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The Uncanny *objet a* in Toni Morrison´s Fiction

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Julkaisun nimike
Kammottava *objet a* Toni Morrisonin fiktiossa

Tiivistelmä

Käsite *uncanny* (suom. "kammottava") viittaa kehittäjänsä Sigmund Freudin mukaan torjutun paluuseen sekä luonnollisen ja yliluonnollisen väliseen liittoon. Tämä tutkimus esittää, että *uncanny* juontuu myös äidillisen objektin menettämisestä oidipaalivaiheessa. Lacanin mukaan taas *objet a* katoaa subjektilta pysyvästi tämän astuessa symbolimaailmaan. Näin ollen *objet a* toimii "halukoneen" voimanlähteenä ja vastaa freudilaista egon pakonomaista kiintymystä äiti-objektiin. Tämä tutkimus purkaa *uncanny*-käsitteen myyttiä ja sijoittaa sen *objet a*:n avulla kieleen tulkitsemalla Toni Morrisonin fiktiota uudella tavalla.

Morrisonin romaaneissa vallitsee jännite faktan ja fiktion, tositapahtumien ja muistojen, sekä toden ja todellisuuden välillä. Nämä läheisesti toisiinsa nivoutuvat käsitteet Morrison on kiteyttänyt tuomalla ne historian piiriin luomansa *rememory*-käsitteen avulla. Tämän todetaan olevan osoitus lineaarisen kerrontatavan yleisestä vaikeudesta, jopa mahdottomuudesta hänen rikkaassa ja dynaamisessa maailmassaan. Tämä tutkimus esittää, että *rememoryn* muistaminen aina koskee äidin sanattomuuden aiheuttamaa traumaa. Tämä kuvastaa mustan äitiyden puutteellisuuksia, jotka johtuvat perheiden hajottamiseen perustuvasta institutionaalisesta orjuudesta. Trauma vieraannuttaa mustan äidin lapsistaan tehden heistä kristevalaisia muukalaisia toisilleen, mutta samanaikaisesti vetää heidät vääjäämättömästi yhteen, koska *rememory* ilmentää heidän yhteistä äidillisen *objet a*:n tavoitteluaan orjuuden aiheuttaman kulttuurillisen trauman jälkishokissa.

Tutkimus käsittelee mustalle väestölle tehtyä vahinkoa tarkastelemalla *objet a*:n käsitteen toteutumista katseena sekä kehollisuutena. Lacanin teoriassa katse sisäistää väistämättömän puutteen, jonka takia Toinen ei voi vastata subjektin haluavaan katseeseen. Morrisonin teksteissä katsetta edustaa alistava valkoisen rodun katse, joka erotisoi ja syrjäyttää mustia, alentaa heidät abjektin, hylätyn, falloksen tasolle ja hautaa heidät elävältä menneisyyteen joka epäinhimillistää, kieltää persoonallisuuden ja vammauttaa. Toisaalta Morrison samanaikaisesti korostaa äidin rakastavaa katsetta täyttääkseen mustan väestön tarpeen peilata itse itseään vääristävän valkoisen katseen alaisuudesta huolimatta. Tutkimus kartoittaa myös alistettua mustaa ruumiillisuutta henkisen parantumisen tapahtumapaikkana Morrisonin teoksissa. Keho on toisaalta tärkeä tutkittaessa systemaattisen väkivallan mustalle ruumiille aiheuttamia somaattisia oireita ja toisaalta mustan ruumiin kokonaisvaltainen takaisinvalloitus yhdistää mustan väen takaisin *objet a* yhteisöönsä sekä omanarvontunnetta kohottavaan kulttuuriseen menneisyyteen ja lopulta omaan itseensä. Näin kärsivästä mustasta ruumiista vapautuminen pitää sisällään mahdollisuuden parantumiseen; tämä parantuminen rakentuu orjuuden trauman purkamiselle ja työstämiselle.

Asiasanat

The uncanny (Freud), *objet a* (Lacan), abjekti (Kristeva), muukalainen (Kristeva), vartalo, katse, orjuus, kulttuurillinen trauma, kaksinkertaistuminen, *rememory* (Morrison), äidin sanattomuus, viehtymys kuolemaan, fallos

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Abstract

Freud develops the concept of the uncanny to address the return of the repressed, the engagement between the natural and the supernatural. This work asserts that the uncanny also derives from the deprivation of the maternal object in the oedipal stage. Lacan defines the *objet a* as what is forever-lost upon the subject's entrance into the symbolic world, and therefore drives the machine of desire, corresponding to the Freudian ego's obsession with the maternal object. Through a new reading of Toni Morrison's fiction, this study demystifies the myth of the uncanny and refinds it in language by way of the *objet a*.

At the centre of Morrison's fiction is the tension between fact and fiction, truth and memory, and the real and reality. In an effort to encapsulate these clustered conceptions, Morrison brings them into history through rememory, which is found to be an example of the general difficulty, even impossibility, of linear narrative in her prolific and dynamic world. This study argues that rememory is always the rememory of the trauma of maternal silence, which speaks to dysfunctional black motherhood resulting from the family-fracturing strategy of chattel bondage. The trauma simultaneously estranges the black mother from her children as Kristevan foreigners to each other, and draws them inescapably back, because the rememory also addresses their desire for the maternal *objet a* in the aftershock of the cultural trauma of slavery.

This work examines the damage done to black people via the *objet a* as the gaze and the body. In Lacan's theoretical system, the gaze internalizes the intrinsic lack of the Other, thereby failing to return the subject's desiring look. In Morrison's writing, the gaze is represented by the white supremacist gaze, which functions to eroticize and marginalize black people, reducing them to the abject phallus, burying them alive in the dehumanizing, depersonalizing and debilitating past. Yet Morrison simultaneously foregrounds the loving maternal gaze to satisfy black people's desire for mirroring under the dissembling white gaze. This work also explores the devalued black body as the locus of spiritual healing in Morrison's works. At one level, the body is important for studying the somatic symptoms inflicted on black bodies by systemic violence; at another, the reclamation of the wholeness of the black body reconnects traumatized black people with their community, with their self-affirming cultural past and, eventually, with their own selves. Consequently, release from the black body in pain promises the very possibility of healing for black people: a healing built on acting out and working through the trauma of slavery.

Keywords

The uncanny, the *objet a*, the abject, the foreigner, the body, the gaze, slavery, cultural trauma, doubling, rememory, maternal silence, the death drive, phallus

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CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

As a Nobel Laureate, Toni Morrison (born 1931) is widely acclaimed for her strong sense of historical responsibility, which throughout her work is preoccupied with elaborating African American experience. Conceiving cultural diversity as one of the greatest obstacles to human communication, her fiction focuses on the conflicts between past and present, on cultural dialogue and the healing power of community. Her reputation as a difficult writer lies in her distinctive talent first to foreground the complicated facets of cultural heritage, then to contextualize her fiction within it to explore humanity, and finally to cross racial boundaries. Removed far from each other psychically, her characters' thinking about culture, community and self are all built on a complex slavery-induced trauma.

In Morrison's work, the trauma of chattel bondage proves haunting and uncanny with its recurring return, continuing to keep black people victimized and debilitated in post-slavery America. Sigmund Freud advances his concept of the uncanny in his critical essay of that name (1919) to elaborate on the return of the repressed. Studying varying forms of the uncanny, he suggests that it derives from the repression of the maternal body in the oedipal stage. Much later, Jacques Lacan coins the term *objet a*[1] to address the Freudian ego's obsession with or desire for the maternal object. According to him, it is "a privileged object, which has emerged from some primal separation, from some self-mutilation induced by the very approach of the real" (1977: 83). Forever-lost yet present, the volatile *objet a* appears as the object-cause of desire; it is employed in this thesis to elaborate the Freudian uncanny.

The experience of the *objet a* is sometimes pleasure-producing as it suggests the subject's fleeting transcendence of the splitting symbolic register. In Morrison's works, this experience deals with a nostalgic longing for the maternal plenitude. In other words, it is utilized to represent what black people have been deprived of and, therefore, desire under the shattering chattel system – African American identity. To make it clearer, the express purpose of the present work is to explore

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[1] Also called *objet petit a*. Though occasionally translated into English as 'object a' or 'object petit a,' Lacan insists on its untranslatability, emphasizing its status as an algebraic sign (Marks 2001: 122). It is always lower case and italicized to show that it denotes the small-o other, as distinct from the capitalized Other. Lacan expands Freud's list of the objects of the drive, including the gaze and the voice (composed of the breast, the faeces and the phallus), and reterms it the *objet a*.

how the polyvalent *objet a* figures as an effective agency in the work of Morrison to expose the aftershock of the cultural trauma of slavery as well as to illuminate ways of healing its scars.

In Morrison's writing, the uncanny addresses the recollection of the hardships of slavery, primarily through the shortcomings of black motherhood. Elaborating on the role of family to the formation of black subjectivity, Michèle Bonnet remarks, "It is, as a matter of fact, the disruption of the bond between mother and child that is the most striking, actually paradigmatic, manifestation" of the systematic breaking up of slave families (1997: 48). The harm done to black motherhood epitomizes the systemic violence of slavery. Accordingly, in this study, the *objet a* refers to the maternal *objet a*, which simultaneously inflicts the trauma of maternal silence on black people and harbors the potential for healing. I have adopted the term "maternal silence" to refer to a salient feature of Morrison's novels, that is, devalued and dysfunctional black motherhood, speaking to the efforts of the oneness-seeking maternal figures (with their children) to compensate for the maternal silence/betrayal by their own mothers. With this term, I come back to the issue of slavery, which continuously wounds African American mind, body and spirit. In *Beloved* (1987), Morrison invents the term "rememory"[2] to address "the slaves' own preoccupation with mnemonic processes" (Mobley 1993: 361), that is, the reexperiencing of that cultural trauma. In "Circularity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," Philip Page reads rememory as "a circling back in one's mind to what was previously there both in reality and in its recall" (1992: 37). It is arguable that what was previously there was a nostalgic, peaceful past displaced by the predatory system of slavery. This work proposes that it is the desire for maternal plentitude or the lost maternal *objet a* that incites or impels black people to circle back to the traumatic past. Accordingly, rememory addresses both the rememory of the maternal silence and the maternal *objet a*; it advances Morrison's experimental efforts to revise American history through the memory of slavery.

The complexity characteristic of Morrison's novels stems from what Deborah Guth pinpoints as two pasts in *Beloved*: "the black cultural heritage, with its distinctive artistic forms and modes of awareness, and the historic past of outrage and suffering with all the compounded distortions it involved" (1993: 588). In this light, the two pasts respectively evoke the "Sixty Million and more,"[3] which en-

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[2] The concept "rememory" was invented by Morrison to fight against disremembering slave history. Valerie Smith reminds us that "recalling both remember and memory, 'rememory' is both verb and noun; it names simultaneously the process of remembering and the thing remembered" (1993: 351).

[3] Morrison alludes to the sixty million (and more) African victims of slavery.

tails cultural trauma, and the African cultural heritage, which is nostalgically reminiscent of a glorious past. Put side by side, according to Eva Lennox Birch, they draw attention to Morrison's emphasis on "community and a cleaving to ancestral history as the path to racial – and human – health" (1994: 11). To sum up, defiant of linearity, Morrison's fiction speaks to her project of blurring boundaries and her stress on the importance of forging a positive relationship with an African American ancestry (cultural continuity and race responsibility) as a solution to the qualitatively unchanged status and the survival of black people in post-slavery America.

1.1 Toni Morrison: Life, Work and Critical Reception

Born Chloe Anthony Wofford in 1931, Morrison was the second of four children of Ramah and George Wofford, who moved north to Lorain, a small steel-mill town west of Cleveland, to escape sharecropping and black-people-oriented violence in the South. Growing up in the constantly poor town during the worst of the Great Depression in the 1930s, she took jobs to relieve her family's financial burdens from age twelve on. It is notable that the family, struggling with poverty, provided Morrison with her first courses in literature. In Eberhard Alsen's words:

> From both her father, George Wofford, and her grandmother, Ardellia Willis, Toni Morrison inherited a love of storytelling, especially ghost stories. In several interviews, Morrison reports that one of her family's evening pastimes was to take turns telling stories and that the children were invited to contribute. Because of these stories, so Morrison says, she became "intimate with the supernatural" from an early age. To this day, Morrison believes in spirits. (1999: 332)

It is no coincidence, considering her upbringing in a family immersed in folk and oral literatures, that Morrison nurtures a love for storytelling. This is reflected in her interest in highlighting spiritual beings such as the symbolic-sabotaging trickster skilled in storytelling as a means of reviving memory, initiating dialogue among trauma-paralyzed characters, and enhancing community-building. In Morrison's fiction, storytelling is inextricably entangled with memory, a site saturated with past demons and present desire on the one hand, and on the other, reminding people about their cultural heritage, thereby showing them their place in the community. I have explored the healing role of the trickster in my essay entitled "Troublesome Tricksters: Memory, *objet a*, Foreignness, Abjection and Healing

in Morrison's *Beloved* and *Love*" (2011).[4] The present study relates storytelling to "rememory," a term which was coined by Morrison to illuminate the dynamics between remembering and revising the past, and healing.

Morrison's specific interest in restoring an effaced history deals with her deep concern with black people's pursuit of individual advancement and her interest in the reclamation of what Linden Peach terms "black solidarity" (2000: 2). With a successful career as a writer, coinciding with being a university teacher in a white-determined nation and culture, she defined and identified herself without reference to the white symbolic, as is evident from her recollections in an interview with Reggie Nadelson in the *Guardian* in 1987:

> Thinking on it now I suppose I was backward, but I never longed for social integration with white people. For a place to pee when shopping, yes, but I was prey to the racism of my early years in Lorain where the only truly interesting people to me were the black people. (qtd. in Peach 2000: 4)

Perhaps Morrison was traumatized by the white supremacist gaze, which gave rise to her feeling like a foreigner in a racist, patriarchal America at that time. Yet this marginalized position facilitated her entry, with what Birch calls the richness of black women writers' linguistic heritage, into a dominant white male culture (1994: 9–10). Consequently, Morrison boasts a distinctive literary voice in an American literary history which is dominated by white male-oriented literary discourse; this state of double marginalization proves to be an interstitial existence which paradoxically endows Morrison with a language uncontaminated by the white patriarchal signifier.

Morrison began to write her debut novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970) while she was working full-time with two sons in tow in New York. In this novel, she foregrounds a black girl Pecola whose obsession with the bluest eye of the title leads to psychological blindness and psychosis. Pecola's tragedy stems from her mother, who, torn between self-love and self-loathing herself, prefers white girls to her own daughter. This novel especially discusses the dysfunctional black motherhood resulting from the internalization of those white aesthetic norms which give rise to black people's "unlove" of themselves and their children. The girl Claudia, more spirited than Pecola, designates "being outdoors" by the mother as "the real terror of life":

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[4] This essay was published in *The Search for Wholeness and Diaspora Literacy in Contemporary African American Literature* (2011).

> Sometimes mothers put their sons outdoors, and when that happened, regardless of what the son had done, all sympathy was with him. [. . .] To be put outdoors by a landlord was one thing [. . .] But to be slack enough to put oneself outdoors, or heartless enough to put one's own kin outdoors – that was criminal. (1994: 17)

Paradoxically, being outdoors denotes the marginalized position of black people who have been swallowed by predatory white culture. As Denise observes, that culture "has the power to disenfranchise a child of mother love, to psychically splinter an entire race identity, and to imprison all human beings in static and stagnant relationships" (1993: 15). Through Pecola, Morrison attacks the idealized beauty enjoined by the aesthetics of white culture, which contributes greatly to black people's degradation and marginalized position in America.

Sula (1973) opens with events of displacement, unmitigated violence and unspeakable horror, meandering its way between demons of historical distortion and a burning search for spiritual places. Incapable of locating herself in or in relation to her community, the title character functions as a physical metaphor of psychic deprivation and privation of the local people, thereby epitomizing the dehumanizing and depersonalizing experiences that befell them both in slavery and its aftermath; in effect, she is employed by the author to embody the displacements and sense of rootlessness inflicted on black people under the predatory, racist culture: the physically displaced town; the psychologically uprooted war veteran Shadrack; the body of Chicken Little drifting homeless in the river for three days; and Eva, the matriarch of the Peace family relocated to an old folks' home by her granddaughter Sula. Traumatized by a marriage marred from the beginning by turmoil and violence, Eva identifies with the paternal Word in the Peace family: as Morrison comments, "she kills her son, plays god, names people and [. . .] puts her hand on a child" (Stepto 1994: 16), thereby permanently maiming them psychologically. Evidently, with the phallic matriarch Eva to take the lead, the Peace family damages its own members. The destructive role of unwed motherhood points directly to dysfunctional black life stemming from the system of chattel bondage. It follows logically that the lack of a protective maternal discourse finally brings down the whole community.

Morrison's writing is influenced by her experience as a single mother. Although Linden Peach notes that "unlike Maya Angelou, Morrison puts very little of her own life overtly into her fiction" (2000: 7), her depiction of the "phallic mother"[5]

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[5] This concept is suggested by Freud in *The Ego and the Id* (1923). In pinpointing the origin of melancholia, he observes that the fear of death in it "only admits of one explanation: that the

Eva is indissociable from her own thinking on every possible permutation of the family after her early marriage to Harold Morrison, an architect from Jamaica. In the interview "The Seams Can't Show" (1977), she talked about juggling her writing life with her responsibilities as a mother:

> if I say that I have to write, that's annoying to them; it takes me away from what I'm supposed to be doing, which is mothering them! I used to go into the back room to write, and they would come in there frequently, asking for things or fighting each other. And then it occurred to me that they *didn't* want me to separate myself from them, so now I write in the big room where we all generally stay.
>
> They didn't *want* me and they didn't have anything to say to me particularly; they just wanted the presence. (Bakerman 1994: 32, original italics)

It is arguable that her emphasis on the self-affirming maternal presence integral to the spiritual and psychic health of black people stems from her own experience as a single mother. Both *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* speak to her unrelenting endeavor to invent herself in a culture dominated by white supremacist values and norms. In contrast to the two novels marked with an absence of a protective maternal discourse, *Song of Solomon* (1977) foregrounds an ancestral presence represented by Pilate Dead, who escorts her nephew Milkman Dead on his journey back through slavery to his roots in Africa.

Tar Baby (1981) is a story set in the present in the Caribbean. Peach asserts that this novel "particularly refocuses attention on the displaced person, the migrant and the stranger, as separated from their history and identity" (2000: 174). Moreover, Morrison incarnates the ancestral, maternal presence in the swamp women *qua* diaspora mothers, contrasting them with the black people uprooted from their land and cultural identity. In this novel, Morrison revises the folk tale as a love story between the tar baby Jadine, an attractive black model moulded by white culture; and Son, a black man who identifies with black rural folk culture, acting as the rabbit trapped by the tar baby. Conspicuously, Son takes on everything Jadine desires and fears, serving as the erotic body created by Jadine's abjection

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ego gives itself up because it feels itself hated and persecuted by the super-ego." However, he goes on to trace the fear further back to maternal loss at the earliest stage of ego development: "Here, moreover, is once again the same situation as that which underlay the first great anxiety-state of birth and the infantile anxiety of longing – the anxiety due to separation from the protective mother" (1989: 61). Given his proposition that the super-ego emerges in the oedipal stage, represented first and foremost by the castrating father, Freud actually fuses the maternal loss and the phallic loss. Correspondingly, Carolyn Dever describes the Freudian phallic mother as "the all-powerful, all-giving source of life that embodies both mother and father, breast and phallus" (1998: 43).

as well as her nostalgic longing for her African roots. With recognizing, worrying eyes, the swamp women witness Jadine's mixed feelings of confusion and rootlessness in a black-and-white world. In this novel, Morrison highlights the power in looking as well as the ego-affirming maternal gaze for the mental health and psychic wholeness of black people who have to construct themselves under the dissembling white gaze. When Jadine is burned by the gaze of a vibrant and confident African woman, Morrison suggests that it is her psychological distance from her own people (signified by her escaping from the arms of the swamp women) that leads to her reduction to a spectacle under the powerful gaze of the African woman.

Beloved is based on the true story of a runaway slave, Margaret Garner, who tried to kill her children rather than condemn them to the soul-death of slavery when her former owners came to reclaim them. Starting with the venom of a baby ghost embodying the past, appearing as an uncanny, ghostly work of psychoanalysis, *Beloved* speaks to the author's effort to wrest meaning from African American history through memory. In this richly conceived and daring novel, a long, unspeakable history is condensed into a full-grown ghost, highlighting the corporeality of the slave trauma. Morrison invites a whole panorama of characters engaging with images, voices, illusions and fantasies to illuminate on the one hand the full spectrum of desire and to highlight the ravages of slavery trauma; on the other hand, loud and demanding, the baby ghost speaks in an uncanny way which inflames the interplay of the desire of the other characters upon their encounter with each other in general and with her in particular. In fact, all the characters experience Beloved either as a splitting aspect of their psyche or as a kind of *doppelganger* for their own feelings of loss, grief, confusion and rage. Emphatically, Beloved is invented by the author to highlight the critical importance of returning to the past to obtain healing. However, implacable and parasitic, she simultaneously suggests the lethal effect of being buried alive in a devouring past. At this point, Morrison portrays Baby Suggs as encapsulating the scourge of chattel enslavement as well as an African cultural past, whose ritual of healing inspires love between her people, whose time-defying ancestral presence protects them on their way to the wholeness of the black self. Suggs and Beloved thus act as doubles to incite desire and to enhance recovery.

Based on and adapted from Garner's story, *Beloved* evinces Morrison's efforts to register and revise, that is, to rememory the American history of slavery. In *American Culture in the 1980s* (2007), Graham Thompson points out that

> Morrison changes the known details of Garner's life in several ways but, rather than just investigating the events of Garner's escape and return, projects Garner's life into the future to imagine the undocumented legacy of

> these events and, most hauntingly, the return of the murdered child, Beloved, to Sethe's house at 124 Bluestone Road, Cincinnati. (2007: 55–56)

The ghost made flesh is invented by the author to foreground the aftermath of the disintegrating chattel system that does not cease to be felt even after its abolition. Similarly, Thompson argues that "the imaginative creation of this after-story" allows Morrison to engage the historical consequences of the slave trauma in the post-Civil War nation. Of no less importance,

> as a contemporary novel it also demands to be read at a broader cultural and allegorical level: not only is Sethe haunted by the trauma of the actions forced upon her by slavery, but so the legacy of slavery haunts the story of African American and US national culture right up to the present day. (2007: 56)

In Morrison's fiction, slavery haunts all African Americans in the United States as a cultural trauma. Put another way, the indirect experience of this trauma is elaborated around the core of slavery. It follows that reconstructing the common past (cultural trauma) is of critical importance for a social group to identify itself in the symbolic; belatedly constitutive of a race, slavery coalesces all American people of African descent into a diasporic we. Set in a wide span of historical period from the late 17th century to the late 20th century, Morrison's work displays her unswerving endeavor to delve into the cultural trauma in order to restore African American identity.

In *Jazz* (1992), Morrison avails herself of jazz technique to explore the way the traumatized characters heal themselves through joint improvisation, highlighting the importance of music to black people for healing in 1920s America. In "Roots of the Body" (1995), Karin Luisa Badt reads *Jazz* as the author's explication of "what it means to be rooted in the body and in history. Here the body – in its curious manifestations as the City, jazz, and the character Dorcas – has 'tracks'" (1995: 569). However, what connects these manifestations is a groove, a memory of maternal silence, which incites the traumatic characters into wrestling with each other in order to revise their past. Significantly, Morrison utilizes this groove to start musical interaction between the victims of the chattel system. In so doing, she turns a discourse of cultural trauma into a source of individual healing through communal responsibility. *Paradise* (1997) was Morrison's first novel after she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. Set during the Civil Rights era of the 1960s and 1970s, this fiction tells a story of a people preoccupied with building a black utopian community called Ruby, which represents their desire for a nostalgic past. Yet the Ruby-inhabitants marginalize and demonize the women living in the Convent located on the outskirts of Ruby in an effort to

establish themselves as subjects. In so doing, they recall white people's tendency to dehumanize black people, designating them as a symbol of rawness and death under the racist culture.

Love (2003) discusses the cluttered relationship of a puzzling cast of warring black women, some old and some young, in the Florida coast area of America in the 1990s. Only lightly sketched, the long-deceased overpowering patriarch Cosey, the one-time owner of the Cosey's Resort (a coastal hotel) has a call on all his women's attention, occupying the centre of the novel even in his absence. Packed with the enigmatic stories of the people of Cosey's world, the story is boisterous, blatant, winding through the labyrinth woven by the black women who are blighted by their burning love for the successful black entrepreneur. Treating Cosy as an ideal ego which promises real mastery, the women are tragically enmeshed in the darkness which, embodied by the deceased patriarch, signifies symbolic lack and the real of slavery.[6] However, J. Brooks Bouson rightly points out, "Even as Morrison in *Love* unflinchingly examines the dirty business of intraracial and class prejudice in telling the stories of Heed and Christine, she also is bent on effecting a cultural cure" (2008: 358). It is notable that a disembodied matriarch L reigns over the living and the dead, serving as a protective ancestral mother for the women. Throughout this novel, L is repeatedly linked with water and music, which suggests her as a life-affirming and -giving maternal figure; her disembodied presence provides her female children with the atmosphere to achieve final fusion and healing. In conclusion, *Love* addresses the impact of past memories on the present, the tenacity of the legacy of slavery, the hierarchy of race, the corruption of innocence, and, most importantly, the sustaining bonds between women. By emphasizing the importance of a border-dissolving ancestral, maternal presence, Morrison displays an unswerving devotion to liberate black people from the splitting white power structure in her black-oriented writings.

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[6] Although the historical reality of the Sixty Million is conceded, it remains a repressed presence in modern America. In this thesis, "the real" is used in the sense of the Lacanian real. During the early 1950s, Lacan introduced his triad of the real, the imaginary and the symbolic as the elementary registers which structure human psychic reality. In his diagram, the three registers remain interrelated (Libbrecht 2001b: 154). Not to be confused with reality, which is perfectly knowable and signifiable, the Lacanian real remains "that limit of experience resisting symbolization" (Libbrecht 2001b: 154), thereby representing what is lack in the symbolic order.

The large field of Morrison criticism has focused on her trauma narratives, her folkloric themes, her feminism, etc. There is also a concern to place this work in the general trajectory of Morrison's postmodern experiment with language to dismantle the hegemonic, univocal white voice. In "Toni Morrison's *Love* and the Trickster Paradigm," Susana Vega-González convincingly argues that "the ambiguity and indeterminacy of meaning, the non-linear layered narrative structure and the deconstruction of established boundaries and categories make of Toni Morrison a postmodern writer" (2005: 276). Grounded in the ethical fields of slavery, Morrison's novels are relevant also for postcolonial studies, since an important aspect that connects her fiction is her attention to the unfathomable weight of the past on the present as well as the future.

