e r s a d a d a g t e r e v e r a t t e d e d r t o g e t e r” (*The Dew Breaker* 73). It is an episode from the past, before Ka learned of her father's past. During mass Anne is thinking about how they have managed to keep their secret and forge whole other identities when they decided to come to New York.

soo a t e r e r s a d a d o p e e d s a r e r s o p e d  
 discovered that since he'd lost eighty pounds, changed his  
 name, and given as his place of birth a village deep in the  
 mountains of Léogâne, no one asked about him anymore,  
 thinking he was just a peasant who'd made good in New  
 York. He ad t e e a a o s “de r e a e r” or t o r t r e r  
 anyway, just one of hundreds who had come done their jobs  
 so well that their victims were never able to speak of them  
 again. (76-77)

We hear of Anne's guilt for her role as accomplice to her  
 s a d “t a s a a s e t s e r e a p e d e t e e  
 forgiveness and regret, but when the anger dissipated she considered it a  
 small miracle, the same way she thought of her emergence from her  
 o a s o a e p e p t s e r e s a a d o r e r r e t o ” ( ) e e a r  
 that Anne's narrative of miracle was her compromising to her partner,  
 then husband and father of her child. It was her effort to find and

maintain hope and be in charge of her life, as opposed to the lack of freedom and the constant threat of violence and death back in Haiti.

Danticat has pointed out the specific dilemma posed to Haitians living under the Duvalier dictatorship: to be either exiled or killed (Danticat 2010: 09). In this context, death also meant freedom for it “preve ted o e ro e g a s ed” ( ) e o e et ee eav g one's family and hometown in self-exile not always seemed better than to stay and die. As Danticat remarks, these were options forced upon people o ere “so eat er-beaten, terror-stricken, and maimed that t e ere st ed” ( ) t s o te t es str gg e to orge a e and existence on her own terms could be thought of as an act of survival.

In the other chapters we learn about people and lives related to Ka's father's past job in Haiti and to his life in Brooklyn as an ordinary resident, barbershop owner married to a hair dresser (who also owns her own beauty shop), landlord, husband, and father. He is not named in the ove “ e oo o t e ead” e s des r ed a “ t -five, five feet eight inches, one hundred and eighty pounds, with a widow's peak, thinning salt-and-pepper hair and velvet-brown eyes [with a] ropelike scar that runs from [his] right cheek down to the corner of his o t ” ( -05). This physical description, especially the scar and the “ do s pea ” ret r ater t e ot er apters s v t s descriptions of their torturer or killer of their parents. Ka's physical descriptions of her father and of her sculpture work as metaphors to what he was/is. She focuses on his physical appearance, the marks of his past (the scar she believes he got in prison), because she never got complete answers and detailed information about her parents' past in Haiti. She has constructed a narrative in an attempt to tell his (and her) story; yet, never in words.

The narrative moves on through apparently unrelated stories.

apter “ eve ” is a third person narration about a man whose wife is arriving from Port-au-Prince after seven years apart. He is welcoming his wife in the basement apartment he rents with two flatmates, Michael a d a roo apter “ ater d” t e arrator tells the story of Nadine Osnac, a thirty-year-old estranged nurse whose parents still live in Haiti. She is grieving an aborted child from Eric, an ex-boyfriend, whose phone number she discovers is unlisted. Chapter “ g t a ers” s a o t a s ret rn back to Haiti to visit his aunt st a st e o ra sed s e “ e ad ost s pare ts to t e



d tators p" ( ) a s a to te s a t e as o d t e o to  
 a o t e o e d s p a r e t s t e " a r g e a t a a e e a s o e r  
 ball a d a d o s p e a d p p g t o t e d d e o s o r e e a d " ( )  
 Dany rents a room in the basement of the former macoute, now a barber,  
 and living there has caused him great distress. He has haircuts at his  
 barbershop regularly so he can watch his moves. Dany expects the  
 barber to show any sign of his past - " s a r g e a d s t o t r e e " ( )  
 t e s t e o e t a t t r e e s a d s e a t s a g r a d o s e d o e " e  
 would never know why why one single person had been given the  
 power to destroy his entire e" ( )

apter " e r d a e a s t r e s s " s t e s t o r o e a s t e  
 a Haitian-American journalism intern at the magazine *Haitian American  
 Weekly*. She has been assigned to interview Beatrice Saint Fort, a well-  
 known bridal seamstress in the Haitian community in New York, who is  
 about to retire. Beatrice tells Aline she has found the prison guard the  
*choukèt lawoze* - who tortured her years ago in Haiti, living and working  
 in her neighborhood.

" e a s e d e t o g o d a g t o e g t " e a t r i c e  
 said, putting her feet back in her sandals.  
 I had a boyfriend, so I said no. That's why he arrested me. He  
 tied me to some type of rack in the prison and whipped the  
 bottom of my feet until they bled. Then he made me walk  
 home, barefoot. On tar roads. In the hot sun. At high noon.  
 This man, wherever I rent or buy a house in this city, I find  
 him, living on my street. (132)

Aline is intrigued by Beatrice story but uncertain whether her  
 trauma has affected her sanity, whether the prison guard is indeed  
 following Beatrice as she believes he is.

apter " o e a s " a t e r a t e s e p s o d e s e t e e e r a r  
 7, 1986 in Haiti and February 7, 2004 in New York. It is narrated by  
 Michael, who is recording into a cassette stories of his childhood in  
 Port-au-Prince to his unborn son, while his nine-month pregnant wife  
 sleeps in bed. Young Michael talks about his mother's over-protection of  
 him among the confusion and irruption of violence in the streets due to  
 Jean-Claude Duvalier and his wife's exile. As Michael describes:

[...] the looting of homes and businesses of former  
 government allies, the lynching, burning, and stoning of the

macoutes, the thousand of bodies that were suddenly being discovered in secret rooms at the city morgues and in mass graves on the outskirts of the capital (162)

His account blends his 12-year-old innocence and fear, his being torn between his mother's over-protection and the adventures his best friend, 18-year-old Romain, offers him. Through Michael's coming of age narrative we learn about familial relations and the weak bonds that sustain them under a violent, dangerous, and corrupt environment. Michael belongs to what he calls

a generation of mostly fatherless boys, though some of our fathers were still living, even if somewhere else in the provinces, in another country, or across the alley not acknowledging us. A great many of our fathers had also died in the dictatorship's prisons, and others had abandoned us altogether to serve the regime. (141)

After “the era of the” storyteller at an immigrant women who met in a high school diploma class in New York. During the after class meals Rézia, Mariselle, and Freda share in Rézia's restaurant, Ambiance Créole, they tell each other about their past and the events that shaped their lives. Freda tells us “the details of my life would inspire them to do the same and slowly we'd parcel out our sorrows as if they were a cake” (172). Freda is the narrator. She was a professional funeral singer before being expelled from Haiti and, in New York, at twenty-two, became a student in a high school validation class.

One day he appeared “one day he appeared at the market to take [his fish stall at the market] and another one too” (172). The next day he took his boat out to sea and disappeared forever. Years later her mother asked her to leave the country after she refused to sing at the national palace. Mariselle's husband was murdered by a man “after the death of her father” (172). Freda tells her story:

One night when she was sleeping, a uniformed man walked in. She dug herself into the bed, but it did not help, so she

passed out.

“ a a a s a e se a t e a r a d ” a says, fanning the smoke from the pots away from her face. “ e o e p t e o r g p a t e s e r e g o e aunt and I never spoke about it. But on her deathbed she asked for my forgiveness. She said this man had threatened to p t e r p r s o s e d d t e t a v e e t a t g t ” (173)

Although these stories are fragmented and constantly interrupted, as the narrative develops, names and places begin to somehow connect one another and all of them to the title protagonist's life. He is the landlord of the husband, Michael, and Dany in chapter “ e v e ” e s a d s e e s t o e a d e s e -boyfriend, Eric. Both e o r t o o s t e g t o e a s a a t o r a t “ e d g a r v e r s o e g e ” ( ) a d e r e t r s r s p o e a a d d s o v e r s s “ e r a d e e a g e d t o o e t a t a s t e d ” ( ) r o r t o s e s a r r v a t e s a d s p o e a s g o e “ t e p o e e r he'd had for the last five years, ever since he'd had a telephone. (He d d t e e d o t e r o e a g o ) ” ( ) e p r s o g a r d Beatrice has recognized is currently working as a barber. Nadine's laryngectomies patient Ms. Hinds, a twenty-five-year-old teacher who will undergo speech therapy, seems to be Rézia, Mariselle, and Freda's tea e r e o s e “ v o e s s e s t s a t e v e r s g o r a g ” (167).

t e a a p t e r “ e e r e a e r ” t e a r r a t o r g o e s a to Port-au-Prince circa 1967 to tell the story of how Anne and her husband met. He has been assigned the job of killing the Baptist pastor who had been accused of broadcasting messages against Duvalier on his Sunday morning show on Radio Lumière. His sermons were perceived as politically liberating and empowering, totally contrary to

the sanctioned national prayer, written by the president se “ r a t e r o a r t t e a t o a l p a l a c e , h a l l o w e d b e t h y n a m e . T h y w i l l b e d o n e , i n t h e c a p i t a l , a s i t i s i n t h e p r o v i n c e s . G i v e u s t h i s d a y o u r n e w H a i t i a n d f o r g i v e u s o u r a n t i - p a t r i o t i c t h o u g h t s , b u t d o n o t f o r g i v e t h o s e a n t i - p a t r i o t s w h o s p i t o n o u r c o u n t r y a n d t r e s p a s s a g a i n s t i t . L e t t h e m s u c c u m b t o t h e w e i g h t o f t h e i r o w n v e n o m . A n d d e l i v e r t h e m

Readers learn about the dew breaker's history, what happened to his peasant family when army officers decided to take their land, how he came to join, at nineteen “t e e s t e o teers or at o a e r t ” (t at ater o d e o as o to a o tes) ( ) deta s about how he tortured and executed people, and his plans of retiring from this job and leaving the country for good. After all these years he knew he was suffering from what one of his victims had identified as “t e greatest a ard o t e o ” “ dev e s v r ta e ge dar e o rrea t as e o g ea ot er o ” ( )

His Volunteers membership card (he did not like to wear their uniform) meant power and created in him a tyrannical behavior. He made sure he was respected and feared in every place he went. His favorite line - “ vo teered to prote t at o a se r t ort ate or fortunately as you like, this includes yo r o ” ( ) - opened every door to him and gave him the right to act as he wished.

resta ra ts ed a e or o sa o to ood doctor, his landlord, gave him two rooms on the lower floor of a two-story house for free. Bourgeois married women slept with him on the cash-filled mattress on his bedroom floor. Virgins of all castes came and went as well. And the people who had looked down on him and his family in the past, well, now they came all the way from Léogâne to ask him for favors. (196)

e as a ed “ ergea t” “ o o e” “ e era” a d so e o d re er to as “ tte res de t” ( ) e as o a o g t e ot er vo teers or av g “t e ost p s a a d ps o og a ta g tr a s” ( ) d r g s s to s t pr so ers. One of his victims when interviewed for a documentary film thirty years later recalled one of his common methods:

He used to call me by my name. He'd lean close to my ears to tell me, 'Valia, I truly hate to unwoman you. Valia, tell me where your husband is and I won't cut out your...' I can't even

<sup>24</sup> Danticat recalls that once a journalist asked François Duvalier what he represented for Haitians and his answer as “t at e aster at era d t e rg ar aster ot er” ( a t at )

say it the way he said it. I refuse to say it the way he did. He'd wound you, then try to soothe you with words, then he'd wound you again. He thought he was God. (198-199)

The arrested Baptist pastor was Anne's stepbrother. She desperately looked for him at the prison, Casernes, after learning about his arrest from the shoeshine man, Léon. At Casernes, the pastor was put in a prison cell awaiting for his interrogation when an order from the national palace is given to release the preacher. He was supposed to have been killed and not arrested, specially in the circumstances the arrest was done, in front of the pastor's whole congregation. Killing the preacher now would make him a martyr. As Rosalie, the protagonist's superior at the prison, says: "I wanted to see you too too often, I would have liked to see you more often, I would have liked to see you more often, I would have liked to see you more often" ( ) to see the preacher in his private room and tell him to quit his radio show and sermons, and then let him go home.

What follows is a vivid narrative of the torturer's power and the preacher's trembling fear and agony as he attempts to anticipate his pain and his death. Hopelessly aware of his fate in this room and prison, the preacher accidentally touches a piece of wood broken from the chair. He says to the torturer: "I tried to speed up my death, I tried to speed up my death, I tried to speed up my death" ( ) The preacher slides the piece of wood down cutting the macoute's face down to his jawline who, shocked by the attack, fires his gun at the preacher's chest. The preacher had left a mark on his killer,

a brand that he would carry for the rest of his life. Every time he looked in the mirror, he would have to confront this mark and remember him. Whenever people asked what happened to his face, he would have to tell a lie, a lie that would further remind him of the truth. (227-228)

He was wounded and tormented by the attack and the consequences of his disobedience, which suddenly became his final job. As he was leaving the barracks, he bumps into Anne in the sidewalk, and she says: "I would have liked to see you more often, I would have liked to see you more often, I would have liked to see you more often" ( ) he'd harmed or nearly killed, someone who's been in the torture chamber adjacent to his office, for he wanted her sympathy, compassion from her.

He wanted her to have pity on him, take him to her house and bandage  
 ” ( ) e ot eeded help and sympathy from the other. He  
 advised her not to go further and she offered to help with his wound.