Morrison also dedicates herself to unsettling the border between folklore and fiction in her literary creation. In *Fiction and Folklore*, Trudier Harris perceptively points out that Morrison "transforms historical folk materials. In the process, she creates [. . .] literary folklore" (1991: 7). Specifically, Morrison restructures folkloric forms in literary, psychoanalytic patterns. In *Trauma Fiction*, Anne Whitehead points out:

> Morrison's fiction, and black literature more broadly, constructs a counter-narrative which asserts what the historical or literary record has 'forgotten'. Morrison's writing overlaps with psychoanalysis in excavating a buried past and bringing repressed material back to consciousness. (2004: 154–155)

Morrison's inclination to delve into the history of American slavery in these terms reflects her obsession with unearthing the unspeakable horror and hardships of slavery. In her works, her characters' obsessive engaging with the death-tainted darkness and silence is interpretable as their efforts to extract meaning from the cultural history. Morrison's thematic astuteness consists in her ability to join the aforementioned two pasts seamlessly into trauma narratives that bear witness to the psychic and physical damage inflicted on black people both under and after slavery.

The aftershock of the chattel system has reduced African Americans to enslaved, exploitable and expendable bodies by way of the dehumanizing white gaze. In *Subversive Voices: Eroticizing the Other in William Faulkner and Toni Morrison* (2001), Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber uses Lacan's psychoanalytic theory to probe the dynamic between dominant and emergent cultures. She observes that the dominant group tends to erotize the marginalized in order to reject cultural differences and fulfill desire. Yet "emergent powers combat the dominant and residual ones through acknowledgement of limitations and confrontation" (2001: 5). To make it clear, confronted with the lack of the Other, the marginalized is driven to reject

his/her object status in order to shift to subject position. In the chapter entitled "Destabilizing Dominant Culture: *Beloved* and the Gaze of the Other," Schreiber reads Beloved as "the gaze of the Other [that] unsettles the dominant culture" (2001: 19). She suggests that the legacies of slavery function through the gaze of the Other, which, on the one hand, marginalizes and dehumanizes black people; and on the other, invoked by the black Other, "destabilizes the dominant culture" (2001: 119). As a result, black characters in this novel shift back and forth from object to subject position. Building on Schreiber's argument, this work interprets the white dehumanizing gaze as the *objet a*. Availing myself of the volatility of the *objet a*, I develop the Lacanian gaze as both dissembling and self-confirming, the former relating to the white objectifying gaze, the latter referring to an ancestral, maternal gaze which empowers black people to gaze (back), to become healed from the traumatizing impact of the white gaze.

Morrison also foregrounds the violence done to the black body through personifying certain things such as trees, which can be read as her efforts to carry on her community's cultural heritage. In a conversation with Charles Ruas in 1981, Morrison describes the world of her novels as

> an animated world in which trees can be outraged and hurt, and in which the presence or absence of birds is meaningful. You have to be very still to understand these so-called signs, in addition to which they inform you about your own behavior. (Ruas 1994: 100)

Clearly, Morrison is elaborating on the human-like nature of trees and birds in traditional African culture. In parallel, in "'To Take the Sin out of Slicing Trees . . . ': The Law of the Tree in *Beloved*," Michèle Bonnet develops a theory of "the law of the tree," proposing that "the most salient feature of the tree is that it is identified with life" (1997: 42). Taking her cue from John S. Mbiti's suggestion that trees are considered intermediaries between God and man, she describes them as rejuvenating, protective, supportive, providing the characters such as Paul D with "the life that goes with freedom" (1997: 43). Accordingly, she claims, "It is what the tree encloses, Life itself, that is sacred" (1997: 44–45). Yet, in "Hiding Fire and Brimstone in Lacy Groves," Lorie Watkins Fulton builds her idea upon Bonnet's concerning trees in *Beloved*, arguing that "trees remain conflicted images," pinpointing both their negative and positive natures throughout Morrison's work (2005: 189). She states that

> Morrison's approach [. . .] seems to alter the ecofeminist belief that the domination of women directly connects to the devastation of the natural environment; rather, her method highlights such a relationship between the natural world and another oppressed group, the enslaved. (2005: 190)

Morrison employs trees to embody the pain, mutilation and scars inflicted on the black body. Accordingly, this thesis argues that the tree is equivalent to the enslaved, expendable black body in her fiction. Put slightly differently, the tree is the "black body in pain."[7]

The cancer of chattel bondage is epitomized by the crushing impact of white, racist, patriarchal culture on black family and black mothers. In this study, I employ the term *maternal silence* to refer to disabled and disabling black motherhood. In *Maternal Body and Voice* (2002), Paula Gallant Eckard examines how maternal experience and the body and voice of the mother are depicted in Morrison, Bobbie Ann Mason and Lee Smith. In this book, she associates voice and articulateness with protective, life-infusing maternal love; and silence with destructive, damaging motherly love. In addition, she employs the silenced maternal body to represent the suffocating maternal love that separates mother and children in Morrison's works. Accordingly, the maternal body is representative of the violence done to black mothers, who preserve and transmit it through inflicting emotional and psychological scars on their children. Eckard comments:

> Morrison's characters who suffer a maternal loss early in life seem similarly plagued by a pervasive melancholy and restlessness. The absent mother continues to affect characters, events, and entire texts from the recesses of the past. (2002: 36)

Eckard reads the loss as traumatic, continuing to victimize the characters in their ensuing life, which concurs with my designation of the loss as the trauma of maternal silence. She further notes that "losing the mother often represents the loss of childhood, and in Morrison's fiction, 'orphans' not only lose their own childhoods but deny those of the next generation as well" (2002: 36). In this way, slavery-induced trauma is perpetuated and the next generation is psychologically orphaned. This work uses the term maternal silence to represent both the physical absence of the black mother due to the systematic breaking up of slave families under slavery and black mothers' failure to offer their children life-affirming functions due to the psychic scars inflicted on them by the chattel system.

Morrison's evocative texts represent the female body as a place where historic and erotic memories entwine with each other, stressing the link between an articulation of corporal desire and a sense of subjectivity. In "'Circling the Subject": History and Narrative in *Beloved*" (1993), Valerie Smith notes that Morrison fo-

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[7] The concept was coined by Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985).

cuses on the black body as the site of revealing the living death of slavery as well as healing its scars. In this essay, she explores scarred, enslaved black bodies and past memories activated by sensations of the present to reveal the bodily nature of slavery-induced trauma; she then moves on to assert: "To the extent that characters feel suffering through their bodies they are healed, physically and psychically, through the body as well" (1993: 348). In this novel, healing is enhanced by and achieved under the protective power of the maternal figure Baby Suggs, who exhorts her people to love and reclaim their scarred bodies. Smith's argument then underpins my reading of the healing body as the maternal body.

In "Roots of the Body," Badt designates the characters' inclination in Morrison's writing to regress to a symbiotic union with the maternal body as integral to self-construction:

> Whether we look at Shadrack retreating from society to live in his womb-like hut over the river, Son in *Tar Baby* allowing himself to be swallowed in Caribbean womb-water, Joe crawling back into his mother's "cave" in *Jazz*, or Sethe and Paul regressing to a bewildered and helpless infantile state in *Beloved*, we find that the womb exercises an eerie and ineluctable power over Morrison's heroes and heroines. (1995: 568)

My insight into the healing function of the maternal body both concurs with and builds on Badt's argument. The characters' desire for this body or *objet a* reveals the trauma of its silence, activating their desire for *jouissance*. As a result, their encounter with the maternal *objet a* initiates sexuality – what the symbolic meaning fails and falls short of. Consequently, the experience of the maternal *objet a* loaded with past horrors orientates the characters paradoxically towards life.

Badt points out that the maternal body manifests itself in varying ways in Morrison's fiction. As mentioned earlier, Badt observes that, in *Jazz*, as manifestations of the body, the City, jazz, and Dorcas all have tracks (1995: 569). This track is further defined by her as "a 'record' – a memory, something that roots one in the past, as well as directs one to the future. It permits the evolution of history" (1995: 570). It is arguable then that this track is suggestive of a nostalgic longing for the lost maternal plenitude. In Morrison's writing, certain discrete parts of the body serve to materialize love. In "A Laying on of Hands" (2005), Anissa Janine Wardi analyzes the healing role of the hand, utilizing it to explore and emphasize the materiality of love in both *Beloved* and *Love*. In this light, the hand is a central attribute of a healing, maternal body. This study combines Wardi's and Badt's insights, reading the hand as the track to the maternal body. Put differently, the maternal body is the *objet a* that tracks and roots black people in a cultural past.

Morrison's fiction is bent on restoring an African ancestral past which is represented by a protective maternal presence in most of her works, thereby providing a powerful instrument of personal and cultural survival. In *Scarring the Black Body*, Carol E. Henderson contends that "the African American literary tradition is distinct in that writers can fashion a *public* 'self' in language that protests their dehumanizing conditions" (2002: 6, italics mine). The public self is constructed on the two pasts which unify American people of African origin and solidify their hyphenated identity and is represented by what Laura Doyle terms "the racialized mother figure" (1994: 4). Combining the African cultural past and the slave past, the racialized mother expresses Morrison's emphasis on a maternal discourse for theorizing the distinctive, gendered violence inflicted on black people during slavery, and healing the scars of slavery. In her work *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000), Patricia Hill Collins employs the maternal to discuss black feminism and the violence perpetrated on black people during slavery, the effects of which are still discernible in its cultural afterlife in African American communities. In particular, she suggests the term "othermothers" to illustrate the type of mothering in which a network of black women "assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities" in black communities (2000: 178). The culture-specific othermother reflects the centrality of motherhood for black women to define themselves and for black people to survive the aftershock of chattel bondage aimed at shattering black families. In this light, in *Beloved*, Baby Suggs, who instructs her people to love every part of their bodies, figures as a racialized othermother, a spiritual mentor, an ancestral figure for other people.

In Morrison's work, the maternal discourse manifests itself in varying forms. In "Representation, Race, and the 'Language' of the Ineffable in Toni Morrison's Narrative" (1999), Abdellatif Khayati points out that "Morrison's narrative accounts of the 'village' or 'community' or 'ancestral' figure represent a counter-discourse to the story of American progress, a story that is rewritten from the perspective of its diasporic, womanist subjects" (1999: 318). Building upon Khayati's idea, this study maintains that the black community, music, trees and water are personified, providing a maternal function for black people who have fallen prey to the aftershock of slavery; all these serve to root them in an African cultural past in the face of what Doreatha D. Mbalia calls the "genocide"[8] committed on them.

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[8] In a footnote in *Toni Morrison's Developing Class Consciousness* (1990), Mbalia employs this word to express the "continual circle of oppression" inflicted on African American people by white colonizing capitalism in Morrison's novel *Beloved*: "slavery, the slave trade, and co-

In conclusion, this study suggests that dysfunctional black motherhood, marked with the lack of the Other, incites the traumatized people's desire for the maternal body or the maternal *objet a*. Its focus on the uncanny *objet a* to delve into the trauma of slavery sets itself apart from earlier scholarship on Morrison as the *objet a* has not been associated with slavery-induced trauma in psychoanalytic studies on the author. It should be emphasized that this study is culture-specific and does not make larger, universalizing claims; it offers the reader a new way to decipher the role of motherhood in the subjectivity formation of African Americans.

1.2 From the Uncanny to the *objet a*

Originally centred on the trope of doubling in her novels *Beloved*, *Sula* and *Love*, my work studies a cast of fictional characters enmeshed in slavery trauma. It is remarkable that Morrison's novels feature a panorama of life built paradoxically on decay and death, which is embodied in the reticent ghost Cosey, who feeds and flourishes on the lives of the living (his kinswomen) in *Love*. In her fiction, traumatic memories resist being buried alive with the passage of time, presenting themselves remarkably as the living dead, an act which doubles the trauma survivors and defies the linearity of time. It is important to mark the original trauma off from its later onsets. Featuring the literal, unmitigated horror of the original experience, traumatic recollections are but a replica of the primal, precipitating trauma that cannot be fitted into the conscious life. This is evident in *Beloved*, which opens with the venom and violence of a baby ghost pestering and persecuting the living, and *Sula*, in which the eponymous protagonist encapsulates the other characters' fear of death. Juggling life and death, Morrison dedicates herself to exposing the haunting manifestations of love in her texts.

In literature, however, doubling is not in itself sufficient to define this study; several components help situate doubling within a postmodern social milieu: schizophrenia, narcissism, obsessive neurosis, paranoia, hysteria, etc are all attached to some disturbance or other of the sense of identity, offering insight into the subversive forces of the human psyche. As my study moves on, it becomes clear that Morrison is attracted to themes of darkness, death, silence, sexuality and desire, preoccupied with a special area of the aesthetic of ambiguity – the uncanny, which emerges as a crisis of the natural, signifying 'eerie,' 'uncertainty,' 'unhomely,' and 'supernatural.'

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lonialism, the underdevelopment of Africa, the distortion of African history, the present destruction of family life, the *genocide* of men, women, and children" (1990: 230, italics mine) .

The uncanny is developed by Sigmund Freud in his eponymous critical essay in 1919. In this essay, he moves beyond an idea of aesthetics "restricted to the theory of beauty" to consider a neglected aesthetics of anxiety which is, by nature, emotional, "relating to the qualities of our feeling" (2003: 123). Probing into the genesis of the uncanny, he suggests that it stems from either revived childhood complexes or reconfirmed primitive beliefs. At another point, he suggests that "primitive convictions are closely linked with childhood complexes, indeed rooted in them" (2003: 155). In so doing, he fuses the two sources into one, pinpointing childhood complexes as the sole genesis of the later experience of the uncanny. In this view, the uncanny derives from the deprivation of the maternal object in the oedipal stage, which gives rise to the child's unrelenting search for the lost object throughout his/her life.

After falling victim to the limitations of language and culture, the Freudian ego is driven by Oedipal desire for the maternal object. In *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Freud goes so far as to read the mental health of modern, civilized white peoples of Europe and America as built on the successful repression of Oedipal, childhood desires. Moreover, fixated on the mystic power of taboo, he attributes the uncanny recurrence of the same thing to the daimonic character of the compulsion to repeat, which in turn foregrounds the trauma-producing fear of castration experienced by all human beings at the Oedipal stage. Featuring repetition of negative or self-annihilating experiences, the compulsion to repeat deals in fact with the loss perpetrated on the child by the castrating father, depersonalized as constricting social norms at a later stage.

In *The Uncanny*, Nicholas Royle approaches the concept from a sense, an apprehension, however fleeting, "of ourselves as double, split, at odds with ourselves" (2003: 6). Apparently, the uncanny surfaces through the gap of the real which the unity of reality fails to deal with. In Lacan's theoretical system, the real represents both the inaccessible realm of being, that is, the real in all its fullness and completeness and at the same time its absence inside the symbolic order: the lack of the real. From this perspective, suggesting the eruption of the real into the present symbolic, the experience of the uncanny evokes both pain and pleasure. In a similar manner, Royle describes the uncanny as "something strangely beautiful, bordering on ecstasy" (2003: 2), in contrast to Freud, who designates the uncanny as always already tainted by feelings of fear. Consequently, the uncanny touches on an area of excess and stretches beyond the legitimate bounds his precursor has set up.

Building on Freud's psychological thinking, Melanie Klein develops the breast as the primal object by which the newborn organizes its psychological self. However,

the breast is treated as either good or bad based on its availability: "From the beginning the ego introjects objects 'good' and 'bad', for both of which the mother's breast is the prototype – for good objects when the child obtains it, for bad ones when it fails him" (1988: 262). It is evident that the Kleinian object is enslaved by the Other,[9] which imposes its endemic lack on it; it is volatile and polyvalent, of critical importance for the nascent ego in its efforts to erect a psychological self. Significantly, Klein designates the breast as the part-object to suggest the nascent ego's incapacity to identify the mother as a whole love-object in the paranoid-schizoid position.

In *Powers of Horror* (1982), inspired by Klein's analysis of the primal object, Julia Kristeva adapts the term "abject"[10] to highlight the lack ingrained to the object. She highlights the function of the Other, which "jettisons the object into an abominable real, inaccessible except through jouissance" (1982: 9). It is then evident that the abject and the object are polarized as two extremes in Kristeva's system:

> The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which [. . .] makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. (1982: 1–2, original italics)

The encounter with the abject is therefore extremely depersonalizing and traumatic. In Morrison's texts, it is a self-annihilating experience of live burial in times of trauma or traumatic reenactments. In this study, I interpret this as claustrophobic isolation resulting from slavery-induced solitude. Evoking the past entails pain as well as courage, for it brings about this awareness of the danger of such a claustrophobic experience. What I would like to underline is the overpowering force of the oppressive white culture embodied in the tenacity of the victimizing past of slavery, which in Morrison's novels colonizes black people and cannibalizes their future. In this connection, the individual suffering from cultural trauma is a mis-

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[9] Essentially a Lacanian category, the Other refers to "the SYMBOLIC order of language and speech" (Boons-Grafé 1992: 296). In *Lacan and Postfeminism*, Elizabeth Wright marks small-o other off from big-o Other: while the former "stands for the image that the little child sees in the mirror, the flattering picture of wholeness that belies the actual fragmentary nature of the subject," the latter "stands for the symbolic itself, the presupposed locus of all desire, determining the speaking subject" (2000: 71).

[10] Others have used it simply with the meaning "cast away."

anthrope, a prisoner, a petrified refugee in a "fortified castle" (Kristeva 1982: 46), a paranoiac buried alive in a stultifying past.

Klein's theoretical statement also inspires Lacan in his invention of the *objet a*.[11] For Lacan, desire subordinates the subject to the effect of the signifier, referring back to the lack resulting from "the constitutive loss [the bipartition of the subject] of one of his parts, by which he turns out to be made of two parts." Accordingly, he asserts that "upon cutting the cord, what the newborn loses is not [. . .] its mother, but rather its anatomical complement. Midwives call it the 'after-birth'" (2006: 716, 717). At this point, the mother's breast appears as a privileged representative of the *objet a* for the newborn. However, even the breast serves to fill the lack upon the infant's entry into the cultural world. For this reason, the subject is destined to long for the lost object throughout his life. For Lacan, the quest for a forever unattainable object leads inevitably to destruction and death. Because of this, he revises Klein's part-object as partial object. Partial, polyvalent and protean, the *objet a* encapsulates qualities applying equally to the object and the abject, both of which prove nonetheless integral to the selfsame human construct.

In an effort to compensate for the oedipal loss, the subject attempts to identify with the other as an inseparable part of him/herself. In this connection, Juliet Mitchell claims that the formation of self is always a "question of finding the self-image in the image of another, and of constituting the self in that discovered image" (1974: 39). By identifying itself in meaning, the ego is endlessly undercut by the unconscious imposed on it by the Other, subject to all kinds of fantasy, including the power to overlook the symbolic order. Eventually, Freud designates the idealized self-image as the ideal ego as the precipitate of the "narcissistic perfection of his childhood" (2001e: 94). As "the assumption of the unitary image of the body" (Libbrecht 2001a: 88), the ideal ego deals with both the untamed or undisciplined grandiose self, and a primary identification with an idealized mother. In this connection, the subject's unconscious searching after the *objet a* is driven by his/her identification with the ideal ego. Yet the lack endemic to the symbolic order renders the ego's effort to identify itself as the ideal ego ineffective and even futile. Because of this, Freud distinguishes between the ideal ego and the ego ideal: the former is a narcissistic projection of the ego whereas the latter

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[11] In "Position of the Unconscious," emphasizing the import of weaning to the psychic formation of the infant, Lacan writes, "Weaning has been too extensively situated, since Klein's investigations, in the fantasy of the partition of the mother's body for us not to suspect that the plane of separation, which makes the breast the lost object involved [. . .] in desire, passes between the breast and the mother" (2006: 719).

evolves from the former, fusing the perfect mirror image and the lack endemic to the Other and therefore figuring as a critical agency for the individual.

The dynamic relationship between the ideal ego and the ego ideal can be used to explore doubling. For Freud, the double deals with the ego's longing for the repressed maternal body. It may have been inevitable that he is fixated on the castration complex in conceptualizing his theory of the uncanny: he formulates the double as the criticizing "conscience" (2003: 142) which emerges from the Oedipus stage. Throughout his works, conscience serves as an agency of the castrating father depersonalized in the superego or the ego ideal. Accordingly, conscience *qua* the double suggests the ego's identification with an idealized yet castigating authority. Constantly harassed by the severity of the ego ideal, the Freudian ego desires the fullness and plenitude suggested by the maternal body.

The bipartition of the Lacanian subject from its very birth presages the doubling of the subject at a later period. The primal lack which manifests itself as the void of the real is perpetrated on the subject by the signifiers: "it is the whole structure of language that psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious" (Lacan 2006: 413). In so defining it, Lacan introduces the linguistic structure to the psyches of human beings: "It is this [linguistic] structure [. . .] that assures us that there is, beneath the term unconscious, something definable, accessible and objectifiable" (1977: 21). In other words, we obtain access to the real only through the mechanism of the unconscious structured by the signifiers of language. From this perspective, the Lacanian subject is always the subject of the unconscious. Thus, the double represents what is desirable and unattainable for the subject. Parkin-Gounelas remarks that "doubling in the Lacanian schema originates in the mirror stage, when the 'misrecognition' of oneself as whole takes on a variety of guises which return throughout life: fragmentation, splitting and substitution" (2001: 109). To clarify, the Lacanian double suggests the inescapable influence of death on the subject upon his entry into language. In short, death is the double of the subject.

The Freudian ego, brimful of narcissistic fantasy, inspired Heinz Kohut to invent the notion of the omnipotent "nuclear self" (1977). Developed from "the grandiose self" and "the idealized parent imago" (1971) as the two components of a living self, the nuclear self emerges in response to the ego's obsession with the parent selfobject. Despite the archaic, narcissistic structure characterizing the nuclear self, Kohut believes in the transformation of the nuclear self into a self-centred self, built on the taming of the ego's narcissistic fantasies and the incorporation of the parent selfobject into the nuclear self under favorable circumstances. Yet if the parent fails to provide optimal developmental conditions for the gradual

transformation of the two psychological poles into one, the child will search for a substitute object for the parent imago which has been traumatically or prematurely shattered throughout his/her life. In Morrison's novels, mother and child are often estranged from each other as Kristevan foreigners due to dysfunctional black motherhood. This study draws on Kohut's psychological paradigm to analyze Morrison's characters' unrelenting search in her fictional writings for the maternal figure as the missing segments of the psychic structure.

In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva coins the term "foreigner" to domesticate the *otherness* dwelling in the inner psyche of all human beings: "Foreigner: a choked up rage deep down in my throat, a black angel clouding transparency, opaque, unfathomable spur" (1991: 1). It is apparent that the foreigner is demonized, reminiscent of the meaning-disrupting abject. However, the foreigner is actually the repressed side of the subject, embodying what he/she abjects in order to identify him/herself as a speaking being in the symbolic. Kristeva describes the encounter with the foreigner as strange and even self-annihilating: "strange is the experience of the abyss separating me from the other who shocks me – I do not even perceive him, perhaps he crushes me because I negate him" (1991: 187). Alien and anxiety-provoking, the experience of the foreigner is no doubt self-sabotaging and uncanny. Yet Kristeva also points out that the foreigner is inherent in the psyches of all human beings. The foreigner thus aligns itself with the *objet a*, the taming of which is crucial to the subject's transformation into a cosmopolitan being.

Healing from depersonalizing experiences entails the reenactment of the precipitating trauma. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Lewis Herman points out that, rather than effecting a liquidation of trauma, psychotherapy does not eliminate it: "The goal of recounting the trauma story is integration, not exorcism." (1992: 181). She advocates the restitution of the decisive trauma, incorporating it into life as a new chapter. Herman's argument coincides with Petar Ramadanovic's conceptualizing of the "diasporic subject" as the way to healing: "From the advent of this modern subject [. . .] knowing history involves a responsibility [. . .] which, in its psychoanalytic version, consists of an overturning of the I so that the other is revealed and has come there where I was" (2001: 91). For instance, in *Beloved*, Denver's healing is achieved only after she takes on the responsibility of history, learning to reconcile herself with her mother's past, re-identifying herself with Sethe as the maternal *objet a*.[12] To sum up, the foreigner functions as the desire-inciting real, the *objet a* which brings Morrison's characters into confrontation with their own psychological damage in a culture enjoined by the white sym-

[12] Denver's psychological development will be further discussed in chapter 4.

bolic. Significantly, the uncanny encounter with the foreigner as the *objet a* is the way to self.

1.3 Trauma as the Dynamic between Departure and Return, between Knowing and Unknowing

In *Studies on Hysteria* (1893–1895), Freud and Breuer elaborate on the affinity between the uncanny and anxiety. Upon investigating "a great variety of different forms and symptoms of hysteria," the authors find that all their patients suffer from varying kinds of anxiety attacks with hallucinatory clarity (1957: 3). According to their description, the onset of traumatic memories featuring outbursts of hysterical, somatic symptoms is disturbingly uncanny. In this context, "anxiety" announces the incursion of the uncanny into the field of psychoanalysis. The first attention to hysterical symptoms is attributable to the great French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1835–1893), whose study of hysteria bore fruit while his followers dedicated themselves to the task of delving into its cause.[13] Among them, Pierre Janet, a pioneering French psychologist,[14] first threw light on neurotic symptoms, thereby tracing hysteria back to psychological trauma. Drawing inspiration from his discovery, Freud and Breuer brought out *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), based on the latter's treatment of Anna O,[15] a woman suffering from psy-

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13 Evaluating their study of hysteria at the end of "Preliminary Communication," Freud and Breuer write, "If by uncovering the psychical mechanism of hysterical phenomena we have taken a step forward along the path first traced so successfully by Charcot with his explanation and artificial imitation of hystero-traumatic paralyses, we cannot conceal from ourselves that this has brought us nearer to an understanding only of the *mechanism* of hysterical symptoms and not of the internal causes of hysteria " (1957: 17, original italics). In this connection, Herman points out Charcot's contribution to the study of hysteria in a clearer and more concise way, "Though Charcot paid minute attention to the symptoms of his hysterical patients, he had no interest whatsoever in their inner lives. He viewed their emotions as symptoms to be cataloged" (1992: 11). Correspondingly, in "The Aetiology of Hysteria," Freud points out that "in the view of the influential school of Charcot heredity alone deserves to be recognized as the true cause of hysteria, while all other noxae of the most various nature and intensity only play the part of incidental causes, of '*agents provocateurs*.'" The seduction theory then came into being with Freud's determination to "have a second method of arriving at the aetiology of hysteria," to "penetrat[e] from the symptoms to a knowledge of their causes" (1984: 260, original italics).

14 In "The Sense of Symptoms," Freud notes that Janet "brought forward the same evidence [of hysteria] independently; indeed, the French worker can claim priority of publication, for it was only a decade later (in 1893 and 1895), while he was collaborating with me, that Breuer published his observation" (1976: 296).