“ at d d t e do to *you* ” s e as ed

This was the most forgiving question he'd ever been asked. It  
 suddenly opened a door, produced a small path, which he  
 could follow.

“ ree ” e sa d “ a es aped ” ( )

The next day they both flew to New York determined to leave  
 the past behind and start a new life. Their unspoken agreement was  
 silence and acceptance of whatever the other was willing to share. We  
 learn in the first chapter that he told Anne about his past as a macoute  
 after Ka was born. Although never certain, Anne has always suspected  
 he was the one who had killed her brother.

He endorsed the public story, the one that the preacher had  
 killed himself. And she accepted that he had only arrested  
 him and turned him over to someone else. Neither believing  
 the other nor themselves. But never delving too far back in  
 time, beyond the night they met. She never saw any of the  
 articles that were eventually written about her brother's death.  
 She was too busy concentrating on and revising who she was  
 now, or who she wanted to become. (241)

Inasmuch as the final chapter pieces together the previous ones,  
 connecting the characters' lives to Ka's father, it does not offer a  
 resolution. It shows Anne's struggle with herself and with her daughter's  
 est o “ a a o do o ove ” e as org ve a d  
 married the man who killed her brother, at the same time, she lives with  
 constant regret and resentment s e s a g t a “pe d et ee  
 regret a d org ve ess” ( ) s t e arrator po ts o t “ e er  
 husband, she would never know how to tell a story like this, how to  
 de per a t e deta s a d a e se se o t e ” ( ). The  
 incomprehensibility of her decisions were articulated into the  
 compromises she made.

Also, this final chapter returns to the reader the issue of  
 redemption in the contrast between the dew breaker's past and present  
 a t o s (“ o d ever do t ese t gs aga ”) e as o str ted a  
 narrative of the life she began to have the night they met. It is a narrative

o ra e o sav g t at a e ev g t at “ato e e t reparat o  
 as poss e a d ava a e or ever o e” ( ) e a ted to e o e  
 that woman as much as he wanted to leave his job and past behind,  
 receive sympathy and compassion from strangers, be forgotten by  
 everyone who ever met him.

As Anne has not been able to fully reconcile with her husband's history and crimes, the reader is also left to struggle with sympathy, compassion, the possibility of forgiveness and reparation. The dew breaker has never been forgotten by whoever was forced to know him. But life moved on; and each chapter tells a story of the afterlife of the dew breaker's histor e “pe d et ee regret a d org ve ess” (242) is a symbol for the instability of life in the novel. Relationships, families, jobs, houses, everything and everyone is constantly on the verge of disappearance. And in this impossibility and constant fright that Anne and her husband are able to forge a self and a life of their own, be it a secret one. By creating forgiveness through the compromises Anne makes, Danticat opens up a new realm of possibilities for transformation and reinvention, and for creativity and love. Recalling Iser's approach to the act of reading as an event in which the indeterminacy of imagination and creativity render it an encounter loaded with affect, we could say that the encounter with *The Dew Breaker* is one loaded with the violence of sensation. The reader's uncertainty and sensation of doubt are aroused when Danticat directs our attention towards looking at and knowing of potential afterlives for violence, of potential new ways of being in the world.

I want to use Abel's focus on the *how* of the aesthetic quality of a literary text in my reading of *The Dew Breaker* in order to propose that such reading experience works like a violent event: an encounter loaded with the violence of sensation. I argue that Danticat creates a site in her narrative for readers to experience affective reactions to the stories they are told. Danticat leaves to the reader the option of naming or not his/her reactions, of imagining resolutions to those stories, and of judging Ka's father and mother. Moreover, Danticat creates a narrative where one could rethink and reconstitute oneself in a novel way and through one's ability to love and to create; and while narrating that outcome of forgiveness, she requires readers to suspend their judgment.

### **7.1 Deferring Judgment in *The Dew Breaker***

It has been mentioned above that Danticat's narrative strategy

offers no resolution to the dilemma of how to make sense of the torturer's history. *The Dew Breaker* is constituted by narratives that emerged from the title protagonist's work in Haiti. The narrators show us, readers, glimpses of Ka's family's history and the afterlife of her father's victims. Ka's question to her mother - “ o a o ove ”

and Anne's inability to articulate it with words, to find words to explain her decision of continuing her life next to such person, haunt the o e arrat ve orever a g t et ee “org ve ess a d regret” s somehow what made possible for Anne and her husband to fashion a life together. Anne suspended judgment the night she met the killer of her brother and refrained from asking for future explanations. For Anne, her attitude cannot be explained in a coherent manner, it does not mean this or that, right or wrong. She called it a miracle and miracles are a matter of faith and belief. A miracle simply is; it can be told over and over again as a story but this telling will never offer an explanation (in the way Ka wanted to know). For Anne, their miraculous encounter outside Casernes, and the uniqueness of the life they transformed and created for themselves in Brooklyn cannot be explained to Ka nor to anyone.

Abel's pedagogical exercise aimed at learning how to deploy and respond to the representations (images) of 9/11 for what they are without making them illustrative of a point of view. Anne's inability to answer her daughter's question or to account for her life choices and decisions, for that matter, work similarly to Abel's masocriticism. Anne's *miracle* could be seen as what Abel would call an *irreducible event*. It should be approached in its own terms by Ka (and by readers). No verbal language, therefore, no representation, can account for it.

In light of Abel's masocriticism, Danticat's narrative strategy asks the reader to follow the stories and the story of Ka's parents as irreducible events connected to each other. This apparent contradiction is the force behind *The Dew Breaker*. In the same manner, Precious' narrative of sexual abuse requires that readers undergo reading refraining from positing meanings that do not emerge from the singularity of her experience. Both novels teach the reader how to respond to them in a new, different way, without the reader's deployment of his/her point of view or familiar mode of response. In the process of reading, the reader is invited to *see again*, which in a significant way is an opportunity to see another, to see the other(s). Both Danticat and Sapphire do not offer resolutions, and that poses the question of



experiencing the violence of sensation, that is, the violation of the self brought by uncertainty.

Furthermore, although time has passed and the victims' lives have transformed, their past destructively lingers. The violence of the past has interrupted life as they knew it, and it lives as affect in their every day and in the lives of the ones around them; the connectedness brought by violence is a symptom of how the past is forever lingering in the present and future. The traumatic events of the past do not cease to affect their present unless one finds a way to compromise and live in an eternal struggle with "original regret" as we do.

In this absence of closure Danticat places existence and the basis for hope. In this way, I want to think of the violent events narrated in *The Dew Breaker* in terms of trauma and how the act of compromising creates a new, and perhaps the only, way of being in the world.

*Trauma* or *traumatic experience* are understood here in their most general sense to be "a violent or catastrophic event in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 2009: 10). A violent event (the traumatic experience) takes hold of an individual too unexpectedly to be assimilated, and it is this *not knowing* (what happened originally) that returns in unwitting and repetitive phenomena such as nightmares, hallucinations, and repetitive unconscious actions from the victim.<sup>25</sup> In this common medical and psychoanalytical (specially in Freud's work) definition, a *wound* is inflicted upon the mind of the victim and, unlike bodily wounds, it cannot be easily healed. These uncontrollable repetitions in a way haunting the individual are the wounded psyche's effort to communicate the truth or reality of the original violent event via a language entangled by what is known and what is not known (Caruth 2009: 10-11; Freud 1961: 23-27). For Cathy Caruth, because the wound of the mind works in the form of a "repetition compulsion" (Freud 1961: 23-27) that "repeats the original event in a way that brings the victim back to that situation and the original sensation of fright. Such repetition can take the form of a "dream, story, or even a ritual" (24).

---

<sup>25</sup> Freud (1961) names such experiences of sudden violence involving risk to the individual's life *traumatic neurosis*. Repetitive phenomena are characteristic of traumatic neurosis and consist of recreating the scene of the violent event or accident in a way that brings the victim back to that situation and the original sensation of fright. Such repetition can take the form of a "dream, story, or even a ritual" (24).

derstanding ( )” she repeated and created a double trauma. Caruth highlights, does not only tell the victim of the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the incomprehensibility (06).

In light of Caruth's explanation of trauma, we could say that the repetition of what seems like haunting phenomena convey a double violence. It simultaneously reveals the known violence of the original event and conveys what is yet unknown, that is, what has not been named (affect).

In *The Dew Breaker*, the violence of their past in Haiti operates in a similar manner to the structure of trauma described above. The shutting down of narrativization (Garland), either as an impossibility or a strategy for forgetting, is illustrated in the characters' silence, secrecy, and imagining. The violence of the original event returns in nightmares, fantasies, and the actual presence of the macoute in their neighborhood. Or, in respect to Anne, it returns in the day-by-day compromise she makes in order to sustain her existence.

In the character of the torturer's wife Danticat rearticulates the notion of trauma. Violence disrupted her life like it did to the other characters. However, different from them, Anne made the conscious choice of embracing the original violent event and its effects. Anne recreated herself and forged a life from her trauma. In Danticat's subversion of the afterlife of a traumatic experience, the victim (Anne) survives the violent event and, different from other survivors, she gives meaning to her haunting returns and behavioral repetitions. Living in a constant struggle to overcome “original and regret” she does not find words to tell her story, yet she finds a way to make sense of her choices and history: she names them miracles. By giving meaning to a violent event, Anne compromises.

If we return to Abel's argument that uncertainty may generate a state of violence (the violence of sensation) which carries the potential for new ways of seeing the other, we could say that Anne deferred judgment when she first encountered the torturer outside the prison. In a way, the overwhelming violent state in which that encounter took place reconfigured Anne's and the torturer's familiar reactions. For once, he wanted another person's sympathy and compassion, and Anne refrained from what seemed the obvious conclusion in that situation: that he worked in that prison, that he was a macoute, and that he knew what was happening to her brother. In that violent event new possibilities emerged. Nevertheless, that momentary pause was unsustainable for too

long. As soon as she chose her future to leave Haiti with that man Anne relies upon a familiar narrative (of religious miracles) in order to refrain from representing a macoute. And that representation comes at an enormous price. On the one side, the guilt, the secrecy, the resentment; on the other side, the companionship and the love required to sustain that narrative. In this incomprehensibility Anne forges an existence and love.

There is no healing nor reconciliation in *The Dew Breaker*. The past, like trauma, is indelible. It exists as a scar visible to everyone, a mark right onto one's face, a constitutive part of an individual, his/her family, community, and country. However, there is hope and the unexpected is seized as a choice of moving on; partnerships are taken as source of hope, of change. The character of Anne, in contrast to the other characters, illustrates that purported impossibilities or incomprehensibilities may be transformed. The deferral of truth occurs in two levels in the novel.

On the one level, the suspension of meaning lies in the fact that meaning, that is narrativization (therefore, healing) is not found. As in trauma, the survivor is haunted by the unwanted return of reality. As Aline remarks after meeting Beatrice:

[she] had never imagined that people like Beatrice existed, men and women whose tremendous agonies filled every blank space in their lives. Maybe there were hundreds, even thousands, of people like this, men and women chasing fragments of themselves long lost to others. (137-138)

On the other level, meaning is willfully given to reality, the truth is rewritten so life can continue, new feelings can emerge (love and desire), and new lives can be created (Ka). In *The Dew Breaker*, it is the impossibility of finding meaning for a traumatic event that constitutes a new way of thinking and feeling (Deleuze 1991: 16). In the character of Anne, living is not interrupted but transformed in a new way of being: one that is flawed and painful but also hopeful and creative.

In this way, we could think of Danticat's multivocal narrative as examples of the potential of day-by-day resolutions, one-on-one responses in the context of extreme violence and interplay of traumatic experiences. Danticat creates a fictional world where violent practices and the infliction of pain reach unreasonably destructive and denigrating levels. In such world, Danticat challenges the reader's familiar responses

when she requires a suspension of ethical judgment in order to propose Anne's narrative of hope and creativity as basis for existence; she suggests that encounters and partnerships hold the potential of transformation. Although readers may not support Danticat's proposed point of view, her narrative strategy creates a site for affective encounters with a text. In *The Dew Breaker*, forgiveness is represented based on a focus towards the future. Anne's act of forgiveness places the past in history and memory and leaves the present and the future as sites for action and creation, where transformation is still possible.

## FINAL REMARKS

As I reached the end of my doctoral study, I went back to *Without Sanctuary* for another look at the photographs. They are still horrific images. However, I must acknowledge that if I keep looking at them, they might become familiar images. Surely repetition is a way of making violence familiar to us. It is certainly a strategy used by the media in the construction and maintenance of discourses of othering as identified by Chouliaraki, Sontag, and Butler, among other authors. And by making the watching of violence and suffering familiar to us, these authors have argued, the media format (of representing violence and suffering) has desensitized audiences.

My initial interrogation was how to maintain the violence *in* and *of* those lynching photographs in order to avoid being accustomed to what was represented there. As I have already asked: how do we keep the shock, the violation of our mind, senses, and body, that watching violence and pain are capable of triggering? Hopefully this study has shed some light towards the issue of desensitization in the representation of violence and suffering. It has been argued that mass media discourse renders unpacked representations of violence and suffering, whereas the aesthetic register disrupts the representation of violence by creating a space for imagining, and potentially, for reflection. Here affect (sensation) plays a vital role in the experience of watching and/or reading about violence and suffering. To put it succinctly: if we remove the violence of sensation from the representation of violence that representation will stop being violent.