15 Anna O. was the pseudonym for Bertha Pappenheim by Josef Breuer in *Studies on Hysteria*, who is perhaps best known for his treatment of the former between 1880 and 1882. Through analysis, Breuer discovered that by casting back to what had happened when the symptoms started, she would restore a repressed fact and then recover a bit, a method which Breuer later

chic disorders. Anna O's consistent proneness to symptoms such as amnesia alerted Breuer and Freud to a buried yet unburiable place – the unconscious. Since its first entry into the perception and mediation of human beings, the unconscious has remained a much disputed locus tightly tied to psychoanalysis. This, however, suggests its emergence as an interface between knowing and unknowing, or, put another way, as a locus of unknowing resisting knowledge.

Somatic symptoms emerge in response to the insistence of the unconscious, with its haunting, enigmatic existence. The "invention" of the unconscious is attributed to Freud in his study of hysteria in the late eighties and nineties. He started to listen more carefully to what the patients had to say after realizing that "the bodily symptoms of hysteria [. . .] were physical expressions of mental ideas" (Mitchell 1974: 8). During his treatment of cases of hysteria, he was surprised by the fact that most of his patients tried to forget something, especially sexual, in infancy, and he was unsettled by the high proportion of incest accounts among his neurotic clients. In his case history of "Katharina," for example, the eponymous character was suffering from suffocating anxiety attacks after finding her uncle[16] in bed with her cousin. Upon deeper probing, Freud established the causal link between earlier sexual assaults that the protagonist had suffered at the hands of her uncle and the later scene of discovery. A "'traumatic' moment" was then identified and considered by him as the precipitating trauma (Freud and Breuer 1957: 133–134). Consequently, convinced of the theory of the sexual aetiology of his patient's neurotic disorders, Freud proposed his revolutionary "seduction theory" in a report entitled "The Aetiology of Hysteria" (1896):

> at the bottom of every case of hysteria there are one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience, occurrences which belong to the earliest years of childhood, but which can be reproduced through the work of psychoanalysis in spite of the intervening decades. (1984: 271, original italics)

The intervening period of incubation between the decisive trauma and its later eruptions fine-tuned Freud's ear to the dynamics of the unconscious. As James Strachey observes, "'Unconscious' was in the first instance a purely descriptive term which accordingly included what is temporarily latent" (1989: xxviii). Closely pressed and pursued by the aetiology of neurosis, Freud finally located it in "a deep, mysterious place, whose presence, in mystical fashion, accounts for all

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termed "catharsis." This case was the practice of the beginning of the psychoanalysis, which is later developed by Freud.

16 Freud disguised the identity of Katharina's abusive father, attributing the molestation to her uncle.

the unknown" (Mitchell 1974: 6). The unravelling of the unconscious rendered psychoanalysis theoretically informed.

The seduction theory was supressed when Freud completely reversed his position nine years later in 1896, insisting instead that sexual memories were in fact fantasies, emerging in response to the child's desire for the opposite-sex parent and its corresponding jealousy towards the other. Freud's gesture, however, initiated a period of incubation in the study of trauma. Looking back at the study of trauma, it alternates between episodes of forgetting and remembering. As Judith Lewis Herman perceptively remarks, "The study of psychological trauma has a curious history – one of episodic amnesia. Periods of active investigation have alternated with periods of oblivion" (1992: 7). In *The Assault on Truth* (1984), availing himself of unique access to Freud's papers and letters kept from public view, Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson attributes Freud's abandonment of the seduction theory to his failure to cope with a pervasive sense of beleaguerment and assault: "what Freud had uncovered in 1896 – that, in many instances, children are the victims of sexual violence and abuse within their own families – became such a liability that he literally had to banish it from his consciousness" (1984: xx).

Finally, Freud turned to examine his own dreams and childhood memories, which in turn led him to trace the aetiology of neurosis back to early childhood. To ascertain the origin of neurosis, he formulated the Oedipal theory[17] in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). Inspired by *Oedipus Rex*, he constructed the psychic life of the subject around the castration ordeal enjoined by the father/law, thereby attributing neurosis to the nascent ego's failure to master the Oedipus complex. Naturally, tightly entangled with the constitutive loss, the child's entering into culture is unsettling and traumatic.

The study of trauma did not become the subject of a wide range of studies until the Vietnam War, and it has been gaining attention ever since in connection with psychiatry, psychoanalysis, neurobiology and sociology. In the wake of the symptoms exhibited by combat veterans from the Vietnam War, the study of trauma has found new life in the study of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), which defines trauma according to the notion given by the American Psychiatric Associ-

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[17] Many of Freud's key psychoanalytic concepts, first appearing formally in his significant theoretical work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, are foreshadowed in the letters he wrote to his colleague Wilhelm Fliess during the 1890s. Freud's first reference to the Oedipus complex comes in a letter dated 15 October 1897, in which he writes, "A single idea of general value dawned on me. I have found, in my case too, [the phenomenon of] being in love with my mother and jealous of my father, and I now consider it a universal event in early childhood" (qtd. in Stanton 1992: 291).

ation in 1980. As a fundamental "disorder of memory," PTSD includes the "symptoms of what [have] previously been called shell shock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome, and traumatic neurosis, and refer[s] to responses to both human and natural catastrophes" (Caruth 1995b: 3).

Deriving from the Greek *trauma*, the originary meaning of the word concerns a physical injury or wound imposed on a body. Its later usage, however, has been extended to a kind of damage to the psyche caused by a traumatic event "particularly in the medical and psychiatric literature" (Caruth 1996: 3). Ruth Leys designates post-traumatic stress disorder as fundamentally a disorder of memory. She explains:

> owing to the emotions of terror and surprise caused by certain events, the mind is split or dissociated: it is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed. As a result, the victim is unable to recollect and integrate the hurtful experience in normal consciousness; instead, she is haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories. (Leys 2000: 2)

Consequently, PTSD appears as a claustrophobic fusion of past and present.

Leys' concept of trauma aligns itself with Morrison's formulation of rememory to explore the slave trauma. In Morrison's works, rememory first refers to the lingering effect of slavery, the haunting memory of the psychic horror perpetuated upon black people by the chattel system, which in turn incites the desire for the pre-oedipal bond with the maternal body before the encroachment of slavery-induced trauma. In this light, rememory both registers the ravages of slavery and orientates her characters towards healing.

As unremittingly intrusive experiences not yet completely taken in, trauma exhibits its uncanny power to bridge the margin between past and present, and, in particular, to restore the real. The lapse of time between the decisive trauma and its later reenactments was discussed by Freud in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) in the following way:

> It may happen that someone gets away, apparently unharmed, from the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident, for instance a train collision. In the course of the following weeks, however, he develops a series of grave psychical and motor symptoms, which can be ascribed only to his shock or whatever else happened at the time of the accident. (1967: 84, italics mine)

Consequently, Freud uses "latency" to address "the time that elapse[s] between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms" (1967: 84), bringing into sharp focus the repetitive nature of traumatic, hysterical symptoms. This passage

suggests first the aftermath of trauma; alternatively, however, the word "unharmed" implies the victim's failure to register the original trauma. Put slightly differently, the victim remains unconscious of the meaning of the precipitating trauma. The unconscious character of trauma is also illuminated by Ulman and Brothers:

> real traumatic events shatter archaic narcissistic fantasies central to the organization of self-experience and that in this shattering and subsequent faulty [. . .] attempts [sic] to restore these fantasies lies the unconscious meaning of the traumatic event. (1988: xii)

The unconscious meaning of trauma refers firstly to the devastating effect of the traumatic event, which paralyzes the conscious self; secondly, however, it refers to the onsets of trauma (the reexperiencing of the symptoms of PTSD), which goes entirely beyond the survivor's conscious control.

Trauma's time[18] is circular and interruptive. The exigency of departure from the decisive trauma emerges in response to the demands of living in the present. Clearly, the departure implies a tacit denial of the precipitating trauma, which renders the ensuing reenactments extremely haunting and present-sabotaging. This moment is exemplified in Morrison's work by Beloved's intrusion into the cloistered world of her mother and sister in an effort to reenact what happened there eighteen years before. Highlighting a ghostly entanglement and engagement of past and present, traumatic reenactment locks up the survivor in the prison of the precipitating trauma; the distance between past and present destroyed, the survivor is divested of the ability to distance him/herself from the horror of trauma and to re-connect with his/her uncontaminated psychic part.

Freud comes up with the idea of the "foreign body" to deal with the literality and recurring nature of traumatic memories:

> We have formed certain conceptions – and they can easily be proved by analysis – of how something gets forgotten and how after a time it can come to light again. The forgotten material is not extinguished, only "repressed"; its *traces* are extant in the memory in their original freshness, but they are isolated by "counter-cathexes." They cannot establish contact with other intellectual processes; they are unconscious, inaccessible to consciousness. It may happen that certain parts of the repressed material have escaped this process, have remained accessible to memory and occasionally reappear in

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[18] The concept "trauma's time" was coined by Aimee L. Pozorski in her article of that name (2006).

> consciousness, but even then they are isolated, a *foreign body* without any connection with the rest of the mind. (1967: 120–121, italics mine)

The "foreign body" highlights the corporeality and incomprehensibility of traumatic memory. In "'Foreign Bodies': Traumatic Latency and Corporeality in *Beloved*" (2006), Laura Di Prete employs Freud's idea of the "foreign body" to read *Beloved*. Analyzing this passage, she argues that designated by Freud as a foreign body, "such traces remain 'isolated,' unbound from other mental processes, loosely *floating* when 'forgotten' or when, occasionally, they rise to memory" (2006: 51–52, italics mine). Di Prete's insight into the floating foreign body coincides with this study's assertion of the volatility of the *objet a*, which appears as something the subject fails to pin down and grab hold of in the symbolic order. In this thesis, I draw on the floating, volatile *objet a* to represent the spatialized real of slavery.

In *Unclaimed Experience*, analyzing Freud's study of the emergence of the Jews, Caruth writes, "Centering his story in the nature of the leaving, and returning, constituted by trauma, Freud resituates the very possibility of history in the nature of a traumatic departure" (1996: 15). Emphasizing a structural belatedness intrinsic to trauma, Caruth deepens the conception of trauma with her temporal understanding of it: she suggests that a history surfaces into consciousness (becomes fully evident) belatedly – "only in connection with another place and in another time" (1996: 17). For example, in *Beloved*, the title character's eighteen-year departure, interpretable either as Sethe's conscious or unconscious act of suppressing the infanticide, bears the impact of history; on the other hand, her return promises both the healing of the scar on her neck and the scar on the psyche of her mother.

In her dissertation "Writing Trauma, Writing Time and Space" (2010), Marinella Rodi-Risberg interprets Caruth's definition of trauma as spatio-temporal. Studying American author Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* (1991) and the Lear group of father-daughter incest narratives, she focuses on how trauma is represented, acted out, and possibly worked over in literature, not just through references to time but also to geographical, bodily, and textual space, finally arguing that trauma fiction itself can become a memory-site for remembering and bearing witness to past traumatic moments. It is notable that one of the major claims of her work is that the structure of trauma is both spatial and temporal.

The spatial structure of traumatic memory addresses the psychic rupture inflicted on the victim's mind by the death drive of the trauma. Freud's and Breuer's study of a severe case of hysteria examines this structure:

> an ideational content is formed during *hypnoid* states; when this has increased to a sufficient extent, it gains control, during a period of 'acute hysteria', of the somatic innervation and of the patient's whole existence, and creates chronic symptoms and attacks. (1957: 16, italics mine)

Hysterical symptoms are often somatic or bodily, signaling the damage done to the psyche of the traumatized person. From this perspective, the word "hypnoid" suggests the unconscious dissociation between body and mind, which addresses the splitting off of the unconscious from the conscious at the traumatic moment and its later reenactments. Put another way, traumatic reenactments often speak through the unconscious, that is, "all kinds of symptoms, traces, gaps, discontinuities and excesses that appear in ordinary conscious discourse" (Easthope 1999: 5). In this connection, featuring overflowing motor symptoms, the hysterical attacks eviscerate the victim, turning him/her into the living dead. It is best illustrated by what "Katharina" had gone through:

> 'It comes over me all at once. First of all it's like something pressing on my eyes. My head gets so heavy, there is a dreadful buzzing, and I feel so giddy that I almost fall over. Then there is something crushing my chest so that I can't get my breath.' (Freud and Breuer 1957: 126)

The decisive trauma has transmuted into a foreign body, which manifests itself as a corporeal double attacking the victim in the later stages, locking him/her up in an overwhelming, claustrophobic fusion of past and present.

In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz reads the body as composed of a series of "corporeal surfaces," the blank page on which inscriptions such as tattooing is written (1994: 117). This work develops her idea, studying the black body in pain in Morrison's writing as registering the cultural trauma of slavery. Inspired by Grosz's volatile body, Kevin Everod Quashie's concept of the memory body argues for memory as fashioned and imagined in corporeal terms: "memory is either a body in full – a literal, material corpus – or is a central attribute of a body, of how a body is constructed, engaged, and identified" (2004: 99). This term is highly useful to my study for explaining the corporeal qualities of traumatic memory, as well as certain places as loci of traumatic encounters. Informed by Grosz's idea of the volatile body and Quashie's memory body, this thesis claims that the black body in pain is the volatile memory body. It is activated by its desire for the lost *objet a*, which is removed from it by the genocidal system of slavery in Morrison's fiction.

Existing on the verge of repression and resurrection, combining the physical with the psychic, and associating a form of ongoing life with destruction and death, the meaning of trauma has from the very start come as doubled and duplicated, leav-

ing open the possibility of the examination of the uncanny real in psychoanalysis and psychiatry as well as poststructuralism. The polyvalence of trauma contributes to its distinctively important status in literature. Laying claim to the interspace between fantasy and reality, and bridging the gap between past and present, literature foregrounds an intellectual darkness especially disposed to psychoanalytic illumination, thus appearing as the intersecting point of psychoanalysis and the uncanny. The interspace foregrounds a haunting intellectual uncertainty, a text that calls out for its silences to be explained, deciphered and theorized. Similarly, Cathy Caruth observes that "it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet" (1996: 3). Empowered with the meaning-defying real, literature like the novels of Toni Morrison brings to light what should have remained concealed, therefore emerging as a unique place to study trauma. Finally, deriving power from the real, literature and the uncanny, trauma overflows them, functioning as the Archimedean point that permits them to participate in and to interact with each other.

1.4 Rememory: Recovering, Revising and Working through the Real

Fully aware of her creative responsibility for African American people, Morrison writes, "The work that I do frequently falls, in the minds of most people, into that realm of fiction called fantastic, or mythic, or magical, or unbelievable." However, she considers as her "single gravest responsibility (in spite of that magic) [. . .] not to lie" (1987b: 112–113). In her novels, what she relies on and will not belie are images, pictures and feelings, or to put it more clearly, the signifiers which defy being pinned down and petrified into the unconscious register:

> What makes it fiction is the nature of the imaginative act: my reliance on the image – on the remains – in addition to recollection, to yield up a kind of truth.[19] By "image," of course, I don't mean "symbol"; I simply mean "picture" and the *feelings* that accompany the picture. (1987b: 112, italics mine)

It is arguable that the pictures which haunt the writer in her process of interpreting fact or composing fiction are the signifiers motivated by the truth buried alive in the American history of slavery.

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[19] By "truth," Morrison refers to the truth buried beneath the fact held by the white hermeneutics.

In *Beloved*, Morrison uses "rememory" to address the inescapability of slavery as well as to provide possible ways of healing its scar. In a conversation with Denver, Sethe describes the cultural trauma (memory) in the following way:

> "I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened." (1997: 35–36)

Evidently, Sethe is commenting on the circular, interruptive and intrusive nature of trauma's time. Her insistence on the literality and indestructibility of her individual memories suggests that they are actually "fragments of a historical memory" (Krumholz 1992: 395). Put another way, she speaks to the inescapable horror of slavery which implicates all American people of African origin. Correspondingly, in "Giving Body to the Word," Jean Wyatt invented the term "spatialized time" (1993: 477) to represent the aftershock of the slave trauma in *Beloved*. Obviously "spatialized" addresses the persistence and the somatic nature of traumatogenic memory – "the puzzling leap from the mental to the physical" (Freud 1976: 297). Further, in "Spacing and Placing Experience," Patricia McKee experiments with space and place in an effort to represent the real of trauma in *Sula*; she discusses them "both as components of social and psychological order and as components of historical experience" (1997: 40). She draws on the characters of the space/place to delve into the psychological damage done to black people by the tenacity of slavery trauma. In Morrison's novels, the slave trauma is spatialized, marginalizing and debilitating American people of African descent as the racial Other.

In *Beloved*, the rememory blurs the boundary between self and other. Sethe describe it to Denver in the following way: "Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no" (1997: 36). Sethe uses the thought picture to depict the onset of a cultural trauma which defies linguistic representation. She further says, "It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else." In this novel, traumatized people frequently "bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else." For example, Denver's recurring nightmare of decapitation is suggestive of Sethe's failure to transform the overwhelming past into abstract signifiers: "what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there" (1997: 36). To clarify, Beloved's anger and grief over the cutting of her

throat by her mother are spatialized in 124. Significantly, Sethe's deciphering of the cultural trauma makes the memory of slavery visible and palpable, that is, something one could see, something one could touch and feel. The cultural trauma is preserved in forms such as somatic symptoms which appear as the memory trace of the traumatic past. Though memory deals with something physically absent, Morrison's fiction contents itself with delineating memory in corporeal ways in order to foreground the scourge of slavery. For example, even before Beloved's physical presence, she drives her two brothers away from home. Likewise, Sethe's comment on spatialized trauma presages the return of Beloved. In the same way, the ghost epitomizes and embodies the enslaved and enslaving past, functioning as the body memory of slave history.

Morrison's writing deals in effect with her efforts to recover and to work through the spatialized real of slavery. Regarding slavery as the truth buried alive in American history, she interests herself in delving into truth via fiction: "[truth is] stranger [than fiction], meaning that it's odd. It may be excessive, it may be more interesting, but the important thing is that it's random – and fiction is not random" (1987b: 113). By random, Morrison points to the fact that truth exists beyond human comprehension; it is ineffable, inexplicable and yet ineluctable. Availing herself of the spatialized real defying conscious symbolization, Morrison eventually delves into the relationship between truth, fact and fiction:

> Therefore the crucial distinction for me is not the difference between fact and fiction, but the distinction between fact and truth. Because facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot. So if I'm looking to find and expose a truth about the interior life of people who didn't write it (which doesn't mean that they didn't have it); if I'm trying to fill in the blanks that the slave narratives left – to part the veil that was so frequently drawn, to implement the stories that I heard – then the approach that's most productive and most trustworthy for me is the recollection that moves from the image to the text. Not from the text to the image. (1987b: 113)

For Morrison, a fact which is too easily tampered with by the dominant ideology is falsified and flimsy, thus amounting to no fact; by contrast, truth, which derives credibility from image/memory trace and survives history, prevails and triumphs. Here the writer reiterates the importance of image (the Lacanian signifier) in deciphering a veiled history. Opposing the fact inscribed on American history by the dominant racial discourse, she instead puts emphasis on the weight of truth, designating it as the locus of the real of slavery. Prizing truth over fact, she places more reliance on the signifier of the memory trace in revising the history of slavery and recomposing an obliterated past. In her novels, she foregrounds people prone to traumatic reenactment of the past to pronounce her tacit denial of the American history filtered through the literary texts authorized by the white sym-

bolic. For this reason, fiction is not fictional; rather, by unmasking a falsified fact, it unearths the fragments of truth embedded in history. In a similar vein, Dominick LaCapra points out that, on a structural or general level, fictional narrative

> may also involve truth claims [. . .] by providing insight into phenomena such as slavery or the Holocaust, by offering a reading of a process or period, or by giving at least a plausible *'feel'* for experience and emotion which may be difficult to arrive at through restrictive documentary methods. (2001: 13, italics mine)

The "feel" evokes Lacan's emphasis on the haunting nature of the real, whose eruption into the symbolic sets signifiers in motion. In this sense, fiction can be read as composed of symbolic signifiers activated by the hidden truth.

Lacan draws a sharp distinction between remembering and memory, designating the former as pertaining to the order of history and the latter as characterising the living organism as such: "One then says that a living substance, following a given experience, undergoes a transformation such that it will no longer react to the same experience in the same way as before" (Lacan 1988b: 185). Lacan's concept of memory throws light on the change brought about when the subject learns something or encounters something for the first time, addressing the way that an organism is transformed by an experience. The Lacanian memory refers to the memory trace, that is, mnemic signifers inscribed on the body. In "The Signification of the Phallus," Lacan makes an evident effort to humanize the signifier, stating that "it is not only man who speaks, but in man and through man that it [. . .] speaks; in that his nature becomes woven by effects in which the structure of the language of which he becomes the material can be refound" (2006: 578). The signifiers distinguish themselves with an extent of autonomy via the body and flesh. From this perspective, the Lacanian memory is volatile, varying according to outside stimulations; it is bodily, affecting the way we now respond to things physically, even unconsciously. In addition, pertaining to the order of history, the Lacanian remembering aligns itself with the Morrisonian fact.

In Freud's system, memory trace is mainly represented by body memory in trauma-producing situations. In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), he suggests that the ego's effort to inhibit the unbinding death drive sets in motion all psychic systems; as a result, "an 'anticathexis' on a grand scale is set up, for whose benefit all the other psychical systems are impoverished, so that the remaining psychical functions are extensively paralyzed or reduced" (2001a: 30). For this reason, the process of restricting the traumatic force of the death drive is unconscious. Studying Freud's ideas concerning how the traces of perception function, Lacan

suggests that "in order for these traces of perception to pass into memory, they must first be effaced in perception" (1977: 46). What he alludes to here is the subject's failure to register the affective event consciously. For this reason, what is repressed is the death drive of the traumatogenic event. In this connection, repression deals in fact with the disaffecting of the death drive. Yet these traces have been successfully inscribed on the body: the depletion of energy spawns mnemic symbols on the body in an unconscious, unobtrusive way.

Studying the psychic mechanism of hysterical patients, Freud and Breuer write, *"These [pathogenic] experiences are completely absent from the patients' memory when they are in a normal psychical state, or are only present in a highly summary form*" (1957: 9, original italics). However, not having been sufficiently, consciously abreacted, the decisive trauma remains attached to the body as affective memory. It follows logically that "the memories which have become the determinants of hysterical phenomena persist for a long time with astonishing freshness and with the whole of affective colouring" (1957: 9, original italics). Apparently, the authors suggest that the affective memories reappear as somatic symptoms in hysterical outbursts. In this way, the abstract psychical trauma is restored, incarnated and spatialized, which suggests the corporeality of the symptoms. Accordingly, trauma deals in effect with the eruption of the real into the symbolic order, with its symbolization of death in the form of bodily symptoms. Additionally, what renders trauma uncanny is its corporeality, its capacity to bind down and control the body.

In "The Site of Memory," the process of "remembering" (later reformulated as rememory in *Beloved*) is inaugurated and impelled by what Morrison terms an "emotional memory":

> the act of imagination is bound up with memory. You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. "Floods" is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory – what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our "flooding." (1987: 119)

The emotional memory is the memory trace or totality of mnemic symbol which give voice to the indelible real. As bell hooks writes, "To bear the burden of memory one must willingly journey to places long uninhabited, searching the debris of history for traces of the unforgettable, all knowledge of which has been

suppressed" (1992: 172). Accordingly, the rememory of what is repressed transforms Morrison *qua* writer into a foreign body, orientating her towards what is screened out by white historians. Thus, the writer's desire to write speaks to her desire to rememory and appropriate the history of slavery as her own, to restore the real of chattel bondage to American history, and, perhaps most importantly, to work through the cultural trauma.

Significantly, in Morrison's texts, rememory exhibits its uncanny power in the restoration of the black community and an African belief system by storytelling, through which the trauma-ridden can gain access to a common history with their people. Eloquently, Linden Peach claims that rememory

> is appropriate to a *dispossessed* people. Since slavery destroyed not only whole communities but entire families, banning their religions, stopping their music and eradicating their cultures, the only way in which an individual could acquire any sense of their ancestral line was to possess and piece together the stories and memories of others, to literally acquire for themselves the texts of which they had been deprived. (2000: 118, italics mine)

The idea of rememory then reflects the dispossessed people's desire to disrupt the invisibility, silence and self-sabotaging solitude imposed on them by racist genocidal culture; rememory always deals with the rememory of the *objet a* to restore African American identity. Of no less significance, despite the past/present clash characterizing traumatic memory, Morrison's concept of rememory emphasizes the participation of the public in the private rememory of the traumatic past.

Given the fact that in Morrison's novels, trauma derives mostly from dysfunctional black motherhood, resulting in turn from the stultifying slavery, the process of rememory addresses the rememory of the maternal body. Consequently, it oscillates between the memory of the real of slavery and maternal plenitude. Morrison's tendency to unearth the truth buried alive in history then corresponds to her insistence on collectively bearing witness to the real, that is, the cultural trauma which links the author and the reader, American people of African descent and the rest of the world. Consequently, her rememory endeavors to restore the Lacanian real while protecting the survivor from falling victim to its lingering influence. As a compromise of past and present, rememory fuses life and death, enabling Morrison's characters to step out of themselves and into each other, which enhances self-connection, claiming ownership of self, and healing in her works.

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The following chapter studies the uncanny via doubling in Morrison's work. Fusing the familiar and the unfamiliar, Freud's concept of the uncanny addresses the

oedipal loss which results in the repression of the maternal body as well as the child's unrelenting desire for it in the following stages of life. This chapter firstly examines the affinity between, and the doubling of, the life and death drives. To clarify, the life drive deals with the child's nostalgic longing for the past maternal plenitude, the lack of which renders the drive death-oriented – the death drive. Secondly, the chapter employs Freud's conception of melancholia, Heinz Kohut's notion of the nuclear self and Julia Kristeva's idea of the foreigner to elaborate doubling in an effort to disclose the deprivation the subject has experienced upon his/her entrance into culture. Furthermore, doubling is also explored through the Lacanian real, which represents not only the idealized merger with the maternal body but also slavery trauma, bent on shattering the close relationship between the mother/child dyad in Morrison's novels.

Chapter 3 probes the polyvalent *objet a* with reference in particular to the phallus,[20] the gaze, the abject and the body in Morrison's works. The debilitating lack inflicted on black people gives rise to their rampant desire for the *objet a*. Lacan elaborates the polyvalence of the *objet a* through relating it to the voice, the gaze, the breast, the phallus, the nothing, etc. (Lacan 2006: 693). Dehumanizing and dissembling, the Lacanian gaze reflects the lack ingrained in the Other. This chapter revises the gaze, using it to both represent the white supremacist gaze and the black maternal gaze which escorts the traumatized black people on their way to healing. In order to elaborate the origin and volatility of the *objet a*, I study it respectively in relation to Melanie Klein's good object and Kristeva's abject, fusing together in the *objet a* the polarized terms. Lacan claims that, as a reminder of the constitutive loss, the *objet a* "serves as a symbol of the lack [. . .] of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking" (1977: 103). Accordingly, I highlight the lack (real) inherent in the privileged signifier, studying the phallus as the abject phallus to address the transformation of the object into the abject. Finally, the phallus is utilized to study the volatility of the body, a locus which both registers and disrupts the symbolic power.

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[20] This term appears very rarely in Freud, "usually in reference to the use antiquity makes of a figurative representation of the male member as object of veneration" (Levy-Stokes 2001: 136). However, Freud utilizes the adjective "phallic" to elaborate "his ideas on infantile sexual theories, particularly in reference to the phallic stage or the phallic mother, who is endowed with having a phallus" (2001: 136). It is notable that for Freud, the phallus is not equivalent to the penis. For the boy at the Oedipal stage, "the discovery of the phallus is inscribed in the register of lack"; for the girl, it is "inscribed in the register of the veil." In other words, the girl's discovery of her lack of the penis incites her desire for it, which "serves as screen hiding the nature of her own lack" (André 1999: 190). Significantly, Lacan develops Freud's concept of the phallus, nominating it as both "a signifier and a lack" (Levy-Stokes 2001: 137). Put slightly differently, the phallus serves as a privileged signifier of the lack inherent in the Other, that is, the symbolic order in Lacan's theoretical system.

Chapter 4 opens the detailed analysis of Morrison's novels. It explores doubling as resulting from rememorying the maternal silence by way of Kristeva's concept of the foreigner. Embedded in the shattering chattel enslavement of African American people, the trauma of maternal silence manifests itself especially as the foreignness planted between mother and child, reducing them to strangers to themselves and each other in Morrison's works. At another level, it gives rise to their fanatical desire for each other – a doubling. Morrison explores doubling through rememorying the past, that is, storytelling, which orientates the traumatized towards the real of the system as well as a nostalgic past of plenitude. Significantly, storytelling proves to be an efficient way to break the maternal silence as well as the silence inflicted on black people by the white symbolic. Availing herself of the rememorying of the maternal silence, Morrison moves back and forth between past and present, life and death, and self and other, seeking to restore the real of slavery to American history.

Chapter 5 continues chapter 4's discussion of trauma by studying the eroticization of black people. Examining the ways black people tragically internalize their role with respect to white people through the phallus, this study stresses the harm done to black psyches in the colonizing culture of America. This is manifested by the intraracial schisms resulting from the invisibility and ugliness inflicted on them by the white symbolic. Eroticized and demonized as the phallus, black people have in effect been buried alive. In her fiction, Morrison juggles life and death, making efforts to bury her characters in order to revive them at a later stage; confronted with the change, chaos and evanescence of life, black people deposit in death life, order and everlasting beauty, reflecting Morrison's literary project to revitalize African people in the midst of victimizing, exploitative culture.

Chapter 6 discusses the formation of African American identity. In *Cultural Trauma*, Ron Eyerman designates slavery as a cultural trauma which functions as a "primal scene" of collective identity. The present study explores this trauma by way of the white supremacist gaze, which functions to dehumanize and marginalize black people. Conferring on the white gaze power or perfection, American people of African origin are obsessed with either locating a black self in the white gaze or obtaining the bluest eye, as Pecola in the novel of that name does. Consequently, the impenetrable opaqueness of the white gaze emerges as the spatialized real of slavery and perpetuates the cultural trauma. On the other hand, it bands

together all black people in their desperate pursuit of self-identity. Therefore, I designate African American identity as a symptom[21] of slavery.

Chapter 7 surveys the process of healing, building on Grosz's conception of the "volatile body." In Morrison's fiction, the function of rememory is inseparable from the body and healing emerges first and significantly from the location of the body. The Groszian body is sexually charged, harbouring the force of libido, which is seen by Freud as "the force by which the sexual instinct is represented in the mind" (Ryan 1992: 222). In Morrison's writing, libido is critical for healing the scars of slavery. Dealing with the rememory of the maternal silence, the return to the past is a return to the maternal body. Although the return is both life-restoring and life-sabotaging, it contributes to this study's concern of the maternal body, the original site of trauma, as the locus of healing. This study links the volatile body with the polyvalent *objet a*, thereby highlighting the crucial importance of the restoration of the maternal body, that is, the maternal *objet a*, to healing. My objective is to examine how the maternal body functions as the locus where rememory of the past takes place, an essential prerequisite for processing and repossessing the traumatic past, thereby promising a future. Consequently, engaging with the body charged with past traumatic memories proves an exigency for trauma survivors buried alive in that past.

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[21] My designation corresponds to the inconsistency and polyvalence inherent in the gaze as the *objet a*: on the one hand, it suggests African American identity as a site loaded with the lack of the white Other, that is, the intersecting oppressions of race, class and nation; on the other hand, black people's attraction to the gaze reflects their desire for self-definition, valuation, reliance and independence in the face of these oppressions.

2 THE UNCANNY AS ENGAGEMENT WITH THE OTHER

> [T]his uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed.
>
> – Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," 2003.
>
> Something comes back because in some sense it was never properly there in the first place.
>
> – Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny*, 2003.
>
> From death to birth, from the imminence of death to the timeless pleasure of womb-life, from terror to lasciviousness, from death to the mother.
>
> – Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny*, 2003.

In this chapter, the uncanny will be studied as an engagement with the Other. Dealing with the fusion of the familiar and the unfamiliar, the uncanny proves to be a special locus in studying the entanglement of past and present. Located in "the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" (2003: 123), it originates from and circles back to the Oedipus stage, which highlights the castration complex. Additionally, the fear and desire deriving from this stage is critical in the formulation of the psychic life of the subject, functioning "as a nodal point stretching back and forth from birth to death, summarizing within its instance the totality of loss" (Mitchell 1974: 76).

The child's entry into the Oedipus stage proclaims his/her development into a cultural being. Yet Freud reads castration as analogous to death,[22] as it signifies the child's loss of oneness with the maternal body. For this reason, there is no clear-cut line between the life and death drives in Freud's theoretical system. Both address the individual's efforts to restore a nostalgic past of plenitude and fullness. To make up for the oedipal loss, the individual makes an effort to incorporate the small-o other, identifying with a desired object, that is, the ideal ego. Yet the intrinsic lack of the Other functions to eviscerate the ideal ego, turning it into the unrelentingly criticizing ego ideal. Thus the uncanny addresses the interface between past and present, the clash between the life drive and the death drive, and the conflict between the other and the Other. In Morrison's writing, the un-

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[22] See, for instance, Freud's "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety" (1993: 285–286).

canny manifests itself as the characters' compulsive reenactment of the traumatic past, which bespeaks their unconscious desire to restore an unsullied, grandiose self.

2.1 Death Drive or Life Drive?

In Freud's theoretical system, "the dominating tendency of mental life [. . .] is the effort to reduce, to keep constant or to remove internal tension due to stimuli [. . .]" – the pleasure principle (2001a: 55–56). Put another way, the pleasure principle engages itself in "keeping the quantity of excitation low" In contrast, Freud considers as unpleasurable "anything that is calculated to increase that quantity" (2001a: 9). What he introduces here is external excitations threatening to disrupt the unity of the psyche of the ego. At this point, it is useful to differentiate between binding and unbinding. Unbinding aims to "undo connections and so to destroy things," and thus addresses situations which produce unpleasure; by contrast, binding aims to "establish ever greater unities and to preserve them" (1949: 6). Certainly, both binding and unbinding deal with the ego's relationship to an outside object – the former aims to build a connection with the object while the latter strives to dismantle connection with it.

The object functions originally as an agent charged with libido. It is useful to mark the sexual instincts[23] off from the ego instincts. Aiming at self-preservation and directed at the ego, the ego-instincts "arise from the coming to life of inanimate matter and seek to restore the inanimate state" (Freud 2001a: 44). Accordingly, the ego instinct anti-cathects[24] the ego, returning it to an earlier inorganic state (see also p. 37–38), and is associated with unbinding and unpleasure. On the other hand, sexual instincts aim at "a prolongation of life," that is, the binding effort of establishing connections. At first glance, the ego-instinct is death-oriented, intimately entangled with trauma-producing situations as it "exercise[s] pressure towards death" (2001a: 44). Actually, this instinct addresses the living substance's tendency to return to the original, unindividuated state with its pur-

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[23] The English Standard Edition of Freud's work (London: Vintage 1953-61) fails to distinguish between *Trieb* and *Instinkt*, translating both as 'instinct.' However, since drive is something Freud develops from Darwin's theory of evolution in order to study humanity, I will avail myself of the distinction between instinct and drive to illuminate the realm of the unconscious.

[24] In Freud's earlier works, cathexis refers to a sum of inflowing excitations "'spread over the memory-traces of ideas somewhat as an electric charge is spread over the surface of a body'" (Cazeaux 2000: 494). However, with his proposition of the original libinal cathexis of the ego as related to object-cathexes, "he ultimately identifies cathexis with his concept of libido" (2000: 494).

pose of re-establishing the state of things before the incursion of external excitements.

Since the ego acts according to the reality principle in an effort to ward off destruction and death, the ego-instinct is self-preserving and conservative. Moreover, there is no distinct demarcation between the reality and the pleasure principles: directed at keeping the quantity of the intruding excitations low, the pleasure principle is simultaneously modified and regulated by the reality principle, which "does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but [. . .] nevertheless demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction" (2001a: 10). In other words, the two principles combine to master the intrusion of external excitations. Accordingly, "following from the principle of constancy" (2001a: 9), the pleasure principle brings itself into relation with feelings of pleasure and, accordingly, the death drive.

The unpleasure resulting from without may be overwhelming, and a protective shield of the psychic system emerges to balance the external stimuli and the internal perceptions. However, "towards the inside there can be no such shield" (2001a: 29). Therefore, a situation is understood by Freud as traumatic when the influx of excitations from outside is powerful enough to break through the protective shield of a "stimulus barrier" which functions to guard an organism against excessive excitations from outside:

> Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism's energy and to set in motion every possible defensive measure. [. . .] There is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus, and another problem arises instead – the problem of mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in and of *binding* them, in the psychical sense, so that they can then be disposed of. (2001a: 29–30, italics mine)

Binding and unbinding are tightly entangled with each other in the traumatic moment. At the core of the traumatic experience is the unbinding initiated by the death drive bent on fragmenting the ego. In other words, the death drive engages itself in disrupting psychic connection. Simultaneously, it involves a binding of the ego, which summons cathectic energy to "provide sufficiently high cathexes of energy in the environs of the breach" (2001a: 30). In an effort to 'disinfect' those freshly inflowing excitations (the death drive), the cathectic energy is bound and hence quiescent. Accordingly, the binding of the energy streaming into the mental apparatus deals with a transformation from freely flowing cathexis to a quiescent one (2001a: 31). Of no less importance, the quiescent cathexis prepares the traumatized for the process of the anticathexis of the death drive.

The cathexis is thus enacted as a necessary preliminary to the process of anticathexis, which manifests itself as repression – the task of suspending or suppressing undesirable actions and thoughts. Ruth Leys comments that "trauma was thus defined in quasi-military terms as a widespread rupture or breach in the ego's protective shield, one that set in motion every possible attempt at defense even as the pleasure principle itself was put out of action" (2000: 23). In consequence, anticathexis deals with inhibiting the unbinding death drive from entering consciousness. In other words, the binding effort refers to keeping unconscious the unbinding death drive – the pinning down and dissolving of the unbinding death drive. Accordingly, both binding (cathexis) and unbinding (anticathexis) address the traumatized person's effort to survive the traumatogenic experience. In view of this, they contrast each other, "combine with each other", and complement each other as the two essential features of Freud's theory of the instinct (Freud 1949: 5–6).

The entanglement of the mechanisms of binding and unbinding can also be studied in Freud's concept "the compulsion to repeat." In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," Freud first directs his attention to the claim of psychological damage resulting from the overpowering and overwhelming imposition of historical events on the human psyche. Faced with the recurring intrusion of nightmares of battlefield survivors and repetition compulsion experienced by people who have succumbed to painful events, he is struck by the unmediated memory of the original violence, which, not confinable yet to any definitions of wish-fulfilment, goes beyond the pleasure principle. The recurring nightmares are no doubt unbinding; on another level, they speak to the survivors' efforts to bind the energies of the death drive through experiencing it repeatedly in the dream. Finally, Freud falls back on the *fort-da* game played by his grandson at the age of one year and a half in an effort to make sense of the enigma of the lingering horror of the original trauma.

Freud's grandson is depicted as having a disturbing habit of repeatedly throwing any small objects available away and then hunting them back. He also takes pleasure in throwing over the edge of his cot a wooden reel attached to a piece of string, and then, after saying "o-o-o-o," pulling it back to himself saying, "da." Freud and the boy's mother interpret his utterance as "Fort" and "Da" (German for *gone* and *there*). Accordingly, Freud infers that the boy employs the game to alleviate his anxiety resulting from the mother's stealing away. On the other hand, however, he finds the pleasure principle falling far short of explaining the boy's compulsive repetition of the distressing experience, that is, the disappearance of his mother. Eventually, he comes up with a pleasure of another sort yielded by the process of repetition (2001a: 14–16).

In *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (1984), Peter Brooks interprets the child's inclination to repeat the unpleasurable experience as involving a "movement from a passive to an active role in regard to his mother's disappearance, claiming mastery in a situation to which he has been compelled to submit" (2002: 98). Accordingly, it is an assertion of control over his mother's absence. By extension, the critic reads the varying repetition forms such as "rhyme, alliteration, assonance, meter, refrain, all the mnemonic elements of literature" as the writer's efforts to build links between past and present, to establish "a future that will be noticeable as some variation in the pattern" (2002: 99). It is clear that the future is achieved as a result of the interconnection of past and present, and the repetition of the past. At another point, he asserts that, in literary texts, repetition "may in fact work as a 'binding,' a binding of textual energies that allows them to be mastered by putting them into serviceable form, usable 'bundles,' within the energetic economy of the narrative" (2002: 101). In other words, repetition is employed by the writer to interconnect events in order to create plot. Brooks' insight can be applied to Morrison's use of rememory to reproduce and work through the traumatic slave past in her fiction in order to endow her characters with a liveable present, which finally orients them towards a future.

The cotton-reel which fills in the absence introduced by the disappearance of the mother suggests the child's entry into the register of symbols, that is, language. With great interest, Lacan reads the cotton-reel as "a small part of the subject that detaches itself from him while still remaining his, still retained" (1977: 62). With this, he reformulates the Freudian objects of drive as the *objet a*. Superficially, the ever-open gap which insinuates the loss of the *objet a* and remains the cause of a centrifugal tracing is filled in by the cotton-reel. Yet there is no point in repeating if the gap is replaceable with the metaphorical bobbin. Rather, what comes into being in the game is the libido, "*qua* pure life instinct, that is to say, immortal life" (1977: 198). Embodied by the cotton-reel, the presymbolic libido functions to alleviate the trauma of the void arising in response to the intervention of language. The child's compulsion to repeat reflects his insistence on the constant presence of his mother as an inseparable double of himself.

The game is affected by the search for pleasure from the very beginning. Identifying the daimonic nature of the game, Freud observes that

> children repeat unpleasurable experiences for the additional reason that they can master a powerful impression far more thoroughly by being active than they could by merely experiencing it passively. Each fresh repetition seems to strengthen the mastery they are in search of. [. . .] [R]epetition, the re-experiencing of something identical, is clearly in itself a source of pleasure. (2001a: 35–36)

The pleasure then consists in the process of exploring an object. This dynamic process, fusing together both pleasure and pain, relates the death drive to the desire first for mastery, and, secondly, for life, thereby merging the life and death drives as the encounter with the real.

The repetition compulsion emerges when the ego presses towards the "restoration of an earlier state of things" (Freud 2001a: 37). However, it is death-oriented as it recalls the decisive traumatogenic event. In this way, the repetition compulsion orients itself towards both the precipitating trauma and an unsullied past before the incursion of the trauma. Put slightly differently, the victim is forced to repeat the trauma in order to survive it. The compulsion to repeat thus addresses both the death drive and the life drive, and its inherent antinomy accounts for and contributes to the power of the uncanny.

In Freud's texts, the death drive is intimately entangled with the fear arising from the feeling of unhomeliness or disorientation. He expounds the daimonic power of the compulsion to repeat (the death drive) by recounting his uncanny experience in a small Italian town, where he is discomfited by his repetitive return to the same unfamiliar street flanked by little houses with windows at which "only heavily made-up women were to be seen" (Freud 2003: 144). Apparently, the women are strange and even frightening for the author as they are closely bound up with his feeling of fear and disorientation in a strange place. Additionally, the women look inanimate and uncanny as they, to borrow E. Jentsch's words, "leave [Freud] wondering whether [they are] real person[s] or [. . .] automaton[s]" (qtd. in Freud 2003: 135) – they arouse in him the uncanny sense of live burial.

Freud adduces his concept of "live burial" from Jentsch's ideas:

> Some would award the crown of the uncanny to the idea of being buried alive, only apparently dead. However, psychoanalysis has taught us that this terrifying fantasy is merely a variant of another, which was originally not at all frightening, but relied on a certain lasciviousness; this was the fantasy of living in the womb. (2003: 150)

It is evident that Freud fuses death with the unindividuated existence in the womb. The uncanny effect of live burial arises when the borders between life and death, pleasure and pain, beauty and horror are blurred. In parallel, for Lacan, the subject emerges as a form of

> attraction toward and defense against a primordial, overwhelming experience of [. . .] *jouissance*: a pleasure that is excessive, leading to a sense of being overwhelmed or disgusted, yet simultaneously providing a source of fascination. (Fink 1995: xii)

In this connection, the attraction of death originates from the desire to be buried alive in female serenity and silence; it speaks to something insoluble, insurmountable, yet extremely tempting about women, and recalls the timeless pleasure of womb-life.

Freud associates death with women. In "The Theme of the Three Caskets" (1913), he writes, "But it is in vain that an old man yearns for the love of woman as he had it first from his mother; the third of the Fates alone, the silent Goddess of Death, will take him into her arms" (2001g: 301). Studying the link between Freud's concept of the death drive and issues of gender, Elizabeth Bronfen claims, "Woman functions as privileged trope for the uncanniness of unity and loss, of independent identity and self-dissolution, of the pleasure of body and its decay" (1992: 56). Women's uncanniness arises from their capacity to combine polarized dyads. Correspondingly, Nicholas Royle observes that "the uncanny commingling of silence, woman and the desirableness of death is quite explicit in the 1913 essay ["The Theme of the Three Caskets"]" (2003: 87). Giving life as well as signifying solitude and death, fusing absence and fullness, woman's polyvalent role renders them a specific cultural trope to discuss the lack or Otherness imposed on the individual by sexist patriarchy.

The heavily made-up women in the Italian town, silent, and perhaps expressionless and detached, evoke in Freud the uncanny sense of live burial. Inevitably, he projects his feeling of disorientation and fear upon them. As he concludes:

> it is only the factor of unintended repetition that transforms what would otherwise seem quite harmless into something uncanny and forces us to entertain the idea of the fateful and the inescapable, when we should normally speak of 'chance.' (2003: 144)

From this perspective, Freud's overwhelming experience of the Italian women signifies his feeling of disorientation and loneliness in a strange place, which originates from the return of the repressed fear of the castrating father.

The dynamic and dialectical relationship between the death and life drives accounts for Freud's inversion of life and death: "the emergence of life would [. . .] be the cause of the continuance of life and also at the same time of the striving towards death" (1989: 38). The inevitability of death renders life a trajectory towards destruction. Put another way, external forces exact decisive influences on the living substance, altering it in such a way as to "oblige the still surviving substance to diverge ever more widely from its original course of life and to make ever more complicated *détours* before reaching its aim of death" (Freud 2001a: 39,

original italics). In so doing, Freud successfully infuses life into death, thereby fusing the two opposing drives.

In Lacan's system, the drive derives from the lack of the Other. He contends that "every drive is virtually a death drive," for the signifier, "whose first purpose is to bar[25] the subject, has brought into him the meaning of death" (2006: 719). To clarify, the split structure forces the subject to desire the Other marked with absence and death. Used as synonyms by Lacan, desire and drive are both object-seeking and death-oriented. For this reason, the death drive is the encounter with the real as "beyond the *automaton*,[26] the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle" (1977: 53–54, original italics). Accordingly, the unconscious encounter with the real is pleasure-producing, as it suggests the subject's momentary transgressing of the lack of the Other as well as the shackles of symbolic signifiers. Correspondingly, Lacan observes that the subject "would (like to) produce [the lack] in the Other through his own disappearance – the disappearance [. . .] of the part of himself he receives from his initial alienation" (2006: 716). What he suggests here is the subject's desire to circumvent the castrating symbolic by submerging himself in the real, which emerges as the vanishing point of the symbolic meaning. Significantly, Lacan's designation of drive as partial, hence leading finally and inevitably to destruction and death, is useful to solve the fissure between the two types of Freudian drive.

In *Death, desire and loss in Western culture* (2001), Jonathan Dollimore points out that before Freud,

> there were those who entertained the attraction of death almost as scandalously as he did. They did not need a theory of the death drive to know that if death both drives and frustrates desire it is also what desire may seek in order to be free of itself. (2001: xx)

Evidently Dollimore attempts to develop desire and the death drive as synonyms. He goes on to list an example: "As Hamlet famously meditated, to die is a consummation devoutly to be wished." Accordingly, "from the earliest times, death has held out the promise of a release not just from desire but from something in-

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[25] Here Lacan uses the word "to bar" in the meaning of "to split."

[26] Lacan revises the relation that Aristotle establishes between the *automaton* and the *tuché*. In his diagram, the former is "the network of signifiers" which operates only in relation to a defined structure of constituent diachrony oriented by the real; while the latter is translatable as "*the encounter with the real*" (1977: 52–53, original italics). Yet, as Lacan expressly claims, this encounter with real is essentially a "missed encounter" (1977: 55).

separable from it, namely the pain of being individuated [. . .] and the form of self-consciousness which goes with that" (2001: xx). In parallel, Bronfen deciphers the repetition characterizing the death drive as a retrieval of a lost merger with the maternal body which signifies "wholeness and stability beyond life" (1992: 56). Thus, the compulsive repetition of the death drive "supports NARCISSISM, implying that in its extreme form [. . .] the exclusive desire for one's self ends in the stasis of death" (1992: 56). Certainly, death spares the individual from the pain of being doubled and divided from himself in the symbolic.

Dollimore's insight is useful to decipher self-injurious forms of behaviour such as suicide. Studying captives under long-time duress, Judith Lewis Herman throws new light on the definition of suicide. She observes that victims in captivity alternate between periods of submission and more active resistance. The second stage culminates in the victims losing the will to live: "people in captivity live constantly with the fantasy of suicide, and occasional suicide attempts are not inconsistent with a general determination to survive" (1992: 85). The will to die then reflects the victims' desire to abject the flavor of death suggested by the loss of freedom through captivity. Viewed collectively, there is no demarcating line between the life and the death drives, both of which serve the purpose of preserving a unitary self in the face of devastation and death. In this connection, this study will show that Toni Morrison employs the affinity between the death drive, desire and the life drive to interpret the cultural trauma of slavery as the limit of subjectivity for American people of African origin. In so doing, she successfully removes the cloak of invisibility, darkness and death inflicted on black people by white dominant discourse.

2.2 Doubling: a Way of Saying "I"

The motif of doubling has been studied in detail and depth first by O. Rank and then by Freud. The double, as Freud puts it, "was originally an insurance against the extinction of the self" (2003: 142). According to him, it stems from protohistoric people's fear of death and a desire for immortality. The relation between the double is deciphered by the psychoanalyst in this way: "They involve a harking back to single phases in the evolution of the sense of self, a regression to times when the ego had not yet clearly set itself off against the world outside and from others" (2003: 143). Freud's conception of the double deals with narcissism, speaking to the clash between past and present, and death and survival. In this sense, the feeling of being doubled evokes the Oedipal loss in this process.

In "The Uncanny," Freud claims that the idea of the double arises

> on the soil of boundless self-love, the primordial narcissism that dominates the mental life of both the child and primitive man, and when this phase is surmounted, the meaning of the 'double' changes: having once been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death. (2003: 142)

Clearly, Freud's concept of the double deals with the Oedipal conflicts which mete out loss and castration for the child. He goes on to write that the concept of the double is transformed, taking on a different form with the taming of the primitive narcissism in the evolution of the ego. In view of this, he posits the "conscience" as the internalization of an outer authority, "which is able to confront the rest of the ego, performs the function of self-observation and self-criticism, exercises a kind of psychical censorship" (2003: 142). It is apparent that conscience *qua* the double emerges in the place of the Oedipal father, perpetuating social norms and laws for the individual.

At first glance, conscience aligns itself with the superego, which comes into being to signal the individual's enslavement to the father at the Oedipus stage. Yet Freud manages to mark them off from each other. In charting the development of the superego, he examines the relationship of the two concepts in the last chapter of *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1940): during the first period of childhood, the ego mediates between the id[27] and external world. In an effort both to satisfy the instinctual demands of the id and to conform to the reality principle with the purpose of self-preservation, the ego puts itself in defense against excessively strong claims from both sides. For this reason, it is "governed in all its decisions by the injunctions of a modified pleasure principle" (1949: 77). At about the age of five, "a portion of the external world has, at least partially, been given up as an object and instead, by means of identification, taken into the ego – that is, has become an integral part of the internal world" (1949: 77). The superego emerges as an internalized external authority; it "only arises after that [Oedipal] complex has been disposed of" (1949: 78). In other words, it comes into being as a result of the child's repression of the maternal body and identification with the father. As a critical agency, it "observes the ego, gives it orders, corrects it and threatens it with punishments, exactly like the parents whose place it has taken" (1949: 77). According to Freud, functioning in varying ways, the superego is identified as conscience only in its "judicial functions" (1949: 77). In this view, conscience figures as the reproaching voice of the father. Analogously, in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930 [1929]), he designates conscience as a function of the superego:

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[27] In Freud's theoretical system, the id is tightly entangled with the unconscious aspect of the human psyche.

"This function consists in keeping a watch over the actions and intentions of the ego and judging them, in exercising a censorship" (2001b: 136). Accordingly, emerging as a self-observing, critical agency, conscience *qua* the double consists of the reproaches from the superego which loads the ego with unbearable burdens.

The superego evolves from the ego ideal, and Freud sometimes uses them as equivalents: in *Dissection of the Personality* (1933 [1932]), he suggests that the superego is "the vehicle of the ego ideal by which the ego measures itself, which it emulates, and whose demand for ever greater perfection it strives to fulfill" (1981c: 96). Given Freud's designation of the superego as the "heir to the Oedipus complex" (1949: 78), the ego ideal is probably "the precipitate of the old picture of the parents, the expression of admiration for the perfection which the child then attributed to them" (1981c: 96). Freud's gesture no doubt defines the ego ideal as a narcissistic setup, the internalization of external perfect yet persecuting authorities. In "On Narcissism : An Introduction" (1914), he reads conscience as a critical agency employed by the ego ideal to keep a careful watch over the ego, checking whether the latter measures up to its demands: "The institution of conscience was at bottom an embodiment, first of parental criticism, and subsequently of that of society" (2001e: 96). In so doing, Freud depersonalizes the castrating father in the shape of the superego or the ego ideal. Additionally, both concepts address the Lacanian lack of the Other.