Marco Abel via the work of Gilles Deleuze has defined the *violence of sensation* as the *violation of the self* that might occur when we are confronted by an event that escapes our understanding. Unable to offer a quick reaction and/or an explanation we are forced into imagining, reflecting, and creating. A momentary pause for the construction of meaning is, for Abel, one way of seeing again, of seeing things and people anew, and thus, of imagining and creating new ways of being in the world.

Abel identified the aesthetic quality of works of art (literature and cinema) as capable of creating that momentary pause or suspension of judgment, as he calls it. A literary text and/or a film representing violence are approached by his methodology as a violent event loaded with the potential to cause the violence of sensation. That is to say, the

experience of reading a violent literary narrative may violate our sense of self once the text forces us to defer meaning. Writers represent violence in various manners and their use of writing strategies will create or not that momentary suspension of meaning. In addition, as Wolfgang Iser posit in *The Act of Reading*, the gaps in the narrative and the text's own limitations in representing, in this case, violence and suffering, create indeterminacy. The reader's task is summoned: in the process of reading, the reader will experience the uncertainty, gaps and structural limitations of the text in order to forge meanings. In violent narratives, this space of indeterminacy may also be the space where readers experience the violence of sensation.

In the works analyzed in this study the violence of sensation is experienced by the reader in the rewriting of histories. Toni Morrison, Sapphire, and Edwidge Danticat offer a space for voices to be heard and affects to be felt and shared. In these three novels pain finds expression once traumatic affects return to haunt characters and readers. The literary narrative becomes a medium in which the shutting down of narrativization is translated via the aesthetic register. We see that in the space of the text, several narratives emerged because although violence destroys language, as Elaine Scarry argues, the author creates a fictionalized space for the return of what has been silenced. Physical wounds are brought back to focus, are asked to be seen and confronted. Psychic ones are vocalized once the text serves as a mediator to pain. The expression of pain, therefore, is reworked through fiction which, in turn, rewrites history.

Ashraf H.A. Rushdy (1999) recalls the issue of writing from a double perspective often asserted by Morrison in interviews in which she states that the author "sought to write in an unforgiving/loving way..., writing to repossess, re-name, re-orient" (quoted in Rushdy 45). The double perspective in *Beloved* is expressed, as she states, "re-orienting the reader's gaze" (46). As she states, what could seem paradoxical come to play a crucial role in the narratives of Black women writers. This double perspective embraces imagining (what Iser referred to as seeing with one's minds eyes). By being guided by a double perspective, which is also at the core of a narrative strategy of *deferral of truth*, Morrison, Sapphire, and Danticat have created sites for the violence of sensation. That is to say that these narratives are aesthetically and thematically violent. These authors have

used the theme of violence in order to create a sensation capable of triggering movement, transformation, new ways of seeing what was thought to be already known.

In *Beloved*, the truth of the violent event of infanticide is deferred by the narrative's articulation of notions of love, freedom, and violence once the latter overtook freedom and re-signified love. In *Push*, Precious' experience of rape and incest requires a suspension of judgment from readers as she writes and makes sense of what has happened to her. While Precious (re)writes her story, she also re-signifies (by revealing their complexity) the affectivity and subjectivity involved in notions of rape, sexuality, and love. In *The Dew Breaker*, the acts of a torturer are rewritten by his victims as his family awaits for meaning, or better, the impossibility of coming to terms with the acts and choices Ka's parents have made. However, it is in this impossibility of truth that Danticat reveals to the reader a source of hope and creation.

Literature carries the potential to make noise, to disturb, and to heighten our capacity of imagining. These encounters with literary texts open paths to order the chaotic after "the course of our lives overgrown" ourselves and people and things around us (Holloway 1992: 40). Violent narratives can do that by bringing back sensation, by incorporating affect to the representation of violence. In *Beloved*, *Push*, and *The Dew Breaker* these paths are explored by narratives in which meaning escapes the reader and indeterminacy and doubt are constant features of the act of reading.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abel, Marco. *Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema, and Critique after Representation*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2007.
- Ahmed, Sara. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- . *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- “ affect e ts” *The affect theory reader*. Eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seighworth. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2010. 29-51.
- Ahmed, Sara, and a e t a e “ trod to der ograp es” *Thinking through the skin*. Eds. Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey. London and New York: Routledge, 2001. 01-17.
- Alcoff, Linda. *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self*. New York: Oxford, 2006.
- e a es “ otes o t e p ates” *Without Sanctuary Lynching Photography in America*. Eds. James Allen, and Hilton Als, Congressman John Lewis, Leon F. Litwack. Santa Fe: New Palms Publishers, 2004. 165-201.
- Alonso, Silvia Leonor and Mario Fucks. *Histeria*. São Paulo: Editora Casa do Psicólogo, 2005.
- Als, Hilton. “ ” *Without Sanctuary Lynching Photography in America*. Eds. James Allen, and Hilton Als, Congressman John Lewis, Leon F. Litwack. Santa Fe: New Palms Publishers, 2004. 38-44.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London/ New York: Verso, 1991.
- r stro g a “ e o t s o a e o a p a t o s o Iser's Aestheti eor ” *New Literary History* 31.1 On the Writings of Wolfgang Iser (Winter 2000): 211-223.
- Bakan, David. *Disease, Pain, & Sacrifice: Toward a Psychology of Suffering*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.
- a d a es “ otes o a at ve o art e ver od s rotest ove ” *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*. Eds. James Baldwin and Toni Morrison. New York: The Library of America, 1998. 11-18.
- “ re a e t o t e ed t o ” *Notes of a native son*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984. ix-xvi.



- Ba ar “ ra a a d t s s t t o a e s t e s” *Cultural Critique* 46, Trauma and Its Cultural Aftereffects (Autumn 2000): 01-44.
- a ara o a d e d “ t e s s e o o e s” *The Black woman: an anthology*. New York: Washington Square Press: 2005. 123-136 (134).
- Beasley-Murray, Jo a d e r t o o r e r a s “ a t e r t a d a e t” *Angelaki Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 6.1 (April 2001): 01-04.
- e d g “ p p r o a t o g g e s t o a d a o g r a s a t g a t o a g a g e” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 36.1, translation (2006): 131-137.
- e r a t a r e “ e e t o r e e e g a r v a a d o t s” *Cultural Pluralism, Identity Politics and the Law*. Ed. Austin Sarat. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press: 1999. 48-84.
- a a s a a d o e e “ e t” *Body & Society* 16.1 (March 2010): 07-28.
- Bollas, Christopher. *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self-experience*. New York, Routledge: 1992.
- Brennan, Teresa. *The Transmission of Affect*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004.
- Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. (1984) Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- “ e a t t e r s t e r s o ” *States of Violence: War, Capital Punishment and Letting Die*. Eds. Austin Sarat and Jennifer L. Culbert. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 229-244.
- Bulkin, Elly, and Minnie Bruce Pratt, Barbara Smith. *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism*. Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1988.
- Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London/New York: Verso, 2004.
- “ t e r o r d t e r o s s a t e ” *Loss: the politics of mourning*. Eds. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003. 467-474.
- Carby, Hazel V. *Race Men*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- . *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