It is useful to differentiate between the ideal ego and the ego ideal in order to argue for the Otherness inherent in the structure of the superego/ego ideal. For Freud, the ideal ego is the recipient of the self-love the ego enjoyed in childhood (2001e: 94). Yet, disturbed by outer admonitions or critical judgments, this perception of self-perfection is modified and transformed into the ego ideal. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), Slavoj Žižek designates the ideal ego as the imaginary identification, and the ego ideal as the symbolic identification. He explains:

> imaginary identification is identification with the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves, with the image representing 'what we would like to be', and symbolic identification, identification with the very place *from where* we are being observed, *from where* we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable, worthy of love. (1989: 105, original italics)

However, "the place" is in fact the place of the Other, the habitation of a critically observing agency. In order to appear loveable or worthy of love, the individual has to measure up to the demands of the sadistic, punishing superego or ego ideal. Correspondingly, Daniel Lagache stresses the ideal ego as an unconscious narcissistic organization:

> The Ideal Ego, understood as a narcissistic ideal of omnipotence, does not amount merely to the union of the Ego with the Id, but also involves a primary identification with another being invested with omnipotence – namely, the mother. (qtd. in Laplanche & Pontalis 1983: 202)

Evidently Lagache's concept of the ideal ego is a bipolar construct, suggesting the importance of the mother for the psychic formation of the nascent ego.

Based on Lagache's insight, Lacan distinguishes between the two terms as follows: in a subject's relation to an outer authority, "the ego-ideal, obeying the law to please, leads the subject to displease himself as the price of obeying the commandment; the ideal ego, at the risk of displeasing, triumphs only by pleasing in spite of the commandment" (2006: 562). Identifying with an ego ideal marked by the lack of the Other, the ego is doomed to repeat its fruitless efforts towards eternity and perfection. On the other hand, closely related to the imaginary phase, the ideal ego can be used by the ego to circumvent or make up for the loss it suffers at the hands of the sadistic, persecuting ego ideal. In this sense, both the ideal ego and ego ideal are narcissistic identifications: they complement and double each other. The difference here is that the ideal ego evolves from omnipotent narcissism while the ego ideal is modeled after an omnipresent, criticizing superego.

Freud's concepts of mourning and melancholia, both of which deal with loss and the ego's response to the loss, prove useful to illuminate his thinking on the dynamic relationship between the ideal ego and the ego ideal. In "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), he defines "mourning [as] regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (2001d: 243). It is arguable that "loved person," "country," "liberty" and "ideal" are but metonymic terms suggestive of the important role of the individual's first loved object – the mother – to his subjectivity formation.

In "On Transience" (1915), Freud foregrounds a young poet obsessed with the transience of beauty. The pessimistic poet figures as a narcissist who fails to extricate himself from the maternal *jouissance*, as transience indicates "the proneness to decay of all that is beautiful and perfect" (1997a: 176). Yet, Freud contends, "since the value of all this beauty and perfection is determined only by its significance for our own emotional lives, it has no need to survive us and is therefore independent of absolute duration" (1997a: 177). Considering beauty as fated

to extinction, he suggests in effect beauty as the partial object[28] independent of human emotional lives.

Freud ascribes the despondency felt by the poet to a "revolt [. . .] against mourning", that is, the clinging of the libido to its lost objects "even when a substitute lies ready to hand" (1997a: 178). In normal mourning, the ego manages to withdraw the libido gradually from the lost object. Because of this, Freud does not regard mourning as a "pathological condition" as, "however painful it may be, [it] comes to a spontaneous end" (2001d: 243; 1997a: 179). In melancholia, as distinct from mourning, the libido is withdrawn from the object into the ego. To clarify this process, the ego's rigid fixation on the loved object facilitates "an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object" (2001d: 249, original italics). In other words, the ego has internalized the lost object into itself as a persecuting ego ideal. As a result, the melancholic is afflicted with

> a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. (2001d: 244)

The melancholic has been buried alive due to the loss of the idealized merger with the maternal body at the Oedipal stage. Accordingly, his desire for the lost and irretrievable touches on the death drive.

In "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1921), Freud suggests that narcissism originates from the ego's sweeping of external authority into its internal psyche: the ego ideal "gradually gathers up from the influences of the environment the demands which that environment makes upon the ego and which the ego cannot always rise to" (2001c: 110). To read it through Lacan's lens, narcissism arises from the intrinsic lack of the Other. Correspondingly, Neville Symington remarks, "It is therefore because of the narcissistic structure that a person is capable of being exploited by an external person, and it is because of this structure that conscience becomes a castigator" (2004: 36). Put another way, it is because of the ego's fixation on the fullness promised by the ideal ego that an individual is prone to the exploitation of the castigating ego ideal in melancholia.

Lacan's insight into the genesis of anxiety in Seminar X paper is useful to illuminate the mechanisms of Freudian melancholia:

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[28] The partial nature of the object will be elaborated in Chapter 3.

> What provokes anxiety? Contrary to what people say, it is neither the rhythm nor the alternation of the mother's presence-absence. What proves this is that the child indulges in repeating presence-absence games: security of presence is found in the possibility of absence. What is most anxiety-producing for the child is when the relationship through which he comes to be – on the basis of lack [sic] which makes him desire – is most perturbed: when there is no possibility of lack, when his mother is constantly on his back. (qtd. in Fink 1995: 53)

In Lacan's system, the subject's entrance into the symbolic is based on his recognition of the maternal deficiency, which is virtually the intrinsic insufficiency of the Other. Arising from and addressing the lack structuring the Other, the Lacanian anxiety features "a lack of lack" (Fink 1995: 53). The second lack derives from the imagined presence of something in the place of the first lack, insinuating the subject's unawareness to the first one – the lack inherent in the mOther. Accordingly, anxiety appears when the subject refuses to reject the pleasure of the maternal body. Thus, the overlapping of the two lacks suggests the child's falling victim to the phallic mother or failure to enter language.

Melancholia arises from the patient's incapacity to mark the loss of the maternal body off with the traumatic loss at a later stage. The insistent presence of the mother in absence functions to lock the patient up in claustrophobic solitude. In this connection, Mitchell remarks that in normal cases of mourning, "both who and what has been lost are quite consciously apprehended by the bereaved person" (1974: 36), which facilitates the overcoming of it on the part of the bereaved after a certain lapse of time. Yet in melancholia, "this conscious factor is missing; the melancholic person cannot know consciously what he has lost – for it is an aspect of himself" (1974: 36). What the melancholic is reluctant to give up is what he/she has forever lost, that is, maternal *jouissance*, or, an idealized merger with the omnipotent maternal figure. From this aspect, the psychological construct of the Freudian melancholic is composed of two inseparable parts, both of which are organized to restore the nostalgic plenitude of the past. In this sense, melancholia is useful in studying the baneful effect of slavery on black psyches in Morrison's novels, since they foreground the lifelong search for self on the part of the psychically scarred black people in the form of a longing for an idealized merger with the maternal figure.

Building on Freud's psychoanalytic thinking, Heinz Kohut comes up with the bipolar self, thereby scientifically designating the double as an integral part of the psychological self. Contrasting with the Freudian double emerging in response to the ego's melancholic longing for an impossible past, Kohut's double is an internalized parent imago, crucial to the organization of the psychological self. In *The*

Analysis of the Self (1971), he posits that, when the equilibrium of primary narcissism is disturbed by the unavoidable shortcomings of maternal care, the child replaces the previous perfection "(a) by establishing a grandiose and exhibitionistic image of the self: *the grandiose self;* and (b) by giving over the previous perfection to an admired, omnipotent (transitional) self-object:[29] *the idealized parent imago*"[30] (1971: 25, original italics). Consequently Kohut pinpoints two psychical poles as constitutive of the primal, narcissistic self. In so doing, he conceptualizes early human psychic organization as divided, thus designating the embryonic self as bipolar.

The two poles constitutive of the earliest self reflect Kohut's inclination to decipher humanity by way of narcissism-related love, that is, self-love. In this paradigm, the grandiose self evolves from an early, mirroring maternal self-object; on the other hand, the idealized parent imago, charged with narcissistic object-instinctual libido, deals with the child's longing for a merger with an idealized self-object. It comes as natural that Kohut designates the two components of the primal self respectively as "the narcissistic 'subject'" and "the narcissistic 'object'" (1971: 32) to elaborate types of fantasy characterizing the primal self. It is notable that "the central mechanisms [. . .] which the two basic narcissistic configurations employ in order to preserve a part of the original experience of narcissistic perfection are [. . .] antithetical. Yet they coexist from the beginning" (1971: 27). Interestingly, this structure of the bipolar self evokes the ideal ego, which serves as the recipient of self-love.

In *The Restoration of the Self*, Kohut reformulates the bipolar self as a "nuclear self"/"core self" (1977: 177). As a narcissistic psychic organization, the nuclear self serves as the "*organizing center of the ego's activities*" (Hartmann qtd. in Kohut 1971: 120, original italics) which undergoes varying degrees of transformation during the psychological development of the individual. In contrast to Lacan, who is skeptical of the psychic unity of the subject and intersubjective communication, Kohut displays a belief in the selfsame psychic structure through transmuting internalization, during which the archaic, self-centered nuclear self is gradually domesticated and incorporated into the personality of the adult. Put slightly differently, the two poles populating the center of this primal self are

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[29] Kohut defines self-objects as objects "which are not experienced as separate and independent from the self" (1971: 3). Its prototype is the "the idealized parent imago," which figures as one of the two poles of the "nuclear self" in Kohut's paradigm (1971: 25).

[30] The configuration of the idealized parent imago consists mainly of an "archaic, overestimated, narcissistically cathected object" (1971: 3).

gradually transformed into a psychological selfhood under optimal developmental conditions:

> Under favorable circumstances (appropriately selective paternal response to the child's demands for an echo to and a participation in the narcissistic-exhibitionistic manifestations of his grandiose fantasies) the child learns to accept his realistic limitations, the grandiose fantasies and the crude exhibitionistic demands are given up, and are [. . .] replaced by ego-syntonic[31] goals and purposes, by pleasure in his functions and activities and by realistic self-esteem. Analogous to the development of the idealized self-object, the outcome of the development of the grandiose self is determined not only by the features of the child's own narcissism but also by certain features of the important personalities who surround the child. [. . .]
>
> The gradual recognition of the realistic imperfections and limitations of the self, i.e., the gradual diminution of the domain and power of the grandiose fantasy, is in general a precondition for mental health in the narcissistic sector of the personality. (1971: 107–108)

The Kohutian ego has to reconcile itself to reality, which suggests the lack inherent in the symbolic Other. This process entails the fusion of the two poles of the bipolar self. Naturally the optimal development condition necessitates the child's experience of a gradual disillusionment in the idealized parent imago, which in turn contributes to "a withdrawal of the narcissistic cathexes from the imago of the idealized self-object and to their gradual [. . .] internalization" (1971: 45). Evidently, Kohut is studying transmuting internalization within the context of an ego-syntonic self-object milieu, which in turn suggests an intersubjective context favorable for the building of a more realistic psychic self. It is notable that in 1978, he displaces the hyphen between the term "self-object" in a joint publication with Ernest S. Wolf, which suggests that he considers the selfobject as integral to the structure of a selfsame self. In other words, the selfobject is experienced as an inseparable part of the nuclear self. This process witnesses the significant merger of the two poles, which facilitates the self's slow yet steady entry into a cohesive, mature self.

Kohut suggests that dysfunctional parenthood can engender trauma in a young child. If a young child suffers severe, sudden loss or disappointment in the idealized object, then optimal internalization does not take place; not having acquired the needed internal structure, "his psyche remains fixated on an archaic self-

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[31] This Kohutian term refers to behaviour, beliefs and feelings that harmonize with ego, or respond to one's ideal ego.

object, and the personality will throughout life be dependent on certain objects in what seems to be an intense form of object hunger" (1971: 45). Clearly, the child is searching for a substitute object for the parent imago which has been traumatically or prematurely shattered, in an effort to restore what Kohut calls the grandiose self: "The intensity of the search for and of the dependency on these objects is due to the fact that they are striven for as a substitute for the missing segments of the psychic structure" (1971: 45). For this reason, the child's attempt to repair the parent imago speaks to the degree to which the selfhood of trauma survivors is fabricated around narcissistic fantasies.

In *Love, Guilt and Reparation*, Melanie Klein finds that some patients who have turned away from their mother in dislike use an imagined perfect picture of the mother as a substitute for her: "I have found that there existed in their minds nevertheless a beautiful picture of the mother, but one which was felt to be a *picture* of her only, not her real self" (1988: 270, original italics). The coexistence of the two mothers, however, insinuates the patients' failure to internalize the maternal imago. Because of this, a fantasied mother image emerges to compensate for the shortcomings of the real one: finding the real object injured, unattractive and incurable, the patients replaced it with a "beautiful picture" which "played a great part in the specific ways of their sublimations" (1988: 270). Klein's analysis seems to suggest that the invented maternal figure functions to spare the patients of the painful compulsive efforts to restore the omnipotent parent imago. Yet the patients' fixation on a fantasied image of the mother is narcissistic as the surrogate maternal figure exists only as a picture (fantasy). Clearly, the example listed by Klein evidences the parental failure to provide favorable circumstances for the patients' gradual transformation of their archaic nuclear self in their formative years; alternatively, it suggests the patients' failure to incorporate the parent imago into their bipolar self as a powerful, protective selfobject.

Studying the post-traumatic play obsessively repeated by trauma survivors, Judith Lewis Herman points out that the survivors are often impelled to reenact the original trauma, either in literal or in disguised form – with a fantasy of revising the outcome of the dangerous encounter. Yet in their attempts to remove the pathological effects of the traumatic moment, "survivors may even put themselves at risk of further harm" (1992: 39). It is apparent that Herman is commenting on the survivors' faulty efforts at the restoration of narcissistic fantasies. In a similar manner, Kohut comes up with his paradigm of traumatic reenactment: confronted with the aftermath of a traumatogenic event, the self may invoke either "defensive reinforcement" or "compensatory reinforcement" (1977: 3), which, however, suggests Kohut's conceptualization of the "bipolar self": "I call a structure defensive when its sole or predominant function is the covering over of the primary

defect in the self. I call a structure compensatory when, rather than merely covering a defect in the self, it compensates for this defect" (1977: 3). Kohut further remarks that a "weakness" in the grandiose self is frequently compensated by a strengthened parent imago; yet it is also true that a weakness in the idealized parent imago may be compensated by the reinforcing of the grandiose self (1977: 3). Put simply, a weakness in either pole may be compensated by the strengthening of the other. Yet the compensatory effort to strengthen the self-pole to amend the flaw in the idealized parent imago may also be read as defensive restoration.

Building on Kohut's theory of trauma, Ulman and Brothers elicit their paradigm of traumatic shattering and faulty restoration: "defensive restoration" and "compensatory restoration," of which the former "involves fantasies of exhibitionistic grandiosity" and the latter "involves fantasies of idealized merger with omnipotent or alter ego (twinship) imagos" (1988: 16). In their discourse, even the most archaic form of fantasy is structured in relation to the selfobject, given the fact that both processes of the aforementioned faulty restoration entail the participation of both poles of the nuclear self: the restoration of the grandiose self needs the selfobject as its witness, and the repairing of the idealized parent imago strengthens the grandiose self. In short, both serve the purpose of self-aggrandizement for the self. Hence, their paradigm can be understood as their theoretical gesture to read trauma in relation to an intersubjective matrix.

In Morrison's novels, the two mechanisms of traumatic reenactment are often indistinguishable from each other: defensive restoration featuring narcissistic exhibitionism sometimes corresponds to the character's longing for a preoedipal merger with an omnipotent parent imago (the mother, in particular), which is alternatively readable as compensatory restoration. For example, defying her status as a marginalized Other, Sethe slices open her daughter's throat in an act of clearly defensive, narcissistic exhibitionism. Her mimicking of the white supremacist gesture of brutalizing the bodies of others is explained by her as wanting to reunite herself with her mother (Morrison 1997: 203),[32] which reflects her compensatory effort to restore the idealized merger with the parent imago. The entanglement of the two mechanisms is due to the fact that traumatized black people desire to restore an unsullied self, which is in effect the ideal ego. As seen earlier, the ideal ego is an archaic self, sustaining itself by fantasizing fullness and self-sufficiency through bringing the id to life or identifying with an omnipotent authority. In this view, the strengthening of both poles is interpretable as the trauma

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[32] This will be further discussed in section 4.4.

survivor's efforts at restoration of his/her ideal ago, which develops from the mirroring mother.

The eminent role of the ideal ego in traumatic reenactment suggests the human psyche as a narcissistic setup composed of two inseparable psychic poles. Herman observes that in traumatic transference, the patient projects her splintered self onto the therapist:

> The greater the patient's emotional conviction of helplessness and abandonment, the more desperately she feels the need for an omnipotent rescuer. Often she casts the therapist in this role. [. . .] The idealization of the therapist protects the patient, in fantasy, against reliving the terror of the trauma. [. . .]
>
> When the therapist fails to live up to these idealized expectations – as she inevitably will fail – the patient is often overcome with fury. (1992: 137)

Treating the therapist as a selfobject, the patient attempts to repair his/her traumatized self with the aid of the therapist, which renders her traumatic restitution both defensive and compensatory. In other words, she attempts to redefine her self in relation to the therapist *qua* the selfobject in order to restitute her grandiose fantasies.

The patient's restorative endeavor is doomed to fail under the circumstances of attempted idealization of the therapist. As Herman remarks, "Though the traumatized patient feels a desperate need to rely on the integrity and competence of the therapist, she cannot do so, for her capacity to trust has been damaged by the traumatic experience" (1992: 138). The patient is in effect trapped between the therapist *qua* the ideal ego and the therapist *qua* the perpetrator. In this connection, studying transference in psychoanalysis, Herman notes a disruptive force "intrud[ing] repeatedly into the relationship between therapist and patient." It is first considered as "the patient's innate aggression" and then "the violence of the perpetrator" (1992: 136). The intruding force signifies a traumatic eruption of the past into the present. Correspondingly, the psychiatrist Eric Lister comments, "The terror is as though the patient and therapist convene in the presence of yet another person. The third image is the victimizer, who . . . demanded silence and whose command is now being broken" (qtd. in Herman 1992: 137). Indicative of the psychological distance between the patient and the therapist, the insidious force remains intangible yet intrusive. Ultimately, the uncanny third person disrupts the Kohutian bipolar self, ushering in the spatialized trauma stemming from the shattering, splitting symbolic order.

The encounter with the Kristevan foreigner is comparable to the eruption of the Lacanian real which foists nothingness on the desiring subject. In a footnote written to explicate "object-instinctual cathexes," Kohut observes that the object which forms the basis for the transference relationships is invested with narcissistic libido. On the other hand, "the self may occasionally be invested with object-instinctual cathexis; e.g. (a) during objective self-assessment, (b) in incipient schizophrenia when the patient looks at himself in the mirror as if at a *stranger*" (1971: 39, italics mine). In the second case, the self is objectified, isolated and split off from the patient. Insinuating itself into the mirror image and estranging the patient from him/herself, the stranger arises virtually as an abominable double of nothingness from the patient's pathological delusion.

Julia Kristeva uses the word *stranger/foreigner* in the sense of the domesticated Other dwelling in the inner psyche of all human beings:

> The image of hatred and of the other, a foreigner is neither the romantic victim of our clannish indolence nor the intruder responsible for all the ills of the polis. Neither the apocalypse on the move nor the instant adversary to be eliminated for the sake of appeasing the group. Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. [. . .] A symptom that precisely turns "we" into a problem. (1991: 1)

In designating the foreigner as formative of the psychic self, Kristeva addresses the issue of narcissistic crisis – to be at odds with oneself or to be doubled with a being with enmity and hostility. Emerging as a symptom, the encounter with the foreigner questions the selfsame psychic structure that the Kohutian ego assumes after going through transmuting internalization.

The experience of the foreigner is boundary-dismantling, uncanny and traumatic: "Confronting the foreigner whom I reject and with whom at the same time I identify, I lose my boundaries [. . .] the memory of experiences when I had been abandoned overwhelm me, I lose my composure" (Kristeva 1991: 187). The experience of the foreigner is reminiscent of that of the criticizing conscience functioning as the agency of the ego ideal/the superego in Freud's system. Confronted with this foreigner, "I feel 'lost,' 'indistinct,' 'hazy'" (1991: 187). Yet contrasting the ego ideal *qua* an idealized image of the self, the foreigner emerges from the locus of the real and invalidates the subject as a symbolic being; he is alien, border-annihilating, appearing as an object of terror. Naturally, the foreigner "leaves [me] separate, incoherent" (1991: 187), provoking an extreme sense of the uncanny. However, Kristeva suggests that the foreigner is an inseparable part of the self, thus designating the psychological organization of the self as virtually split.

Kristeva attaches great importance to taming the foreignness inherent in the psyches of all human beings:

> With the Freudian notion of the unconscious the involution of the strange in the psyche loses its pathological aspect and integrates within the assumed unity of human beings an *otherness* that is both biological *and* symbolic and becomes an integral part of the *same*. Henceforth the foreigner is neither a race nor a nation. The foreigner is neither glorified as a secret *Volksgeist* nor banished as disruptive of rationalist urbanity. Uncanny, foreignness [sic] is within us: we are our own foreigners, we are divided. (Kristeva 1991: 181, original italics)

The foreigner is the repressed part of the self, awaiting recognition and restoration. Interestingly, "he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities" (1991: 1). Evidently Kristeva suggests the foreigner as the path to a cohesive and centered self. bell hooks makes a parallel exhortation to dismantle intraracial hatred and prejudice between American people of African descent: "Collectively bringing our knowledge, resources, skills, and wisdom to one another, we make the site where radical black female subjectivity can be nurtured and sustained" (1992: 60). In Morrison's novels, the foreigner appears as the harm inflicted on the psyches of victimized black people. It isolates black people from each other, burying them alive in a perpetual slave past, figuring as the spatialized real of slavery. In this context, healing is only achieved when the survivors learn to reconcile themselves with the foreigner both inside and outside, to dismantle the barrier between them, which signifies self-connection, communal communication as well as collective healing.

Addressing the ego's obsession with the repressed maternal object, the uncanny suggests the constricting effect of social norms which are personified by the castrating father in Freud's theoretical system. Lacan develops the Freudian father as "the Law of the Father" as the father enacts the law, perpetuating a symbolic loss on the subject upon his/her entrance into language and culture. Embodying this primal loss, the *objet a* is first and foremost represented by the maternal object. Accordingly, the uncanny deals with the subject's desire for the forever-lost maternal *objet a* in Lacan's system. The following chapter will explore the *objet a*, whose polyvalence derives from its absence-presence[33] in the symbolic order.

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[33] By this term, I addresses the lack of the *objet a* in the Other (lack of the Other) and the desire it provokes in the subject.

3 THE VOLATILE *objet a*: FROM OBJECT TO ABJECT

> The *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ.
>
> – Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 1977.
>
> The abject is the violence of mourning for an "object" that has always already been lost.
>
> – Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 1982.

This chapter probes the polyvalence of the *objet a* from the perspective of the rememory of the maternal silence with its capacity to fuse the opposing pair of object and abject, a fusion which is central to Morrison's writing. In "On Narcissism," Freud states that, in the very first moments of an infant's life, it claims oneness with the mother, or, more exactly, the mother's breast: "the persons who are concerned with a child's feeding, care, and protection become his earliest sexual objects" (2001e: 87). Commenting on Freud, Juliet Mitchell writes, "for both sexes the first sexual object is the mother's breast and then the mother who cares and cuddles" (1974: 54). Accordingly, the mother functions as the first object cathected with the infant's libido, that is, the energy of the sexual instincts that are present from the beginning of every individual's life, whose existence suggests the ego's "capacity for love" (Freud 1997a: 178). Yet in the lived harsh reality, the infant's increasing needs are often disappointed by the sometimes unavailable maternal object.

The necessity of relinquishing the maternal object comes upon entering into the Oedipal stage, which serves to distinguish between the two sexes. Mitchell explicates this moment in the following way: "At the phallic stage, the girl realizes she is without the phallus and proceeds to envy it. The boy, seeing the female's lack, fears the possible loss of his own. This is the distinguishing moment between the sexes" (1974: 87). However, as she observes at another point:

> unlike in the nineteenth century, permissive child-rearing nowadays freely allows masturbation and a child is almost never threatened with the cutting off of his penis or offensive hand. [. . .] The *actual* threat can be absent, but the *idea* of it still there. (1974: 74, original italics)

The idea of castration is insinuated by the *fort-da* game[34] played by Freud's grandson, through which the one-and-a-half-year-old boy gives voice to his anxiety over his mother's absence with a cotton-reel. The lack felt by the little boy predates and foretells the threshold moment, that is, the castration complex which smashes the symbiotic unity between mother and child, catapulting the latter, ensconced in imaginary fullness, into confrontation with the symbolic, which enjoins both separation and suffering.

In Freud's system, both boys and girls have to go through the Oedipal stage, and both experience the first taste of lack through the sometimes unavailable breast of the mother. In Kleinian discourse, the mother's breast, existing as an externality for the nascent ego, functions as the primal object in relation to which the nascent ego establishes a tentative self. Klein points out that in the earliest phase of life, the baby "has sadistic impulses directed, not only against its mother's breast, but also against the inside of her body: scooping it out, devouring the contents, destroying it by every means which sadism can suggest" (1988: 262). This, however, suggests the newborn's failure to distinguish itself from the object and thereby establish a self-centered self. Eventually, Klein marks the part-object off from the whole love-object in order to distinguish the "paranoid-schizoid position" and the "depressive manic position." To clarify, the first position deals with the part-object and the nascent ego's incapacity to identify with the love-object as a whole, complete object; the second position is more developed and basically spared the narcissistic, paranoiac fear and sadism. It signifies the ego's internalization of the love-object as complete and ego-enhancing.

As discussed earlier, Lacan builds his concept of the *objet a* on Klein's primal object. Rather than being a part-object, the Lacanian desired object is partial. By this term, Lacan suggests that the *objet a* is but an "imaginary object" [35] which is marked by the intrinsic lack of the Other. In so doing, he revises Klein's conception of the part-object. The critical role of castration for the formation of the ego then lies in its revealing and symbolizing the lack inherent in the maternal object, thereby pressing the child to identify with an outside object.

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[34] See "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." The game has been discussed in chapter 2.2.

[35] This term is invented by Lacan to suggest the nature of the phallus, which is one of the forms of the *objet a*.

3.1 The Revolutionary Unconscious

In *The Ego and the Id* (1923), the heredity of culture is suggested by Freud's illustration of the relationship between the id, the ego and the superego. In his theoretical system, addressing the unconscious of the human psyche, the id can be inherited through successive generations of the human race; on the other hand, the ego – whose business is to protect itself from dangers or death – seems to relate to the external world and is thus not inheritable. The ego exists as a mediator between the id and the superego, that is, the instinctual demands of the id on the one hand and the cultural requirements of the superego for the control and modification of instinctual satisfaction on the other.

Freud, however, disrupts the rigidity of the distinction between the id and the ego, stating that the experiences of the ego are transformable into experiences of the id "when they have been repeated often enough and with sufficient strength in many individuals in successive generations" (1989: 35). Arguably, Freud's gesture renders the id/ego border porous and penetrable, which in turn contributes to the id's role as an unmapped, unfathomable and uncanny realm. Containing instinctual and corporeal strivings, the id is unconscious. The vicissitudes of the ego convey the shaping role of the Other. Given the fact that the id inhabits the unconscious, the metamorphosis of the ego into the id is readable as the banishing into the unconscious of instinctual requirements that are no longer compatible with dominating cultural norms.

For Freud, the unconscious stems from the subjective individuation of the young child upon its initiation into society, during which the unconscious polarizes itself from the conscious, looming as the locus of repressed, inaccessible instinctual requirements. Similarly, Susan Neal Mayberry observes, "That moment when the child recognizes the prohibition symbolized by the father segues into its repression of guilty desire and the birth of its unconscious" (2007: 263). Coexisting in this moment are the repressed sexual desires and traumatic experiences of the ego. Despite the efforts of some critics and psychoanalysts to localize the unconscious in the psychic life of human beings, the topography of its domain remains enigmatic.

In Freud's theoretical works, the unconscious emerges insofar as instinct enters into culture and evolves into the drive (or 'instinct' in the Standard Edition translation). In other words, the unconscious functions to indicate the interposition of culture on the instinct. In his revolutionary paper "The Unconscious" (1915), Freud deciphers the drive in the following way:

> An instinct [drive] can never become an object of consciousness – only the idea that represents the instinct [drive] can. Even in the unconscious, moreover, an instinct [drive] cannot be represented otherwise than by an idea. If the instinct [drive] did not attach itself to an idea or manifest itself as an affective state, we would know nothing about it. (2001i: 177)

Contrasting with the biologically determined instinct that knows and obtains its object, the drive comes into being as a result of the ego's failure to represent it consciously, thereby rendering it unconscious.

In "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905), Freud discusses the relation between the oral drive and the hunger instinct: "Our study of thumb-sucking or sensual sucking has already given us the three essential characteristics of an infantile sexual manifestation. At its origin it attaches itself to one of the vital somatic functions [i.e., instincts]" (2001h: 182). In so doing, Freud pinpoints the origin of oral drive as somatic and biological. In this context, Elizabeth Grosz comments that

> even apparently incontestable processes such as hunger, thirst, and the need to urinate or defecate – which are generally regarded as instincts par excellence – are not biologically fixed but are amenable to a psychosymbolic takeover, in which they are retraced, taken over, as sexualized drives. (1994: 53)

In this connection, Morrison frequently fuses hunger for food and desire for love in her novels. For instance, after her reincarnation, Beloved is addicted to sweet things, which suggests her desperate desire for a pre-oedipal merger with her mother (see 1997: 55).

Attempting to distinguish between the drive and the instinct, Freud fails to escape the dynamic equilibrium characteristic of biology. Malcolm Bowie pinpoints the ubiquitous influence of biology in Freud's notion of the drive and contends that Freud's effort to biologize the mind "postulate[s] a primal oneness that [. . .] is somehow possible and desirable to restore or to emulate" (1991: 6). Significantly, Lacan diverges at this point from Freud: for him, the dynamic equilibrium characterizing Freud's thinking of drive addresses "the acknowledged source of an unacknowledged madness" embedded in human thinking (1991: 37). Put differently, it is a psychic reality characteristic of the nascent ego enthralled with its mirror image in the imaginative order.

Lacan combines drive and desire, attributing their origin to the lack of the Other. In so doing, he successfully discloses the genesis of the drive[36] that Freud fails to reveal. Interestingly, Slavoj Žižek draws an analogy between the Lacanian drive and what Einstein does with the notion of gravity in his general theory of relativity:

> Einstein 'desubstantialized' gravity by way of reducing it to geometry: gravity is not a substantial force which 'bends' space but the name for the curvature of space itself. In a homologous way, Lacan 'desubstantialized' drives: a drive is not a primordial positive force but a purely geometrical, topological phenomenon, the name for the curvature of the space of desire, i.e. for the paradox that, within this space, the way to attain the object (a) is not to go straight for it (the safest way to miss it) but to encircle it, to 'go round in circles'. Drive is this purely topological 'distortion' of the natural instinct which finds satisfaction in a direct consumption of its object. (2006: 192–193)

The drive thus represents the winding path to the *objet a*. Accordingly, it is only representable by its unrespresentability. What renders it unconscious is the circuitous path through which the drive force pushes forward. In this view, the drive plays midwife to what meaning fails to signify; in other words, it obtains meaning from the lack endemic to the system of language. For example, in *Beloved*, the title character incarnates the drive, and her return to the symbolic world speaks to the desire of trauma victims such as Sethe to disrupt the state of live burial inflicted on her by the chattel system.

Lacanian desire eludes realization, and even overflows the theoretical system of the very person who discovered it. As Bowie remarks, "Desire is the subject-matter of psychoanalysis, but something is always left out when the analyst writes about it" (1991: 1). The participation of the Other entails the metonymic structure of desire, which in turn reflects the nothingness perpetuated on the subject. Accordingly, "a shadow has fallen across his page and will not go away. However hard he [Lacan] tries to 'articulate desire' [. . .] desire will always spill out from his sentences, diagrams or equations" (1991: 1). The shadow suggests the ghostly, unsettling real,[37] whose sense of incomprehensibility operates as the very incep-

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[36] Probing the origin of the drive, Freud writes, "By the source [. . .] of an instinct [drive] is meant the somatic process which occurs in an organ or part of the body and whose stimulus is represented in mental life by an instinct [drive]. We do not know whether this process is invariably of a chemical nature or whether it may also correspond to the release of other, e.g. mechanical forces" (2001d: 123).

[37] Catherine Belsey marks the "real" off from "reality": "The real is not reality, which is what we do know, the world picture that culture represents to us. By contrast, the real, as culture's

tion of perception. Subsisting itself as the "unsayable [through language], the shadow cast by the vertical images of things" (Belsey 2005: xii), the real's enigmatic invading into the symbolic has already touched on the realm of the uncanny.

With great boldness, Lacan presents his own version of psychoanalysis, transforming psychoanalysis from an essentially humanist philosophy into a post-structuralist one by a rereading of Freud's theory of subjectivity and the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theory. Saussure's main contribution to linguistics is his reformulation of language as a system of signs composed of the signifier and the signified: the signifier is the "*sound pattern*"[38] of a word, and the signified the concept corresponding to it (Saussure 1986: 67, original italics). Lacan resorts to Saussure's structural linguistics to represent the effect of language imposed on the subject. In this connection, Alexandre Leupin observes:

> for Lacan, the structure is a way to build a spider's web around what escapes it, the unconscious. Whereas true structuralism never was preoccupied with the point where the structure fails, one can say that this failure, which shows the structure's limit, is the object of psychoanalysis itself: where the structure falls silent, the unconscious begins. (2004: xxiv)

Particularly, the Lacanian unconscious deals with both the psychic reality of wholeness characterising the imaginary ego and the castrating Other that divides the subject from him/herself. In so doing, Lacan reads the subject as forever pestered by desires to return to the fullness promised by an imaginary order which has been shattered by the lack of the symbolic Other.

Lacan's effort to decode the human psyche by means of language is indissociable from his finding of the critical function of the signifier in building human relations: "before strictly human relations are established, certain relations have already been determined. They are taken from whatever nature may offer as supports" (1977: 20). Accordingly, what nature provides, Lacan tells us, is signifiers which "organize human relations in a creative way, providing them with structures and shaping them" (1977: 20). On a more general level, "as the place where everything of the signifier which can be articulated comes to be signified" (Lacan 1982: 151), language functions to epitomize the network of signifiers which structure human relations and shape human beings. Consequently, for Lacan, the pri-

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defining difference, does not form part of our culturally acquired knowledge, but exercises its own, independent determinations even so" (2005: xii). In Lacan's theoretical system, reality is equivalent to the Other, featuring lack and absence.

[38] Roy Harris discusses on page xv his use of the term "sound pattern" instead of "sound image" in his translation.

mary reason for the initial alienation experienced by the child with the nascent ego is attributable to language which, "with its structure, exists prior to each subject's entry into it at a certain moment in his mental development" (2006: 413).

Lacan appropriates and reconstructs Saussure's linguistic sign in order to explore the structure of the unconscious. Saussure insists on the arbitrary relationship between the two interrelated sides of a sign, aware of the varying signifiers given to the same signified by diverse languages. Yet it is noteworthy that the Saussurian sign appears as a unity, held together by the relationship between the signifier and the signified. In Lacan's restructuring of the Saussurian sign, the signifier and the signified switch positions: S/*s* – the capitalized S referring to the signifier, while the lower case, italicized s representing the signified. Significantly, Lacan deposits a rupture between the signifier and signified in rejection of the Saussurian binary oppositions, proposing "the notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier" (2006: 419). Arguably, the sliding insinuates the failure of the signifier to symbolize the former; on the other hand, however, the unhomely, overflowing signifiers signify the agency of the unconscious, which strives to sabotage symbolic language through setting signifiers in motion. Accordingly, Lacan identifies the complete sign as the locality of the conscious, while designating the unconscious as the place where the signifier plays (see 2006: 412–441). Consequently, as an emergent Other "far from being an irreducible chaos, the unconscious possesses a structure all its own, however different that structure may be from the structure of the conscious" (Kristeva 2001: 10). Eventually, Lacan comes up with his famous enigmatic dictum: "the unconscious is structured like a language" (1977: 149). Linking its birth with the advent of the symbolic order, he endows the unconscious with a scientific edge.

As a locus of uninhibited power deriving from the Other, the unconscious suggests the splitting effects foisted on the subject (by the signifier) upon his/her inception into culture and society. Revealing itself as a "lacuna, cut, rupture inscribed in a certain lack", the Lacanian unconscious is embodied by something that stumbles in a spoken or written sentence (1977: 153). It is apparent that Lacan's conceptualization of the unconscious is based on the "Freudian slip." In "The Freudian Unconscious and Ours," Lacan writes:

> Impediment, failure, split. In a spoken or written sentence something stumbles. [. . .] There, something other demands to be realized – which appears as intentional, of course, but of a strange temporality. What occurs, what is *produced*, in this gap, is presented as *the discovery*. It is in this way that the Freudian exploration first encounters what occurs in the unconscious. (1977: 25, original italics)

Lacan discovers the real in the Freudian unconscious. For him, the unconscious serves as the locus of the real, emerging as the place where language is "spoken in a stuttering, stumbling way" (1977: 47). In short, it both surrenders to and sabotages the system of language as an emergent agency. Correspondingly, Ellie Ragland-Sullivan points out that "language [. . .] stands in for a subject, both as agent of the learning of difference, in the first place, and as the carrier of alienated desire(s) of the Other. In this sense, language is paradoxical, an index of its own negative function" (1991: 61). She suggests language as both speaking for the subject and speaking to the lack imposed on him/her by the Other.

Initially emphasizing the sign as structurally split, Lacan suggests the illusion that "the signifier serves [. . .] the function of representing the signified, or better, that the signifier has to justify [. . .] its existence in terms of any signification whatsoever" (2006: 416). In this sense, the signifier's capacity to produce meaning is ascribed to its interrelation with an indefinite and potentially endless set of other signifiers within the system. Though first underlining a "barrier resisting signification" between the signifier and the signified, Lacan then highlights the "connections characteristic of the signifier, and of the magnitude of their function in generating the signified." Introducing the further issue of the circularity of signification, he states that "no signification can be sustained except by reference to another signification" (2006: 415). To illustrate this signification effect, he draws on the one-side, one-edge Mœbius band[39] of topology. Respectively deposited on the seeming two sides of the band are the signifier and the signified. Interestingly, tracing far enough along the chain of signifiers, the signified is produced as an effect. Lacan's inclination to read the unconscious terrain topologically is attributable to topology's special interest in structures as "the location of the point of disjuncture and conjuncture, of union and frontier" (Lacan 1977: 161).

The aforementioned barrier[40] between the signifier and the signified speaks to the haunting effect of the real in the symbolic. In other words, the signifiers are orientated towards the real: "the signifiers were able to constitute themselves in simultaneity only by virtue of a very defined structure of constituent diachrony. The diachrony is orientated by the structure" (1977: 46). Accordingly, the signifiers exist in a diachronic relation to the real; alternatively, the diachronic structure is

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[39] It is what you get when you take a strip of paper and twist it 180 degrees before joining it to the other. What is remarkable about the band is that there is no distinction between the inside and the outside.

[40] The barrier is indicated by the bar between the signifier and the signified. For Lacan, the bar functions to denote "the irreducible nature of the resistance of signification as constituted in the relations between signifier and signified" (2006: 428).

at the bottom settled by the very lack of the real. In Morrison's novels, fictional characters frequently function as signifiers, as will be discussed later in detail in section 4.4. For instance, in *Love*, the patriarch Cosey represents this gap of the real/memory towards which all the women (serving as signifiers) closest to him gravitate.

The power of the real derives from its insistence, which is countered by the "*re-sistance of the subject*, which becomes at that moment repetition in act" (1977: 51, original italics). The word *repetition* here signifies the traumatized, symptomatic existence of the subject in the symbolic. The insistence of the real is similar to the "*pulsative* function" of the unconscious: "everything that, for a moment, appears in [the unconscious's] slit seems to be destined, by a sort of pre-emption, to close up again upon itself [. . .] to vanish, to disappear" (1977: 43, original italics). The pulsative function represents the engagement of the real and the symbolic order. As Lacan observes, "one can only think of language as a network, a net over the entirety of things, over the totality of the real. It inscribes on the plane of the real this other plane, which we here call the plane of the symbolic" (qtd. in Belsey 2005: 4). Overwritten and displaced by the symbolic, the real returns as the unconscious.

The real affects language/meaning from two diametrical directions: on the one hand, it admits the authority of language bent on displacing and categorizing; on the other, it discloses the deficiency immanent in the symbolic system: "Meaning indicates the direction in which it fails" (Lacan 1982: 150). Inspired by Lacan, Jacqueline Rose perceptively points out that "meaning can only be described as sexual by taking the limits of meaning into account, for meaning in itself operates *at* the limit, the limits of its own failing" (1982: 46, original italics). This designates sexuality as counter-linguistic, or to be more exact, unconscious. Significantly, Lacan diverges here from Freud in his refusal to equate the reality of the unconscious with sexual reality (1977: 150). Put another way, he refuses to read culturally enjoined sexual identity as originating from the unconscious; rather, for him, sexuality is born of the lack of the Other and merely derives power from the unconscious.

In "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," Freud discusses the libido as a quantitatively variable force by which sexual excitation is represented in the mind. Conceived as a mobile force subjected to build-up and discharge, the Freudian libido is "invariably and necessarily of a masculine nature, whether it occurs in men or in women" (2001h: 219). Freud's conception has frequently been attacked

by feminist criticism as more appropriate to male sexuality than female.[41] Lacan develops Freud's conception of the libido by reformulating it in relation to the lack inherent in language. Lacan approaches the concept by studying what the individual loses upon his/her initiation into the symbolic world. According to him, "it [the libido] is precisely what is subtracted from the living being by virtue of the fact that it is subject to the cycle of sexed reproduction" (1977: 198). The libido created by sex is a response to the lack of the Other; it emerges in response to the split thrust into the subject by the Other, existing as "the effective presence [. . .] of desire" (1977: 153). It subsists by virtue of its eternal circuit around the lost *objet a*. As a result, the libido represents the desire-ridden subject's attempt to fill the gap of the real. Serving as a ghost of the removed *objet a*, the Lacanian libido is pliable, enveloping, bearing witness to the violence inflicted on the subject by the symbolic.

In tampering with language through the emergent unconscious as the locus of sexuality, Lacan revises the unconscious developed by Freud. Bruce Fink aptly remarks that, "rather than being the privileged seat of subjectivity, the unconscious [. . .] is itself Other, foreign, and unassimilated" (1995: 9). Yet the Lacanian unconscious both derives power from and defies the Other; it corresponds to Lacan's theoretical thinking which both constructs and disrupts culture; it is salient and subversive, existing as an emergent agent in the symbolic. Consequently, structured by language and embodied by the immortal, irrepressible life of the libido, the fabric of the Lacanian unconscious turns out to be "more accessible to us today than at the time of Freud" (Lacan 1977: 20).

3.2 Part- or Partial Object?

> As we learn from psycho-analytic work, women regard themselves as having been damaged in infancy, as having been undeservedly cut short of something and unfairly treated; and the embitterment of so many daughters against their mother derives, ultimately, from the reproach against her of having brought them into the world as women instead of men.
>
> – Sigmund Freud, "Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-analysis Work," 2001f.

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[41] In *Straight Sex: Rethinking the Politics of Pleasure*, Lynne Segal criticizes "the cultural imperatives and practices of a heterosexism definitively linking the 'masculine' to sexual activity and dominance, the 'feminine' to sexual passivity and subordination" (1994: 268).

In Freud's theoretical system, the girl enters into the Oedipal stage as the result of the castration complex. It emerges that entry into this stage is marked by penis-envy,[42] which must be repressed or transformed. However, Freud points out that "faeces were the first gift that an infant could make, something he could part with out of love for whoever was looking after him" (1981a: 133). He goes on to say that "it is a universal conviction among children [. . .] that babies are born from the bowel like a piece of faeces" (1981a: 133). In "Femininity" (1933), he comes up with the well-known equation of faeces = penis = baby to illustrate the girl's entering into the Oedipal stage as a result of the castration complex (1981b: 150–151). The equation no doubt functions to illuminate the nature of penis-envy, which is a metonymic chain suggesting the irretrievable loss at this stage and the girl's compensatory effort to restore her castrated penis. This equation is also applicable to the psychology of the boy as "both sexes seem to pass through the early phases of libidinal development in the same manner" (1981b: 151). In other words, both sexes have to go through the straits of the Oedipus complex. Elsewhere, in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," analyzing parental distribution of attention among competing children, Freud observes that the child attempts to give birth to a baby him/herself to compensate for the rupture of the tie of affection between the child and the parent of the opposite sex due to "a vain expectation of satisfaction or to jealousy over the birth of a new baby." However, carried out with tragic seriousness, his/her own attempt "fails shamefully" (2001a: 21).

It is the pre-oedipal mother that first acquaints the child with the symbolic lack. Discussing Freud's equation, Juliet Mitchell observes:

> Children believe that babies are born anally, like faeces [. . .] The faeces produced for the mother, or whoever cares for the child, are offered as a gift, from here one train of 'thought' leads to an equation with money, but another to a reconfirmation of the production of a baby which is also always 'given,' a gift. (1974: 102–103)

Mitchell seems to suggest that the child makes efforts to fill the lack that gives rise to his mother's desire. In her words, "The child desires to be what his mother desires he should be for her. He desires to *be* her with his phallus, but learns instead to be her phallus *for* her" (1974: 396, original italics). Consequently,

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[42] Freud has been heavily criticized by feminist scholars who find his description of female sexuality to be masculine-biased. For example, in *Feminine Psychology* (1967), Karen Horney "attacked the Freudian fatalism which presented penis envy as inevitable. She saw the male attribution of penis envy to women as a consequence of both fear of women and envy of their reproductive power" (Berry 1992: 304).

marked with the lack of the Other, the mOther functions to mete out the lack and limitations of the symbolic.

In Melanie Klein's discourse, the Other estranges the infantile ego desirous of both love and nurture from its outside object. In her seminal paper "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms" (1946), she proposes the "paranoid-schizoid position" to chart the specific psychological composite simultaneously repelled and enthralled by the mother's breast during the first three to four months of human life. She depicts this mental makeup as full of psychotic anxieties, persecutory fears as well as love. In "The origins of Transference" (1952), she presents in detail her thinking on the first moments of infancy: "The infant directs his feelings of gratification and love towards the 'good' breast, and his destructive impulses and feelings of persecution towards what he feels to be frustrating, *i.e.* the 'bad' breast" (1997d: 49). At this stage the infant employs a splitting mechanism to largely keep apart from one another "love and hatred as well as the good and bad aspects of the breast" (1997d: 49). Clearly, the good object refers to the small-o other, while the bad object relates to the big-O Other. Both help the ego build itself up in the earliest phases of life. Further, the coexistence of the two types of objects attests to the dynamic composite of the early ego. In other words, the ego is afflicted by its failure to distinguish between good and bad objects.

Taking the mother's breast as the prototype, this primal object witnesses the early ego's failure to establish a self-centred self. In this connection, Julia Kristeva writes:

> To defend itself against being the sole target of this primary destructiveness and to stave off separation, the ego jettisons that destructiveness in part and redirects it toward the outside world. At that point, the ego is drawn into what might be called a quasi-object – the breast – in the sense that the fragile ego is not truly separated in the sense of a 'subject' separated from an 'object,' but it incessantly consumes the breast from within and ejects the breast into the outside world by constructing-vacating itself while constructing-vacating the Other. (2001: 62–63)

Charged with either love or hate, and ejected back and forth, the breast reflects Klein's inclination to designate it as a detachable part-object and witnesses the paranoid fear permeating the nascent ego: "As urethral- and anal-sadistic impulses gain in strength, the infant in his mind attacks the breast with poisonous urine and explosive faeces, and therefore expects it to be poisonous and explosive towards him" (1997c: 63). The faeces then function to project the infant's paranoia outside, which proves of great importance for the infant to maintain a consistent, cohesive self. Eventually, employing the "mechanisms of introjection and projec-

tion" (1988: 262), the early Kleinian ego tentatively builds up a *fragile, borderless* self in relation to others, its mother's breasts in particular.

Mitchell considers the faeces, "a column that stimulates the membranes of the bowel," as "a forerunner of the penis." Moreover, like the faeces, the penis is also detachable from the body in castration (1974: 103). In this light, the faeces serve to compensate for the lack the child feels in the function of the mother's breast. Both Freud and Klein here define the faeces as the part-object which comes into being as a result of the lack/defect the infant finds in the maternal figure. Correspondingly, Kristeva writes, "the anal penis is also the phallus with which infantile imagination provides the feminine sex and [. . .] on the other hand, maternal authority is experienced first and above all, after the first essentially oral frustrations, as sphincteral training" (1982: 71). For instance, in Morrison's novel *Beloved*, the eponymous character employs the part-objects included in Freud's metonymical chain faeces = penis = baby to establish contact with people closest to her in general and her mother in particular. After her return, she looks sick and is incontinent. Later, she recovers health and full strength, and manages to become pregnant in order to provide her mother with another penis in the form of a baby, which is interpretable as either her effort to return to the maternal body or her unconscious effort to become valorised in the symbolic order.

The Kleinian ego finally achieves maturity, signified by its newly developed feelings of gratitude and intensifying desire for reparation. Klein designates this phase the "depressive-manic position":

> during the period from three to six months considerable progress in the integration of the ego comes about. Important changes take place in the nature of the infant's object-relations and of his introjection-progresses. The infant perceives and introjects the mother increasingly as a *complete person*. (1997b: 35, italics mine)

Represented at first as a part-object, that is, the breast, the maternal figure is now recognized as integrated and separated from the subject, which reflects the latter's accrued ability to make binary distinctions and to relate to its outside object as a whole. This, however, suggests the start of interpersonal relationships (social life) based on the capacity for identification[43] and love, which in turn stimulates the ego's developing into a mature, conscious self.

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[43] This, however, suggests the separation of the self from other.

Klein's emphasis on the breast as the primal object which is crucial for the identity formation of the nascent ego inspired Lacan to invent the *objet a*. Upon cutting the cord, the newborn becomes a symbolic subject. Yet, swaddled in care and comfort, the Lacanian newborn is still at oceanic oneness with its mother and thus the 'after-birth' is postponed until the point of weaning, which in turn ushers in desire. Concerning the critical importance of weaning to the psychic construction of the human being, Lacan continues, "The breast [. . .] is not merely a source of 'regressive' nostalgia, having been a source of highly prized nourishment. It is [. . .] related to the mother's body, to its warmth, and even to tender loving care" (2006: 719). Relating to the aforesaid *constitutive loss*, the breast comes as a privileged representative of what Lacan calls the *objet a*:

> all the forms of the *objet a* that can be enumerated are the representatives, the equivalents. [. . .] The breast – as equivocal, as an element characteristic of the mammiferous organization, the placenta for example – certainly represents that part of himself that the individual loses at birth, and which may serve to symbolize the most profound lost object. (1977: 198)

The *objet a*, from that moment on, structures Lacan's thinking on desire; it is the object of desire, impelling desire on its endless circuit for the impossible encounter with the real. "Being selected as the index of desire from among the body's appendages, object *a* is already the exponent of a function, a function that sublimates it even before it exercises the function." Lacan further explicates that "this function is that of the index raised toward an absence about which the 'it' [. . .] has nothing to say, if not that this absence comes from where it speaks [. . .]" (2006: 571). Apparently, the "it" refers to the subject, who is transformed into an object[44] due to his/her complex entanglement with the *objet a*, which serves as a reminder of the absence. The *objet a*'s capacity to jettison the subject into the Other as the object, however, leads Lacan to define it as the partial object. In contrast to Klein's formulation of the breast as the part-object due to its role as part of the complete loved object, Lacan designates the *objet a* as partial and evoking the death drive:

> For isn't it plain to see that the characteristic of being partial, rightly emphasized in objects, is applicable not because these objects are part of a total object, which the body is assumed to be, but because they only partially represent the function that produces him? (2006: 693)

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[44] It is indicated by the word "it."

Dylan Evans rightly points out that "Lacan argues that what isolates certain parts of the body as a part-object is not any biological given but the signifying system of language" (1996: 138). It is apparent that Lacan is obsessed with the haunting existence of desire while disapproving of the false sense of consistency and completeness allocated to the *objet a*.

For Lacan, the volatility of the object insinuates the split imposed upon the subject: "the object generally vacillates in a manner that is complementary to the subject['s vacillation]" (Lacan 2006: 659). In a similar manner, Mitchell states, "the grammatical subject is either absent or shifting or, at most, only passively constructed" (1982: 4). Falling victim to the lack inherent in the *objet a*, the subject is reduced to a back-and-forth movement between self and Other. By superimposing on the term *subject* the meaning of the object, Lacan distinguishes between ego and subject, and deconstructs the illusion of wholeness and perfection asserted by the former in the Other.[45] In this sense, the Other presents a radical difference, reducing the subject as the subject of the unconscious.

Contrasting the Kleinian object existing virtually internally[46] in the subject, the *objet a* is a forever lost object due to the subject's initiation into the Other as the locus of culture; put another way, the *objet a* has in essence been eviscerated by the Other. Naturally, Lacan writes, "while it is a partial object, it is not merely a part, or a spare part [. . .] of the device that depicts the body here, but an element of the structure from the outset" (2006: 571). To clarify, the desired object has taken on the lack inherent to the symbolic structure. Additionally, echoing the breast bereft of nourishment-supplying function by the symbolic father, the *objet a* speaks to Lacan's obsession with symbolic lack, functioning as the theorist's panoply for deciphering love, the lack of love and the desire for love in the symbolic register.