- . "e o g oder a a ed e ts eto rs ro g r ast  
to rod e rse ves e " *Cultural Studies* 23.4 (July 2009):  
624-657.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*.  
Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press,  
1996.
- a d e r a t r " e o o o esed e tat o  
Du Bois and the s o rses o t e egro" *Callaloo* 19.1  
(1996): 78-93.
- Cheng, Anne Anlin. *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis,  
Assimilation and Hidden Grief*. New York: Oxford University  
Press, 2001.
- Chouliaraki, Lillie. *The Spectatorship of Suffering*. London: Sage  
Publications, 2006.
- Christian, Barbara. *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black  
Women Writers*. New York: Pergamon Press, 1985.
- " e ra e or t eor " ( ) *New Black Feminist Criticism 1985-  
2000*. Eds. Gloria Bowles, and Giulia Fabi, Arlene R. Keizer.  
Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007. 40-50.
- " t at o e ere o g a e tate o a  
Feminist Criti s (s) or ers o o a tte to stor " (1989). *New Black Feminist Criticism 1985-2000*. Eds. Gloria  
Bowles, and Giulia Fabi, Arlene R. Keizer. Urbana and  
Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007. 05-19.
- . " at e e o st at o o d o " ( ) *New Black  
Feminist Criticism 1985-2000*. Eds. Gloria Bowles, and Giulia  
Fabi, Arlene R. Keizer. Urbana and Chicago: University of  
Illinois Press, 2007. 20-30.
- r st a ar ara a d e ora o e e e a " "   
Conversation on Toni Morrison's *Beloved*". *Beloved: A  
Casebook*. Eds. William L. Andrews and Nellie Y. McKay. New  
York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 203-220.
- Clough, Patricia T. *The Affective Turn: theorizing the social*. Durham  
and London: Duke University Press, 2007. 01-33.
- Collins, Patricia Hills. *Black feminist thought: knowledge,  
consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York:  
Routledge, 2000.
- oo e a a " et g ge e o e o og a pproa to  
od e ta d ge t apa tes" *Political Studies* 53

- (2005): 124-142.
- re s a e r a s “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity o t s a d o e e g a s t o e o o o r” *Stanford Law Review* vol 43 (July 1991): 1241-1299.
- Danticat, Edwidge. *The Dew Breaker* (2004). New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 2005.
- . *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*. The Toni Morrison Lecture Series. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- ar g ars a “ t e e a o e s p o s t o v e r s a t o t h o o r r s o ” ( ) *Conversations with Toni Morrison*. Ed. Danille K. Taylor-Guthrie. University Press of Mississippi, 1994. 246-256.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Leopold Von Sacher-Masoch. *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs*. Trans. Jean McNeil. New York: Zone Books, 1991.
- “ o a v e o e t d g e t ” *Essays Critical and Clinical*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael Greco. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. 126-135.
- . *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.
- o s “ e t d o t e e g r o r o e s ” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 568, The Study of African American r o e s o s s Agenda, Then and Now (March 2000): 13-27.
- . *The Souls of Black Folk*. The Boston Globe Family Classics. Boston: The Boston Globe, 2005.
- g a v d a d e e a “ a o g e o a a e a o a ” *Loss: the politics of mourning*. Eds. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003. 343-371.
- Evans, Ivan. *Cultures of violence: Lynching and racial killing in South Africa and the American South*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009.
- Eyerman, Ron. *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- a “ e o s t r t g t e r a e t e o v e a t e r s a v e r ” *The Cambridge Companion to African American Novel*. Ed. M.

- Graham Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 34-49.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (1970). New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- . *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977). Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.
- . *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. Trans. Robert Hurley and others. Ed. James D. Faubion. Vol. 2. New York: The New Press, 1998.
- . *Power*. Trans. Robert Hurley and others. Ed. James D. Faubion. Vol. 3. New York: The New Press, 2000.
- “ so dos ra eres e as as de ” ( ) *Michel Foucault: Ética, Sexualidade, Política (Ditos e Escritos)*. Ed. Manoel B. da Motta. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2004. 193-224.
- Franklin, John Hope, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. “ a e er a Looking Back, oo g or ard” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 55.1 (Autumn, 2001): 42-49.
- Fredrickson, eorge “ eve or ra er a s ste as Often at the End o a ope” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 28 (Summer, 2004): 123-131.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: W.W. Norton & Company: 1961.
- . *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: W.W. Norton & Company: 1961.
- ar a d aro e ed “ ga o t tra a” *Understanding Trauma: A psychoanalytical approach*. London: Duckworth, 1998. 09-31.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr.. *The Signifying Monkey: a Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- ates er o s r a d e e a “ ro s eate to Toni Morrison: The Flowering of American-American Literat re” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 14 (Winter, 1996-1997): 95-100.
- G ro a “ aspora a d te eto rs o de tt ” *Identity and difference*. Ed. Kathryn Woodward. London: Sage Publications, 1997. 299-346.
- . *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*.

- Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- os a a ta “ e e o d e osop ost o o a s  
African- er a e s a d t e a e or eor ”  
*Angelaki Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 13. 2 (August  
2008): 73-91.
- re a derpa “ ra s at o a er a a e a d e der a ter ”  
*Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms*.  
Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. 196-220.
- r ara as e “ rt ears o a er a t erature and  
Literary t d es ev e ” *Journal of Black Studies* 35. 2,  
Special Issue: Back to the Future of Civilization: Celebrating 30  
Years of African American Studies (November 2004): 165-174.
- a t art “ egot at g ar ea de t t es” *New Left Review* (01  
January 1995): 03-14.
- “ t ra de t t a d aspora” *Contemporary Postcolonial  
Theory. A Reader*. Ed. Padmini Mongia. London: Arnold, 1997.  
110-121.
- “ e t - t ra est o ” *Un/settled Multiculturalisms:  
Diasporas, Entanglements, Transruptions*. Ed. B. Hesse  
London: Zed Books, 2000. 209-241.
- “ g d aspora o e t o g ts ro a road” *Postcolonialisms:  
An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*. Eds. G. Desai  
and S. Nair. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press,  
2005. 543-560.
- e gs are “ vo g e t t ra t eor a d t e o to og a  
t r ” *Cultural Studies* 19.5 (September 2005): 548-567.
- e der so ae “ o orr so s *Beloved*: Re-Membering the Body  
as stor a e t” *Beloved: A Casebook*. Eds. William L.  
Andrews and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Oxford University  
Press, 1999. 79-106.
- o s atr a “ a e st t o g t” *Theories of Race and  
Racism: A Reader*. Eds. Les Back and John Solomos. London  
and New York: Routledge, 2000. 404-420.
- Holloway, Karla FC. *Moorings & Metaphors: Figures of Culture and  
Gender in Black Women's Literature*. New Brunswick: Rutgers  
University Press, 1992.
- . “ e oved a sp r t a ” *Callaloo* 13. 3 (Summer, 1990): 516-525.
- . *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories*. Durham: Duke  
University Press, 2003.