In "Selling Hot Pussy," commenting on the fact that a complete black female was observed as certain body parts by white viewers at a fancy dress ball in Paris, bell hooks writes, "She is there to entertain guests with the naked image of Otherness. They are not to look at her as a whole human being" (1992: 62). Clearly, the critic suggests that, only perceived in terms of body parts, the black female is dehu-

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45 "Between the subject and his/her desire," Leonarodo Rodriguez asserts, "the ego stands as an obstacle. The ego is the product of an identification that provides the subject with an anticipatory sense of identity, unity and mastery" (2001: 194).

46 As analyzed earlier, "*construction from within*," Klein's internal object emerges as an "*amalgam* of representations, sensations, and substances – in a word, it is a diverse array of heterogeneous internal objects" (Kristeva 2001: 63, 63–64, original italics).

manized as an expendable body, that is, the *objet a*, from which supremacist viewers mark themselves off as cultural beings. In Morrison's works, black females are sexualized, serving as the screen onto which dominating white people project their nostalgic longing for the recapture of something lost. Significantly, the black female body is exploited as the *objet a*, functioning to preserve the power of the white patriarchal structures. Women's role as the abject phallus, which is a form of the *objet a*, will be further explored in section 5 of this chapter.

3.3 The *objet a* as the Gaze

In "The Uncanny," Freud proposes that "one of the uncanniest and most widespread superstitions is the fear of the 'evil eye'":

> Anyone who possesses something precious, but fragile, is afraid of the envy of others, to the extent that he projects on to them the envy he would have felt in their place. Such emotions are betrayed by looks, even if they are denied verbal expression [. . .] What is feared is thus a covert intention to harm, and on the strength of certain indications it is assumed that this intention can command the necessary force. (2003: 146)

Freud seems to suggest that the evilness in others' eyes is actually what the subject has projected onto others. For this reason, the subject is afflicted by his/her inner fear of losing something precious yet fleeting, speaking in turn to the transitory nature of human life; or, to employ Lacan's terminology, the lack of the Other. Accordingly, in this passage, the subject engages the symbolic order in the form of the gaze of the Other, which intends, and is filled with, harm.

In Lacan's system, the ego enters into the imaginary order when gazing into the mirror, and identifies itself with the ideal ego, whose presence evidences the formative role of the maternal figure's gaze in constructing the identity of the nascent ego. Important for the mirror stage is the fact that the ego emerges as a result of the young child's *misrecognition* of him/herself as whole. Naturally, Lacan later develops his theory and posits a split between the eye's look and the gaze. In the section entitled "The Line and Light," he employs Hans Holbein's famous painting *The Ambassadors* to illustrate the split between them. Foregrounding two splendidly dressed and immobile figures, the fascinating picture recalls, in the perspective of the period, "the vanity of the arts and sciences":

> the secret of this picture is given at the moment when, moving slightly away, little by little, to the left, then turning around, we see what the magical floating object signifies. It reflects our own nothingness, in the figure of the death's head. (1977: 92)

The death's head catches in its trap both of the splendidly dressed ambassadors as well as the observer. As Felluga (2003) observes, "We may believe that we are in control of our eye's look; however, any feeling of scopophilic power is always undone by the fact that the materiality of existence (the real) always exceeds and undercuts the meaning structures of the symbolic order." The feeling of being spied on is certainly uncannily objectifying, reminiscent of the lack at the heart of the Other. The Other's gaze then proves traumatic; it addresses a moment when the gaze fails to return the eye's look, therefore confirming the perfection and wholeness that the ego has arrogated to itself. By so doing, the Freudian ego is transformed into the Lacanian subject, falling prey to the splitting effect of the symbolic order.

In "I Hear You with My eyes," Slavoj Žižek builds upon Lacan's designation of voice and gaze as *objets a*, establishing that the voice and gaze "are not on the side of the looking/hearing subject but on the side of what the subject sees or hears" (1996: 90). He suggests by this the corporeality of both concepts. Put differently, both inscribe and embody the lack of the Other. Žižek gives the archetypal scene from Hitchcock's *Psycho* as an example: a heroine is disturbed by the impression that "the object she is looking at is somehow returning her gaze" when approaching an allegedly empty house. In fact, the heroine is "dealing with a kind of empty, a priori gaze that cannot be pinpointed as a determinate reality." Put another way, "she is looking at a blind spot, and the object returns the gaze from this blind spot." For this reason, Žižek writes, "so it is with the object returning the gaze, which is a kind of formal 'condition of possibility' of our seeing anything at all" (1996: 90). It follows logically that he claims that "the object gaze is a blind spot within the field of the visible" (1996: 92). The gaze then suggests the subject's incapacity to offer others an ego-confirming gaze, thereby affirming their subject status in the symbolic.

Lacan employs the gaze to suggest the uncanny experience of a primordial Other which returns the observer's gaze, reminding him/her of his/her constitutive lack. In sexist patriarchy, the gaze refers to the phallocentric gaze which functions to inscribe woman as the object of male desire. Lacan's theorization of the gaze can be used to interpret the experience of the uncanny which grips Nathaniel in E. T. A. Hoffmann's story "The Sand-Man" (1816). Freud builds part of his conception of the uncanny on this story. Though engaged to a young woman called Clara, the young man Nathaniel fails to extricate himself from his childhood memories of the Sand-Man, who is obsessed with tearing out children's eyes. His desperate situation is compounded with his falling fatally in love with the beautiful automaton Olympia. Even more tragically, he is further traumatized when repeatedly

confronting the varying surrogates of the Sand-Man, which finally causes his death.[47]

In this story, Nathaniel's childhood memory of the Sand-Man is resuscitated after meeting "Giuseppe Coppola, an itinerant Italian optician who hawks weather-glasses in the university town" (2003: 137). He buys a pocket spyglass from him, using it to look into Professor Spalanzani's house, where he catches sight of Olimpia, the professor's attractive yet inanimate daughter, who turns out to be an automaton, "for which Spalanzini [sic] has made the clockwork and in which Coppola – the Sand-Man – has set the eyes" (2003: 137). One day, the student comes upon the two quarreling over their handiwork: "The optician has carried off the eyeless wooden doll; the mechanic, Spalanzani, picks up Olimpia's bleeding eyes from the floor and throws them at Nathaniel, from whom he says Coppola has stolen them" (2003: 137–138). The blind doll is reminiscent of the heavily made-up women whose silent appearance compounds Freud's feeling of the uncanny in an Italian town.[48] Freud contends that "in Hoffmann's tale the sense of the uncanny attaches directly to the figure of Sand-Man, and therefore to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes" (2003: 138). In this light, Nathaniel's fascination with the motionless, expressionless, blind automaton is attributable to his desire for oneness with the maternal body and his dread of a splitting, spying Other; alternatively, the doll's blindness arouses in Nathaniel the uncanny sense of live burial.

In *The Uncanny*, Nicholas Royle reads Freud's essay as a work of psychoanalysis itself permeated by the uncanny, remarking that Freud seems to be disoriented and "robbed of the sense that telling or retelling a story is always, in some sense, something new, another story" (2003: 40). Royle's argument, however, suggests the agency of the unconscious *qua* an emergent Other which participates in the subject's understanding and retelling of a story. Royle further attributes the uncanny power that "most affects, intrigues, haunts Freud" to the intellectual uncertainty ingrained in literary writings (2003: 40). Yet the intellectual uncertainty signifies a psychological blindness, addressing and arising from a constitutive loss, which is caused by a castrating father representative of cultural and social norms.

Freud's relating of the sense of the uncanny to "being robbed of one's eyes" in the story finds its origin in his preoccupation with his own childhood memories

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[47] See Freud, "The Uncanny," where this story is summarized and discussed (2003b: 135–142).
[48] See section 2.1.

and his feeling of disorientation in the symbolic, because blindness amounts to the depersonalizing experience of losing possession of the shielding superego. In "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety," he elaborates on the affinity between castration and death: "the fear of death should be regarded as analogous to the fear of castration and that the situation to which the ego is reacting is one of being abandoned by the protecting super-ego – the powers of destiny – so that it has no longer any safeguard against all the dangers that surround it" (1993: 285–286). In this passage, castration, death and trauma are interwoven together. Contrasting the sadistic, criticizing superego elaborated earlier in section 2.2.1, the protective superego recalls the object of desire, the *objet a*, which, forever lost, sustains itself only as various surrogate *objets a* such as the mother's breast. Accordingly, the fear of death incites desire for the lost maternal *jouissance*, that is, a merger with the maternal body in the symbolic.

In her groundbreaking essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), Laura Mulvey claims that popular cinema uses two mechanisms to create visual pleasure in male viewers:

> The first, scopophilic, arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. The second, developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen. (1999: 836–837)

The first kind of pleasure addresses the experience of encountering the *objet a* as the momentary circumventing of symbolic containment. The object of desire – "where we see it in its nakedness – is but the slag of a fantasy in which the subject does not come to after blacking out [. . .]. It is a case of necrophilia" (Lacan 2006: 658). Compared to erotic attraction to corpses, the subject's experience of the *objet a* touches on the locus of *jouissance*. In this light, the doll's losing of her eyes in "The Sand-Man" reflects the male gesture of castrating and then inscribing her in a narrative of voyeuristic pleasure. Furthermore, it renders her powerless, a perfect object of the phallocentric, scopophilic gaze of Nathaniel. Nathaniel's obsession with the eyes[49] therefore originates from his fear of being robbed of his *objet a*.

Miriam Thaggert convincingly reads the second method invoked by male viewers in Mulvey's essay to induce visual pleasure as a cinematic enactment of Lacan's

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[49] By the "eyes," I refer to Nathaniel's fear of losing his eyes, his desire for eyes capable of empathy and his dread of the castrating gaze of Coppola who has set the eyes for the automaton – the split between Nathaniel's eye look and Coppola's gaze.

concept of the mirror stage: "the male viewer is fascinated that he looks somewhat like this ideal person on the screen and is pleased in recognizing himself" (1998: 482). Evidently both methods emphasize the male power in looking. Or, alternatively, the phallocentric domination established on the right to look at and commodify the female body.

In Morrison's fiction, white people (mainly white men) utilize the objectifying gaze to eroticize or demonize black people. Under the white supremacist gaze, female bodies in general and black female bodies in particular are objectified to perpetuate white patriarchal supremacy in America. As bell hooks puts it in "The oppositional gaze," an essay elaborating black female spectatorship:

> With the possible exception of early race movies, black female spectators have had to develop looking relations within a cinematic context that constructs our presence as absence, that denies the "body" of the black female so as to perpetuate white supremacy and with it a phallocentric spectatorship where the woman to be looked at and desired is "white." (1992: 118)

The degradation experienced by black females is compounded when they are deprived of the right to look. At the beginning of this essay, hooks recalls being "punished as a child for staring, for those hard intense direct looks children would give grown-ups, looks that were seen as confrontational, as gestures of resistance, challenges to authority" (1992: 115). She goes on to write that she was acquainted with the fact that white slave-owners punished enslaved black people for looking in history classes. Accordingly, she suggests that black people have tragically internalized white people's strategy of colonization: "there is power in looking" (1992: 115). However, "all attempts to repress our/black peoples' right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze." The gaze is decipherable as black people's rebellious gesture of abjecting[50] the object gaze.

The power in looking relates to the ability to appreciate and internalize things conducive to the formation of a speaking being. In "An Aesthetic of Blackness," hooks tells the story of a house inhabited by her grandmother, who acts as her mentor in aesthetics:

> *Our grandmother, Baba, made this house living space. She was certain that the way we lived was shaped by objects, the way we looked at them, the way they were placed around us. She was certain that we were shaped by space.*

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[50] Here, the complex Kristevan term is used as a verb, referring to the process of ejecting or expelling the Other.

> *From her I learn about aesthetics, the yearning for beauty that she tells me is the predicament of heart that makes our passion real. A quiltmaker, she teaches me about color. Her house is a place where I am learning to look at things, where I am learning how to belong in space.* (1990: 103, original italics)

It is apparent that hooks is elaborating an ego-syntonic[51] space. Opposing the Lacanian gaze which objectifies the subject, the good objects are conceived by Baba, the grandmother, as contributing to the formation of a positive black subjectivity. Consequently, the ability to look at beautiful things, to perceive beauty, functions in parallel to being mirrored by a reciprocal, maternal gaze.

Baba's ability to manipulate colors in quiltmaking renders her a generational culture-transmitter. In parallel, in her widely studied and frequently anthologized short story "Everyday Use" (1973), Alice Walker brings up the question of whether old quilts should be preserved as cultural heritage or integrated into everyday life. The story is told in the first person by the "Mama" Mrs. Johnson, a "large, big-boned [black] woman with rough, man-working hands" living in the Deep South with one of her two daughters (1994: 24). The story contrasts Mrs. Johnson and her shy, scarred younger daughter Maggie, who still live traditionally in the rural South, with her smart, educated daughter Dee, who is estranged from her roots and her family. In the story, the quilts are preserved to commemorate Grandma Dee, who taught Maggie how to quilt:

> They had been pieced by Grandma Dee and then Big Dee and me had hung them on the quilt frames on the front porch and quilted them. One was in the Lone Star pattern. The other was Walk Around the Mountain. In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's Paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War. (1994: 32)

The quilts symbolize the American history of slavery, but they also evidence black women's collective creativity and artistic spirit. Significantly, the intimate interrelation between black females in quilting functions to solidify the quilters into a "we" in the face of the shattering strategy of chattel bondage.

Black quilting represents the aesthetic of blackness that Baba has taught her granddaughter hooks: "Aesthetics [. . .] is more than a philosophy or theory of art and beauty; it is a way of inhabiting space, a particular location, a way of looking

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[51] For the definition of this term, see section 2.2.2.

and becoming" (1990: 104). This space is an ancestral, spiritual space, and what distinguishes black aesthetic is its collective, participatory character. Baba has taught hooks "we must learn to see" (1990: 104). What she asks her granddaughter to see is the thrill of bold colors interwoven into wild, intricate patterns, which suggests an ancestral, maternal presence. Baba's house thus functions as the maternal body which provides hooks with a self-confirming oceanic oneness. It comes as natural that hooks emphasizes the "powerful role black women have played in constructing for [black people] homeplaces that are the site for resistance" (1990: 45), rebelling against the white supremacist gaze which threatens to dehumanize or animalize black people.

In "The oppositional gaze," hooks studies two black women's struggle for subjectivity in Sankofa's collective work *Passion of Remembrance*. She writes, "Dressing to go to a party, Louise and Maggie claim the 'gaze.' Looking at one another, staring in mirrors, they appear completely focused on their encounter with black femaleness" (1992: 130). Arguably, they represent the ideal ego for each other in the Lacanian mirror stage. Yet instead of being the Lacanian nascent ego recognizing itself as integrated through a misrecognition (the aid of the mirror image), the two women render each other an empowering, subjectifying, maternal gaze which breaks the cloak of invisibility and ugliness projected on them by the white objectifying supremacist gaze: "How they see themselves is most important, not how they will be stared at by others. Dancing to the tune 'Let's get Loose,' they display their bodies not for a voyeuristic colonizing gaze but for that look of recognition that affirms their subjectivity – that constitutes them as spectators." Quite significantly, hooks' insight into the power of the gaze breathes life into Lacan's formulation of it. In her theoretical system, the gaze is both objectifying and, more importantly, subjectifying, which can be used by the dominated as a resisting strategy to disrupt "conventional racist and sexist stereotypical representations" of black people (1992: 130). In a similar manner, Morrison distinguishes between looks that kill and looks that heal in her fiction. She employs the dehumanizing gaze (looks that kill) to highlight the harm that white supremacist domination has inflicted on black psyches; by contrast, she utilizes the maternal, subjectifying gaze (looks that heal) to stress the exigency of rooting the black self in the African cultural past in order to heal the scars of the chattel enslavement of black people.

3.4 The Abject as Othered Object

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva proposes the theory of abjection to elaborate the subject's effort to banish the persecuting Other: "There looms, within abjec-

tion, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" (1982: 1). Arising from her study of Freud's taboo theory, the abject deals with what the subject casts off from him/herself in order to become a symbolic, speaking being. As opposed to the paranoid Kleinian ego, plagued with its failure to distinguish between good and bad objects, the Kristevan subject obtains symbolic identity by expelling the trauma-engendering abject. It follows logically that the abject exists beyond the symbolic, only taking shape after transgressing the boundary constituting the subject.

The abject disrupts the demarcating line between the subject and the real. Kristeva describes the abject as something "about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me" (1982: 2). Uncannily, the abject evokes the real which draws the subject towards annihilation. Kristeva's invention of the abject addresses her suspicion of the power of desire to drive the subject in a symbolic order bent on Othering, barring the subject from culture; hence, she observes, "there are lives not sustained by *desire*, as desire is always for objects. Such lives are based on *exclusion*" (1982: 6, original italics). By so doing, she localizes the abject totally in the register of the real, which attacks the assumed consistency of language.

Kristeva's formulation of the concept of the abject is greatly influenced by Mary Douglas, who has suggested that, because orifices symbolize the body's most vulnerable points, "matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body." She goes on to point out that

> The mistake is to treat bodily margins in isolation from all other margins. There is no reason to assume any primacy for the individual's attitude to his own bodily and emotional experience, any more than for his cultural and social experience. (1995: 122)

What Douglas suggests here is that bodily margins are employed in the context of cultural and social experiences of borders. Discussing Douglas, Kristeva asserts, "The potency of pollution is therefore not an inherent one; it is proportional to the potency of the prohibition that founds it" (1982: 69). Consequently, the role of culture proves critical in delimiting the physical self. As Kristeva eloquently points out:

> Through frustrations and prohibitions, this authority shapes the body into a *territory* having areas, orifices, points and lines, surfaces and hollows, where the archaic power of mastery and neglect, of the differentiation of

> proper-clean and improper-dirty, possible and impossible, is impressed and exerted. It is a "binary logic." (1982: 72, original italics)

Eventually, originally inside and integral to the body, the discharged bodily fluids or excrement, however, take on the lack inherent in the Other. In this sense, the prohibition practiced on bodily discharge serves to substantiate symbolic attempts in order to marginalize what is foreign and alien.

Cannibalism can be used to probe into the binary logic which transforms bodily discharge into cultural taboos. Featuring the pleasure of eating, it speaks to the subject's attempts to colonize the Other, thereby incorporating it into his narcissistic plenitude. Freud proclaims that "the act of eating is a destruction of the object with the final aim of incorporating it, and the sexual act is an act of aggression having as its purpose the most intimate union" (Freud 1949: 6). Accordingly, cannibalism deals with the dissolving of the distance/difference between self and other. Yet, according to Kristeva:

> the fantasy of incorporation by means of which I attempt to escape fear (I incorporate a portion of my mother's body, her breast, and thus I hold on to her) threatens me none the less, for a symbolic, paternal prohibition already dwells in me on account of my learning to speak at the same time. (1982: 39)

Due to the emergence of the paternal Other, "my empty and incorporating mouth," detached from myself, "watches me, threatening, from the outside" (1982: 40). What Kristeva expresses here is the intrusive, enmeshing Other which has converted the object into an abject, an abominable nothingness. In other words, the laws of language have pulverized and objectified the subject fixated on incorporating. Consequently, what combines cannibalism and abjection is their common interest in tampering with borders: cannibalism is a "narrative of the self and of the other" (Porter 2002) – the desire of the self for the captivating other. By contrast, the abject is not "my correlative" (Kristeva 1982: 1) and belongs instead in the Other. While in sex and in eating the subject makes efforts to efface borders between self and other (the object), the experience of abjection always deals with the setting up of borders between self and the intruding Other.

Kristeva evokes the fear of castration by formulating the experience of abjection as a "conglomerate of fear, deprivation, and nameless frustration, which [. . .] belongs to the unnamable" (1982: 35). In contrast with the object existing to fill the lack resulting from the castration, the abject exists as a cultural taboo. The experience of abjection is therefore uncanny when the abject transcends the borders of the familiar and unfamiliar: "A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing,

either" (Kristeva 1982: 2). Correspondingly, Ruth Parkin-Gounelas argues, "it is [the] implication of familiarity, of something known but long since forgotten (repressed), which makes its emergence so eerie" (2001: 104). Apparently, the abject emerges as an agent from the repressed past, reminding the subject of his/her unindividuated state before appearing as a speaking being.

Assaulting the subject as the uncanny, the abject was originally an inseparable part of him/her. In ascertaining the origin of the abject, Kristeva states, "Once upon blotted-out time, the abject must have been a magnetized pole of covetousness" (1982: 8). She suggests here the kinship between object and abject. The abject originates from inside the body while the object is localized outside as an impossible object of desire. As she clearly claims, "*the abject would* [. . .] *be the 'object' of primal repression*" (1982: 12, original italics). The primal repression is a deeply embedded infrastructure playing a decisive role in the second repression happening after the oedipal phase. Explicators of psychoanalysis Laplanche and Pontalis discuss Freud's primal repression in the following way: it is "the formation of a certain number of unconscious ideas – the 'primal repressed'. The unconscious nuclei constituted in this way then participate in repression proper" (1983: 333). The unconscious nuclei function as a pole of attraction for elements to be repressed later. The nuclei are first and foremost an indicator of a primal lack, which acts as a harbinger of the child's realization of his castrated status upon his entry into the Oedipal stage. Accordingly, the demarcating line between the object and the abject does not come into being until the stage of the primary repression. In other words, originally, the object and the abject are inseparable, functioning as a reminder of the bipartition experienced by the newborn upon its entering into the world.

In Lacan's theoretical work, the primal repression goes back to weaning, which bars the individual from primal oneness with the maternal body. In struggling to transcend the symbolic lack, the subject encounters the real at the locus of the unconscious. Lacan suggests the neurotic person's unrelenting searching after maternal *jouissance*, which mixes pain and pleasure: the unconscious is what is produced in the gap of the real – to be one with the mother. From this perspective, it is possible to read Beloved as the real in Morrison's novel, disclosing a more fundamental lack underlying the signifying chain than the infanticide: Beloved's return points to what Lacan terms the "constitutive loss" (2006: 716) on the part of Sethe, symbolizing the latter's struggle with her Othered, orphaned status in the white symbolic, and implying her longing for an idealized merger with the maternal body. Suggesting the primary repression, Beloved merges the characters of the object and the abject: as the object of desire of Sethe, Beloved is finally

abjected by Sethe when the latter is oriented towards the future by the end of the novel.

The relationship between the object and the abject also accounts for the polyvalence of the *objet a*. Lacan formulates the *objet a* to fill the lack caused by symbolic castration. For him, the symbolic order functions through the network of signifiers which are driven by the subject's desire for the object. Yet desire only comes into being due to the lack of any object to satisfy it. Accordingly, the *objet a* speaks to both the desirability of the object and the abominability of the abject. Such an *objet a* wielding power spells ruin for the subject, who has been fractured by the symbolic order; yet at another level, symbolic-defying, the volatile *objet a* prides itself on harboring the subversive force of the unconscious, which is critical for the subject to shake off symbolic shackles. The affinity between the *objet a* and the abject is manifested particularly in traumatic reenactments in Morrison's fiction writing, where the *objet a* merges maternal plenitude and the materiality of slavery. Moreover, as a disruptive agency, the *objet a* drives the black people buried alive in the past to engage and abject the demons of the deep legacy of slavery, an act which, significantly, brings about the healing of its scars.

3.5 The Abject Phallus as the Locus of the Real

Lacan nominates the phallus as the privileged signifier which secures the other signifiers' status in the symbolic dimension: "it is the signifier that is destined to designate meaning effects as a whole, insofar as the signifier conditions them by its presence as signifier" (2006: 579). As the signifier towards which the living subject pushes him/herself forward throughout life, the phallus figures as the signifier which promises to endow the subject with the subject position in the symbolic order. However, the signifying chain points to the fact that what the phallic signifier introduces into the signifying system is but *absence* or *difference* which sabotages the signifier/signified dyad and disrupts the interrelated signifiers. Accordingly, the phallus signifies the absolute Otherness of the symbolic order. Naturally, Lacan portrays it as an "imaginary object" (2006: 693). In this connection, Jacqueline Rose writes, "The Other therefore stands against the phallus – its pretence to meaning and false consistency. It is from the Other that the phallus seeks authority and is refused" (1982: 51). Consequently, though enjoined and activated by the phallus, the Lacanian signifier virtually spells ruin to the privileged signifier.

In an effort to approach the question of male and female sexual desire, Lacan designates the woman as serving as the man's phallus, which functions as the "signi-

fier marking gender difference as a position taken toward language and law" (Ragland-Sullivan 1991: 57). The woman then functions as the privileged signifier which subjects man to symbolic castration and, paradoxically, imbues him with phallic power. For example, in *The Woman Warrior* (1975), Maxine Hong Kingston points out that in traditional Chinese culture, women sacrifice themselves for their husbands and family life:

> Marry a rooster, follow a rooster.
> Marry a dog, follow a dog.
> Married to a cudgel, married to a pestle,
> Be faithful to it. Follow it. (1989: 193)

In this way, women are totally objectified upon entering into marriage under the domination of patriarchal Chinese culture. In *Écrits*, Lacan employs the word "masquerade" to suggest the masochism that the woman has experienced upon entering into culture: "a woman rejects an essential part of femininity, namely, all its attributes, in the masquerade" (2006: 583). In so doing, women actually give up their right to be a speaking subject in the phallocentric symbolic order.

Masquerading to match man's phallic nature, the Lacanian woman is always "already doubled" (Lacan 1982: 152) and divided from herself, living both inside and outside language. Falling prey to symbolic signifiers, she is deprived of the right to speak. For this reason, it is impossible to essentialize her who is "*not all*":

> when any speaking being whatever lines up under the banner of women it is by being constituted as not all that they are placed within the phallic function. It is this that defines the . . . the what? – the woman precisely, except that *The* woman can only be written with *The* crossed through. There is no such thing as *The* woman. (Lacan 1982: 144, original italics)

In this light, there is no signifier for the woman in the unconscious: "Any search opens to the search for an absent signifier where the inadequacy of signifiers for sexual difference finally bump [sic] up against a beyond in culture itself which Lacan names Woman" (Ragland-Sullivan 1991: 59). She is the Other sex which suggests the unconscious locus where the man displaces and deposits his lack in the Other.

Julia Kristeva elaborates the woman's entering into culture and language as masochistic self-mutilation: "If what woman desires is the very opposite of the sublimating Word and paternal legislation, she neither *has* nor *is* that opposite" (1986: 144, original italics). Accordingly, as with Lacan, Kristeva refuses to categorize the woman. She elaborates further:

> All that remains for her is to pit herself constantly against that opposite in the very movement by which she desires it, to kill it repeatedly and then suffer endlessly: a radiant perspective on masochism, a masochism that is the price she must pay in order to be Queen. (1986: 144)

Indeed, the woman is caught in a double bind: whether she desires that opposite or expels it, she "has no access to the word" (1986: 142). Put another way, what she desires turns out to be the Lacanian real, which implies her status of lack resulting from paternal legislation. Not surprisingly, she has to submit herself to symbolic castration in order to secure power in a patriarchal society.