- ser o ga g “ e ead g ro ess e o e o og a pproa ”  
*New Literary History* 3.2 On Interpretation: I (Winter 1972):  
 279-299.
- . *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore: The  
 John Hopkins University Press, 1980.
- o so ar ara “ res o ds o ere e tr t res o d dres  
 ora ea e rsto ” “ ace”, riting, and iffERENCE. Ed.  
 Henry Louis Gates, Jr.. Chicago: University of Chicago Press,  
 1986.
- Johnson, Charles. *Being and Race: Black Writing since 1970*. London:  
 Serpent's Tail, 1988.
- Johnson, Yvonne. *The voices of African American Women: the Use of  
 Narrative and Authorial Voice in the Works of Harriet Jacob,  
 Zora Neale Hurston, and Alice Walker*. American University  
 Studies. Series XXIV, American Literature, vol. 59. New York:  
 Peter Lang, 1998.
- o e o e “ e a a o e o str t g a er a  
 terar rt s ” *New Literary History* 18.2 Literacy,  
 Popular Culture and the Writing of History (Winter 1987): 335-  
 344.
- e er re e “ a e st rt s ” *A History of Feminist  
 Literary Criticism*. Eds. Gill Plain and Susan Sellers.  
 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 154-168.
- . “ e g a e st rt s ” *New Black Feminist Criticism  
 1985-2000*. Eds. Gloria Bowles, and Giulia Fabi, Arlene R.  
 Keizer. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007.  
 01-03.
- a e “ arved ear g t ess to e - ar ” *Thinking  
 through the skin*. Eds. S. Ahmed and J. Stacey. London and  
 New York: Routledge, 2001. 124-142.
- r o ert “ op s o st r o ” ra s José Marcos Macedo.  
*Folha de São Paulo, Caderno Mais!* 18 March 2001. Print.
- ev so rett “ ee g t es a ter a dt e orga te e t a ”  
*Angelaki Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 6.1 (April  
 2001): 65-74.
- e s a “ a a g t re s rd ar ” *Cultural Studies* 21.6  
 (November 2007): 866-886.
- “ rt g a a ere e o versat o s t ot er and  
 t ers ” *Studies in the Maternal*. Issue one (2009). Web 20

December 2009

<[http://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk/back\\_issues/issue\\_one/gail\\_lewis\\_abstract.html](http://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk/back_issues/issue_one/gail_lewis_abstract.html)>

- es o “ ore ord” *Without Sanctuary Lynching Photography in America*. Eds. James Allen, and Hilton Als, Congressman John Lewis, Leon F. Litwack. Santa Fe: New Palms Publishers, 2004. 07
- ta eo “ e o ds” *Without Sanctuary Lynching Photography in America*. Eds. James Allen, and Hilton Als, Congressman John Lewis, Leon F. Litwack. Santa Fe: New Palms Publishers, 2004. 08-37.
- ott r “ a a ross-dressing and the construction of American te ess” *The cultural studies reader*. Ed. Simon During. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Routledge, 1999. 241-255.
- aa e “ argaret ar era d eve t ers” *Beloved: A Casebook*. Eds. William L. Andrews and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 25-36.
- May, Todd. *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham and London: Duke University Press: 2002.
- McCammon, Holly J., and Karen E. Campbell, Ellen M. Granberg, rste oer “ o ove ets e dered Opportunity Structures and U.S. Women's Suffrage Movements, to ” *American Sociological Review* 66.1 (Feb., 2001): 49-70.
- ae e “ trod to ” *Beloved: A Casebook*. Eds. William L. Andrews and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 03-19.
- ee ar oe “ pa es for readers: the novels of Toni orr so ” d ar e a ra a *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 221-232.
- McWhorter, Ladelle. *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009.
- te e ge ad ae a or “ trod to ” *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women's Literature*. Eds. Angelyn Mitchell and Danille K. Taylor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

- Moeller, Susan. *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*. New York and London: Routledge, 1999.
- Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye* (1970). London: Vintage 1999.
- . *Beloved* (1987). London: Vintage, 2005.
- . *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
- “ e te o e or ” ( ) *Toni Morrison What moves at the margin: selected non-fiction*. Ed. Carolyn C. Denard. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008. 65-82.
- “ ooted ess e estor as o dat o ” ( ) *Toni Morrison What moves at the margin: selected non-fiction*. Ed. Carolyn C. Denard. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008. 56-64.
- “ ooted ess e estor as o dat o ” *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation*. Ed. Mari Evans. New York: Doubleday, 1984. 339-345.
- “ e or reat o a d rt g ” *Thought: A Review of Culture and Idea* 59 (December 1984): 385-390.
- ote red “ a o ” *Loss: the politics of mourning*. Eds. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003. 59-76.
- ve r stop er “ ree g t e vo e reat g t ese t e ove a d s aver ” *The Cambridge Companion to African American Novel*. Ed. M. Graham Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 17-33.
- orve ta e a d a tte r “ e so a egro r g e ed er o ” *The Journal of Negro History* 51.3 (July 1966): 209-218.
- tta ara “ et v dades da ra dade ” *Branquidade: Identidade Branca e Multiculturalismo*. Ed. Vron Ware. Trans. Vera Ribeiro. Rio de Janeiro: Garamond, 2004. 183-218.
- O'Sullivan, Simon. “ e est et so et g rt e o d eprese tat o ” *Angelaki* 6.3 (December 2001): 125-135.
- apo as o sta t a a d e t a ard “ o og s t Interrogating the Turn to e t ” *Body and Society* 16.1 (March 2010): 29-56.
- Patterson, Orlando. *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries*. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1998.
- eterso ara “ ap ta s a ( der)deve op e t a d t e



- Production of the African-er a ove t e s”  
*Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature*. Eds. Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000. 176-195.
- ooove ar “ e s a dde o str t o ” *Feminist Studies* 14. 1 (Spring 1988): 51-66, esp. 56.
- Rachleff, Peter. “ ra dade e gar a stor ogra a da a a e da Classe os stados dos” *Branquidade: Identidade Branca e Multiculturalismo*. Ed. Vron Ware. Trans. Vera Ribeiro. Rio de Janeiro: Garamond, 2004. 97-114.
- Radley, Alan. “ rt a ts e or a da e se o t e ast” *Collective Remembering*. Eds. David Middleton and Derek Edwards. London: Sage Publications, 1990.
- e d e e “Beyond Morrison and Walker: Looking Good and oo g or ard o te porar a o e s tor es” *African American Review* 34.2 (Summer, 2000): 313-328.
- ose eter “ ver Hue and Caste: Race, Immigration, and Perceptions of ra s ” a s *AAPSS*, 530 (November 1993): 187-202.
- Rucker, Walter, and James Nathaniel Upton. *Encyclopedia of American Race Riots*. Vol. 1. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007.
- s d s ra “Daughters Signifyin(g) History: The Example of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*” *Beloved: A Casebook*. Eds. William L. Andrews and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 37-66.
- Rustin, Michael. *The Good Society and Inner World: Psychoanalysis, Politics and Culture*. London and New York: Verso, 1991.
- Said, Edward. *The World, the Text and the Critic*. London: Vintage Press, 1983.
- . *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures*. London: Vintage 1994.
- . *Orientalism*. (1978) New York: Vintage, 2004.
- . *Culture and Imperialism*. (1993) New York: Vintage, 1994.
- Sapphire. *Push* (1996). London: Vintage, 1998.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Sedlak, Victor “ savo a a d sses s e t or s ot erap ” *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy* 4.2 (1989): 97-107.
- g r t t a d eter dt “ t e orders et ee

- ... t d e s a d o s t o o a e o r ” *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature*. Eds. Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000. 03-69.
- Smith, Valerie. *Not just race, not just gender: Black Feminist readings*. New York and London: Routledge, 1998.
- Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. London: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Spivak, Gayatri. "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Spivak*. ed. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean. New York: Routledge, 1996. 203-236.
- Stewart, Kathleen. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007.
- ... a e o t o a “ p e o d s ” *Thinking through the skin*. Eds. S. Ahmed and J. Stacey. London and New York: Routledge, 2001. 104-123.
- Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple* (1982). New York: Washington Square Press, 1983.
- . *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. New York: A Harvest Book Harcourt, 1983.
- Ware, Vron. *Beyond the Pale: Women, Racism and History*. London/New York: Verso, 1992.
- “ o d e r a d o r o d a r a d a d e “ r o e a a o o a r ” *Branquidade: Identidade Branca e Multiculturalismo*. Ed. Vron Ware. Trans. Vera Ribeiro. Rio de Janeiro: Garamond, 2004. 07-40.
- ... a s g t o o o e r “ e t r e o t e e r a e g r o ” *The Booker T. Washington Papers*. Eds. Louis R. Harlan and Raymond W. Smock. University of Illinois Press. Web. 10 March 2009  
<<http://www.historycooperative.org/btw/Vol.5/html>>
- ... t e a t e r “ o p e a d a g g o t ” *Crisis* 3 (New York, 1911).
- ... a s a t r a “ a e a d r g t s ” *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*. Eds. Les Back and John Solomos. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 421-430.
- Williams, Raymond. *The Long Revolution*. (1961) Toronto: Broadview Press, 2001.
- “ r o a r s a d t e r a t r e ” ( ). *The Critical Tradition*. Ed.

- Woodward, Kathryn. "Trauma and the Cultural Aftereffects of the 1990s." *Cultural Critique* 46, Trauma and Its Cultural Aftereffects (Autumn, 2000): 210-240.
- Woodward, Kathryn. "Identity and Difference." *Identity and Difference*. Ed. Kathryn Woodward. London: Sage Publications, 1997. 07-62.
- Woodward, Kathryn. "Early Works." *Early Works*. The Library of America: New York, 1991.
- Woodward, Kathryn. "The State in the Americas." *Feminist Studies* 22.1 Women and the State in the Americas (Spring, 1996): 06-39.
- Woodward, Kathryn. *Violence*. London: Profile Books, 2009.

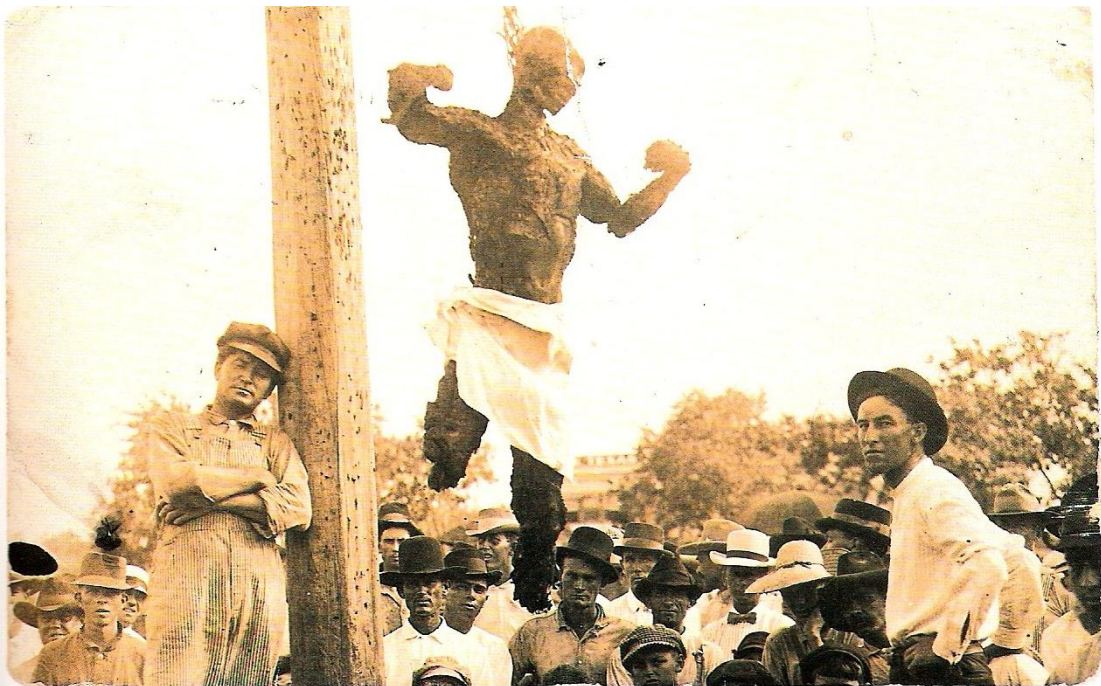
## APPENDIX



ove “ e g o o r de t ed r a er a s r a  
o at o o ” (*Without Sanctuary*, plate 16)

age “ r t orpse o a ta e g st 1915, Temple,  
e as ” (*Without Sanctuary*, plates 25 and 26)

age “ e g o ge a es g st e ter  
e as ” (*Without Sanctuary*, plate 54)



POST CARD

PLACE A  
STAMP  
HERE

CORRESPONDENCE HERE

NAME AND ADDRESS HERE

KATY ELECTRIC STUDIO  
TEMPLE, TEXAS.  
H. LIPPE, PROP.

This is the  
Barbecue we  
had last night  
my picture is to  
the left with a  
cross over it your  
son's job.