The woman's affinity to the real inscribes her beyond the symbolic order. As Lacan points out, "Her being not all in the phallic function does not mean that she is not in it at all. She is in it *not* not at all. She is right in it. But there is something more" (1982: 145, original italics). This does not mean that she exists outside the symbolic, but that she also relates to the Other "where truth[52] falters" (Lacan 1982: 151). Significantly, it relates the woman to "a point of origin prior to the mark of symbolic difference and the law," which "gives them access to an archaic form of expressivity outside the circuit of linguistic exchange" (Rose 1982: 54). The woman *qua* the phallus both registers and invalidates the power of language.

Kristeva designates "feminine," far from being a primeval essence, as an "other" without a name which subjective experience confronts when it does not stop at the appearance of its identity. The subject's reluctance to stop suggests the other as reminiscent of maternal plenitude. Yet at another level, in so doing, he risks being swamped by the maternal body and then "the loss not of a part (castration) but of the totality of his living being" (Kristeva 1982: 64). Morrison highlights the lethal effects of regression into the maternal body in her novels. For example, after Beloved's reinsertion into her family, mother and daughters cluster together in the all-female household, falling into oblivion of the outside world; they are in effect buried alive in the house of 124, which figures as the abject maternal body.[53] On the other hand, Kristeva inclines to eroticize the experience of encountering the maternal body:

> How, if not by incorporating a devouring mother, for want of having been able to introject her and joy in what manifests her, for want of being able to

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[52] In Lacan's diagram, truth points to the lack ingrained to the symbolic system. It refers to "language as a system of rules [which] is indeed a prototype of a closed circuit whose self-sustaining *raison d'être* is not only to negotiate desire, but also to exclude disunities, inconsistencies, doubts, fadings, anxiety, *jouissance*" (Ragland-Sullivan 1991: 63).

[53] 124 *qua* an abject place will be further discussed in chapter 7.

> signify her: urine, blood, sperm, excrement. [. . .] the advent of one's own identity demands a law that mutilates. (1982: 54)

What Kristeva expresses here is a law founded on the sacrifice of the maternal figure who is feared for her "generative power" (1982: 77). Accordingly, Kristeva highlights "a coming face to face with an unnamable otherness – the solid rock of jouissance and writing as well." By so doing, she "set aside [. . .] a different version of the confrontation with the feminine, one that, going beyond abjection and fright, is enunciated as ecstatic" (1982: 59). This moment serves to suggest the subject's escaping symbolic castration by way of straying on to the "excluded ground" of the maternal body: "And the more he strays, the more he is saved" (1982: 8). The more he strays, the more he escapes the castrating, confining paternal law. Eventually, the loss and repression of the maternal is eroticized and projected onto the woman, who is simultaneously rejected and sought after in the phallocentric symbolic order.

In Kristeva's system, abjection is at some point synonymous with castration, which is integral to the formation of symbolic identity: "To preserve himself from severance, he is ready for more – flow, discharge, hemorrhage. All Mortal" (Kristeva 1982: 55). For instance, to protect her double Nel as a gesture of protesting her own marginalized position in the symbolic, Sula slashes the tip of her finger to scare away the Irish hoodlums; similarly, by having her leg cut off by a train in order to collect insurance money to raise her children, Eva achieves her status as a matriarch in the Peace family. Similarly, in *Beloved*, Sethe commits infanticide, which constitutes symbolic suicide at the same time, and is thus interpretable as a moment of abjection of slavery-inflicted shame; she obtains ownership of her children by sacrificing them firstly to the symbolic. To view the three female characters' violent acts collectively in the light of Kristeva's statement and query, "The eroticization of abjection, and perhaps any abjection to the extent that it is already eroticized, is an attempt at stopping the hemorrhage: a threshold before death, a halt or a respite?" (1982: 55. Question mark in the original). In this light, subjected to the castrating effect of the symbolic, they figure as Lacanian subjects who take on the power possessed by the phallus by succumbing to the letter of the Other (the symbolic order) in the first place.

Fusing the opposing other and Other, woman remains remarkably unconscious to man: she insinuates the non-existence of sexuality and the un-relation between the two sexes in the symbolic. Yet alternatively, sexuality arises when taking into

account the limits of meaning.[54] It may be argued that Lacan's inclination to read sexuality side by side with the unseen and interstitial presence of the woman corresponds to his tendency to decipher the subject in relation to the split inflicted on him/her by the symbolic. Inevitably, men as well as women are driven by desire marked by the Other. Defining both sexes with their desire for the lost *objet a* in the symbolic order, Lacan has effectively dissolved the demarcating line between male and female sexuality.

Ragland-Sullivan observes that feminine sexuality is "not necessarily correlated with gender"; rather, it is a "masquerade not only because s/he can disguise her desire, can fake it, can cover her body with cosmetics and jewels and make of *it* a phallus, but also because her masquerade hides a fact – that masculine sexuality is a tenuous matter" (1991: 71, original italics). Accordingly, the equal, parallel development of the sexes belongs in the realm of fantasy, since the unconscious divides subjects from themselves and each other. In this view, "Lacan's phallic signifier would not be read imaginarily – i.e. essentialized – as a privileging of the masculine. It would be seen, rather, as a dividing effect created by learning difference as gender difference" (1991: 71). From this aspect, the phallus is improvised as a result of the lack of a signifier to represent the non-existent sexual difference in the unconscious. As a result, the genital drive based on a prescribed sexual division ("which ensures the survival of a species") (Lacan 1977: 150) is not listed by Lacan as one of the partial drives. The expulsion of the genital drive from the realm of the drive amounts to questioning its very existence or addressing its subsistence only in the realm of fantasy.[55] Lacan in effect suggests the failure of sexuality to "represent in the subject the mode of what is male or female in his being" (2006: 720), which in turn dismantles the two sexual poles presumed to be integral to the formation of sexuality in Freud's paradigm. In consequence, dissolving the prescribed divisions of sexual reality, Lacan's conception of sexuality eludes language and transcends cultural limitations.

The phallus signifies sexuality insofar as the subject searches after it unconsciously in the symbolic,

> something is lacking to define how two sexes [. . .] might find a "natural" rapport or Oneness within the actual otherness or twoness out of which cultural mythologies and ideologies spring, essentializing an anatomical divide

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[54] This point has been elaborated earlier in this chapter in section 1.

[55] It is interesting that, in studying the nature of "phallic *jouissance*," Lacan identifies genital drive as "the *jouissance* of the idiot" (1982: 152).

> at the level of psychology, sociology and economics. (Ragland-Sullivan 1991: 53)

In this view, the unconscious functions as the locus where the barred/eclipsed subject deposits his repressed drives/desires engendered by the primacy of the phallus in the symbolic dimension. Alternatively, however, it is the non-existence of sexual divide that puts the phallus in a position of primacy in the symbolic register. As Ragland-Sullivan suggests, "Although the signifier 'phallus' does not exist as a positive object, it signifies this fact: that the effects of sexual difference constitute the axis of the symbolic order" (1991: 61). Accordingly, both man and woman have to sacrifice themselves to the phallus to be able to speak in the symbolic register.

As a signifier of the lack, the phallus sexualizes the asexual object of male desire; it introduces sexuality into man insofar as he is driven unconsciously by the constitutive lack towards the lost *objet a*, that is, the woman. The woman's lack of and capacity to reflect the power of this privileged signifier finally inspires Lacan to formulate her as the *objet a* in response to male fantasy: "What was seen, but only from the side of the man, was that what he relates to is the *objet a*" (Lacan 1982: 157). Seeking after a sexual object marked with the radical lack of the Other, the man is in effect reduced to an obsessional neurotic.

Inspired by Lacan's designation of woman as the object of man, Rose comments, "As the place onto which lack is projected, and through which it is simultaneously disavowed, woman is a 'symptom' for the man" (1982: 48). The word 'symptom' certainly reminds us of the life and power denied to the woman: "Defined as such, reduced to being nothing other than this fantasmatic place, the woman does not exist" (1982: 48). Woman is in effect effaced by what she represents for man. On the second level, proving unrelenting and hence haunting, the symptom refers further back to the real, which functions as the cause of desire and thus weighs on language. Accordingly, incarnating the real, the pulsative, unconscious assaults of the symptom have effectively undermined the phallus. Put differently, the phallus is in effect eclipsed and eviscerated by the very symbolic signifiers it gives rise to. On the third level, as Slavoj Žižek observes, "man himself exists only through woman qua his symptom: his very ontological consistency depends on, is 'externalized' in, his symptom" (qtd. in Hawthorn 2001: 322). Žižek seems to suggest woman as the Other sex onto which man projects his endemic lack. Correspondingly, Ellie Ragland-Sullivan claims:

> males defend against imaginary castration anxiety by linking identity, discourse, and sexual apparatus to a fantasy of superiority *qua* difference. Such a position must then mobilize forces to shut out the feminine, telling the tale

> that something lacks in speech and being; i.e., the Other sex that bespeaks the unconscious. (1991: 59)

Woman's symptomatic, interstitial existence in the symbolic speaks to the lack of the Other. In this connection, Ragland-Sullivan points out that "Lacan saw Woman as symptomatic, not only for man, but of a beyond or excess that niggles in reality and thought" (1991: 62). Put another way, the woman points to the place where symbolic, patriarchal meaning falls apart: "A beyond that returns in language and *logos*. She counts by not counting." Counting by being castrated, she spells ruin for the man, emerging as the desired object marked by the lack of the Other. Yet "it is, paradoxically, no-thing and that on which we count for our grounding. She counts in the same way the real does, as our very cause which is a lost cause" (1991: 62–63, original italics). Evidently, the enigma of woman rests in the fact that her nature of being the Other of man reduces the latter as a hysteric.[56] Or, in Lacan's words, "the whole of his [man's] realisation in the sexual relation comes down to fantasy" (1982: 157). Eventually, woman transcends the gender difference, appearing as a cultural symptom indicative of the deficiency of the phallocentric order.

Perceptively, Kristeva finds affinity between the abject and the symptom: "The *symptom*: a language that gives up, a structure within the body, a non-assimilable alien, a monster, a tumor, a cancer that the listening devices of the unconscious do not hear, for its strayed subject is huddled outside the paths of desire" (1982: 11, original italics). The symptom appears as an ossified real which ruptures the signifying chain. In giving body to the symptom, Kristeva suggests the haunting, unrelenting war that the real wages on the symbolic. It is hence inevitable that the woman's symptomatic, phallic function deprives man eerily of his self-autonomy; she encapsulates both man's desire and fear, impinging eerily and inexorably on the lack of the Other and revealing relentlessly the obsessive nature of a male-oriented culture. Unarguably, as the other marked with the lack of the Other, the woman evokes the return of the repressed. In fact, she figures as the abject, parodic phallus of man. In consequence, Lacan's deciphering of the woman through language renders her presence uncanny in the symbolic register.

The abject status of women is reflected by their degradation into the role of expendable bodies in the patriarchal sexual and social order of modern class-society. In a similar vein, American people of African origin are reduced to the level of

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[56] By this, I suggest the fact that the lack inherent in the Other calls into question woman's role as the *objet a* of man, and thereby renders man as hysteric and manic, in an constant attempt to pin down woman in order to take on phallic power.

exploitable bodies, absorbing and inscribing the ravages of slavery, reflecting their subjugated position structured by race, nation and class. This is also true of gender issues. Morrison takes a great interest in the abject position as well as the phallic function on the part of black females: the bodies that are mutilated, disfigured, brutalized or repressed are, more often than not, black and female, existing as a mosaic composed mainly of past memories. Bennett and Dickerson make a similar claim, pointing out that "in slavery, the black female body served as one of the prime technologies of reproduction and commodification. It, more than any other body, politically belies the American declaration of democracy, equality, and freedom" (2001: 13). The historical status of black people as commodified bodies functions to spatialize, incarnate and commemorate the horror and terror physically and psychologically perpetrated on American people of African origin.

In foregrounding the black "body in pain," Morrison denounces this eroticization and exploitation, attacking the equivalence of blackness to marketable bodies. Perhaps most significantly, her gesture of defying this historical reduction of African Americans manifests itself as her prizing of the body as the prime site of healing for her characters. Her literary gesture firstly emphasizes the degradation and devaluation black people have suffered at the hands of whites: the black body serves as the locus of the real onto which whites project their self-hate, fear and repressed desire. Of no less significance, the black body has "all the explanatory power of minds" (Grosz 1994: vii); it is the place where the white, hegemonic language is spoken in a stuttering way. Eventually, the black body in general and the black female body in particular emerge as the spatialized real of the slave past as well as a place of psychological grounding and the site of race and history for black people who have succumbed to the ravages of the system of slavery. Defying being categorized, the women are loud and boisterous; they surrender and at once solicit, bringing light to the lack deriving from the dehumanizing, dominant ideology and proving to be a path to the glorious past before the unwelcome intrusion of the white Other. For this reason, in the work of Morrison, engaging with the maternal memory body proves an exigency for the trauma survivors still buried alive in the past.

4 REMEMORYING THE MATERNAL SILENCE: THE FOREIGNER AS THE WAY TO THE SELF

> [T]he face that is so *other* bears the mark of a crossed threshold that irremediably imprints itself as peacefulness or anxiety.
>
> – Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 1991.
>
> [T]he mother's gift of birth is also the gift of death, and [. . .] the embrace of the beloved also signifies a dissolution of the self.
>
> – Elisabeth Bronfen, "Death Drive (Freud)," 1992.

This chapter discusses the trauma of slavery as the engagement with the maternal silence in Morrison's fiction. In order to unearth the "unread" story and muzzled voice of black people, Morrison often populates her novels with a medley of black females, either on the verge of falling apart or inextricably gravitating towards each other. In *Maternal Body and Voice*, Paula Gallant Eckard notes that "throughout the history of western culture and literature, maternal perspectives have been ignored and the mother's voice silenced" (2002: 1). Morrison discloses the aftershock of the chattel system by highlighting dysfunctional black motherhood throughout her work: slavery trauma is, more often than not, experienced indirectly, in relation to the devaluation or dysfunction of black motherhood in slavery and its aftermath.

The history of American people of African origin is a history of deprivation. Most black families forged in racial oppression were driven asunder, and most black slaves were divested at an early age of their autonomous egos due to dysfunctional motherhood. As a prominent African American writer proficient in psychoanalysis, Morrison has a tendency to read racial issues in general and dysfunctional black motherhood in particular as a way of exploring the psychic damage perpetrated on black people by the slave trauma. Accordingly, the shortcomings of black motherhood are suggestive of the shortcomings endemic to the white symbolic.

Under chattel enslavement, the black woman was used primarily for the purpose of producing increasing numbers of slaves for her masters. Denied the rights of motherhood, the black mother either displayed a fanatical claim to oneness with her children or failed to respond to the children's basic need for empathy and mirroring in their formative years, a failure which sheds light on the shortcomings of black motherhood and family relations. The maternal silence suggests the mother's incapacity to insinuate herself into the egos of her children as their selfobject.

To clarify, the mother fails to help her children establish a self-centred, bordered self. As a result, the children's psyche is unconsciously organized in terms of an archaic, grandiose self, or based on an idealized merger with their parent imago.

Denied the subject position, most black mothers make efforts to define themselves in terms of maternity in Morrison's work, yet their status as the marginalized Other calls into question their maternal subjectivity. As Jean Wyatt eloquently claims when studying Sethe's "problematic relation to language," it "results from her position as body not only in a maternal order but also in a social order that systematically denied the subject position to those it defined as objects of exchange" (1993: 478). Black women's efforts to define themselves in relation to their children in such a system reveal their psychic incompleteness: their fanatical preservation of oneness with their children leads inevitably to the destruction of either themselves or their children. The maternal silence engenders a pressed-in rupture of the psyche of the children, driving them to search after the maternal figure throughout their life. Doubling deals especially with losing possession of the protective maternal *objet a* and the desire to return to it before the incursion of the white symbolic. As a result, most female characters dwell in the shadowy, uncanny realm of doubling: Sula and Nel in *Sula*; Beloved and Sethe in *Beloved*; and Christine and Heed in *Love*. Doubling is useful and central to the study of the degradation of life for African Americans living in the generally whitewashed culture of the United States in Morrison's writing.

The maternal silence is entangled with and built upon the complexity and polyvalence of rememory. In this thesis, cannibalism and traumatic dissociation represent the process of rememorying the past, the loss of boundaries between the mother/child dyad, and the harm inflicted on each other or the foreignness planted between them. On the other hand, characteristic of conflicts of love and hate, the traumatic relationship of the embattled dyad opens them to the outside world, and finally to self. As Ulman and Brothers suggests, "as subject, a person creates self; and, accordingly to self psychology, such a creation always occurs in the context of a relationship to selfobject" (1988: 5–6). From this perspective, the traumatized person's effort to define him/herself in relation to the other is readable as their attempts to create him/herself. Then healing comes with the traumatized individual's accrued capacity to integrate the mother *qua* the selfobject into the fabric of his/her psyche. Through the complex use of doubling, Morrison highlights the shattering slave trauma, the exigency of facing up to the history of slavery and the possibility of healing.

4.1 Othered Mother-Child Relationship

It is apparent that the institution of chattel slavery turned the black woman into a birth-giving machine. Angela Davis observes: "as her biological destiny, the woman bore the fruits of procreation; as her social destiny, she cooked, sewed, washed, cleaned house, raised the children" (1995: 205). Significantly, the performing of domestic labor "was the *only* labor of the slave community that could not be directly and immediately claimed by the oppressor." As a result, endowing the enslaved black woman with some degree of autonomy, it thrust the black woman "into the center of the slave community," thereby making her "essential to the *survival* of the community." Accordingly, Davis considers such activities as "survival-oriented [. . .] a form of resistance" (1995: 205, original italics). It is arguable that childbearing and child-nurturing endow the black woman with phallic power in a social order predisposing black people to exploitation and deprivation.

The significant role of childbearing and raising for black women derived from the fact that, forged in the crucible of race, black families were especially predisposed to fracture. Aptly, Paula Gallant Eckard remarks that "the ascendancy of motherhood over marriage perhaps lay in the fact that slave marriages were fragile institutions" (2002: 20). Correlatively, Deborah Gray White points out that, though the newborns helped to solidify the black family structure, the pressure on the young female slave was not brought to a close after marriage and childbirth as unpredictable factors could bring about "the sale or permanent separation of a husband and a wife" (1985: 103). As a result, "a young woman's search for another spouse with whom to have more children for her owner was expected to begin immediately" (1985: 103). For this reason, "prenuptial intercourse was not considered evil, nor was it, as too many Southern whites mistakenly assumed, evidence of promiscuity" (1985: 106). In her writing, Morrison highlights single black mothers to disclose the damage done to black families by the horror and inhumanity of slavery. For example, in *Sula*, Hannah, a single mother renowned for her sexual freedom, is portrayed by the author as a "perfectly charming person" (Parker 1994: 63) and liked by the local society.

In *Toni Morrison's Developing Class Consciousness*, Doreatha Drummond Mbalia explains the repetition of key words[57] as Morrison's attempt to reflect the un-

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[57] For instance, on page 200 the chapter begins with the lines, "Beloved, she my daughter. She mine"; on page 204 the chapter ends with "She come back to me, my daughter, and she is mine." Further, the next chapter ends with "She's mine, Beloved. She's mine" (1997: 209).

changing status of the African masses (2004: 100). However, it rather suggests the author's obsession with the trauma of maternal silence as one of the effects of genocidal slavery. In her fiction, more often than not, the absence of father figures, complemented by emotionally distant mothers, prevent the characters from enacting healthy fantasies of idealized merger with an omnipotent parent imago. Inevitably, maternal silence spawns the unrelenting search after the maternal figure on the part of black people.

Morrison is greatly influenced by traditional African culture, foregrounding mother-daughter dyads[58] to address slavery trauma in her work. White suggests that in traditional West Africa, black women established their position as childbearers and rearers in African family and tribal life:

> mothers, by virtue of their having and nurturing children, ensured the survival of the lineage, the consanguineal group that controlled and dictated the use and inheritance of property, provided access to various political and/or religious offices, regulated marriages, and performed political and economic functions. [. . .] the most important responsibility of each individual was to have children. [. . .] African women were valued for their work, which contributed to the economic success of the family, but their greatest asset was their fecundity. (1985: 106–107)

As a result, the black woman's integral role in family/race continuity has contributed to her exalted status as the matriarch in the family. In nearly all of her novels, there is a maternal figure occupying the center of story: Eva in *Sula*, Sethe in *Beloved*, and L in *Love*. In "Those Females Who Can Wreck the Infinite," Kristeva highlights the "two-faced mother" who "gives [. . .] life but without infinity" (1982: 158–159). In parallel, Morrison suggests that black mothers are dichotomous, proffering life as well as destroying it. They are exemplified by the one-legged mother Eva, who sacrifices one of her legs in order to get insurance money to provide for her family, and sets her son on fire to "save" him from being buried alive; and the slavery-violated mother Sethe, who exchanges ten-minute-sex for the seven letters "Beloved" to be engraved on the tombstone of the baby whose throat she sliced open with a handsaw. Most mothers in Morrison's opus are persecuted, paranoid and hence persecuting, seeking an unchained and unfettered life even at the cost of their children's lives. Their possessiveness towards their children, however, deprives the latter of a cultural identity.

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[58] The victims of maternal silence are essentially female, which shows the author's predisposition to explore the mother-daughter relationship in her work.

Judith Lewis Herman's depiction of the complex psyche of combat veterans is useful to study the psychology of the phallic black mothers in Morrison's work:

> The veteran is isolated not only by the images of the horror that he has witnessed and perpetrated but also by his special status as an initiate in the cult of war. He imagines that no civilian, certainly no woman or child, can comprehend his confrontation with evil and death. He views the civilian with a mixture of idealization and contempt: she [sic] is at once innocent and ignorant. He views himself, by contrast, as at once superior and defiled. (1992: 66)

To employ Lacan's insight, the veteran feels radically sullied and Othered by the death and decay permeating the war; on the other hand, surviving the war endows him with phallic power. Yet, wounded by the Other of death, he is psychically isolated from the other, losing the sense of connection with his own people. In this view, he figures as the foreigner estranged from his people by the haunting shadow of the war, existing as a marginalized cultural orphan that has been scapegoated by the dominant culture.

In Morrison's fiction, most black women enter into meaning through motherhood: they attempt to neutralize the *lack* forced upon them by slavery by treating their children as extended parts of themselves. In so doing, they identify themselves as a full identity in language. However, Ellie Ragland-Sullivan remarks, if a mother fetishizes her child, "a mammocratic state of totalitarian horror rules. Such fetishization unveils another idealizing harmony, implying that a child can make up for what is missing" (1991: 75) – the phallus. Clearly, by treating the child as her phallus, the mother "'enjoys' by refusing identity to the child *qua* different from her desire." To clarify, the child is treated by his/her mother as an indistinguishable part of herself. As a result, she keeps her child from entering into culture: "The child is [. . .] not nameable, not signifiable, not other" (1991: 75). In *Beloved*, Morrison foregrounds the systematic separating of mother and children which results in the children's failure to enter into the symbolic order. Correspondingly, Michèle Bonnet asserts:

> A dominant theme of the book is that, because the children have been deprived of proper nurturing, they have been unable to develop into real persons – it accounts not only for Beloved's crippled and ultimately evil character but also for Denver's unnatural childishness and inner emptiness. (1997: 49)

Commenting on the troubled parent-child relationships among African Americans, Morrison says in an interview:

> Parents who simply adore their children and really and truly do want the best for them may, in fact, destroy them. They say to them, as Eva did, "Your life is not worth living." They may not kill them, as she does, but they say, "If you do not behave the way *I want you to behave*, then leave or get out. You must live *this* way." Too frequently love has to do with owning that other person. (Bakerman 1994: 42, original italics)

What Morrison suggests here are parents who interfere with the style of life of their children. As a result, as Ragland-Sullivan claims, fetishized as the phallus, "such a child identifies with the real rather than the imaginarized symbolic which is not pushed away to the livable distance that constitutes most people as subjects of the symbolic and imaginary orders" (1991: 75). From this perspective, treating her child as her phallus, the black mother refuses the distance between self and Other, thus turning him/her into the symbol of the haunting real.

The maternal silence overshadowing black motherhood eludes meaning and the mastery of the child, proving devastating to the child's sense of self in Morrison's works. Accordingly, trauma manifests itself mainly as the characters' failure to capture the unconscious meaning of maternal silence and to integrate the maternal selfobject into their selves during their formative years. Morrison highlights characters who, scarred by maternal silence in their separation-individuation phase, seek surrogate objects in their ensuing life; they remain fixated on their children, who serve selfobject functions for them. Yet the restitution of the selfobject proves to be futile and ineffective for it is based on their desire for an idealized merger with their own parent imago. Kohut describes the nature of the surrogate selfobject in this way:

> They are not objects [. . .] since they are not loved or admired for their attributes, and the actual features of their personalities, and their actions, are only dimly recognized. They are not longed for but are needed in order to replace the functions of a segment of the mental apparatus which had not been established in childhood. (1971: 45–46)

It is apparent that the selfobject is utilized to strengthen the subject's sense of subjective self unconsciously organized in accordance with narcissistic notions of grandiosity, greatness and grandeur. This sense is built on an imagined togetherness with the selfobject, recalling the sense of fullness and perfection felt by the Lacanian ego in the imaginary order. As opposed to this subjective sense, self-selfobject experience necessitates and features a degree of separation between self and selfobject. Put clearly, the formation of a self-centred self emphasizes the subject's awareness of the boundary between self and other, which is firstly based on the successful integration of selfobject into the structure of the psychological self, and then the disengaging of self from selfobject. Significantly, the internali-

zation of the idealized parent selfobject into the self invests the self with a certain freedom.

In Morrison's novels, in spite of the maternal silence bent on shattering black families, the glorious heritage of an African past combines mother and child, which is suggested by their mutual interest in community-building storytelling. Correspondingly, Dori Laub, probing Holocaust-induced trauma, points out the survivor's need or imperative "to *tell* and thus to come to *know* one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life" (1995: 63, original italics). Evidently, self-witnessing is critical for the process of healing. However, this process is undertaken in the presence of a listener/interviewer *qua* witness:

> To a certain extent, the interviewer-listener takes on the responsibility for bearing witness that previously the narrator felt he bore alone, and therefore could not carry out. It is the encounter and the coming together between the survivor and the listener, which makes possible something like a repossession of the act of witnessing. This joint responsibility is the source of the reemerging truth. (1995: 69)

The listener serves the function of a protective parent imago, providing the victim with the safe therapeutic environment which makes possible the remembering of the precipitating trauma. In Morrison's fiction, storytelling is inextricably linked with rememory, a site saturated with halcyon pleasure as well as the demons of desire deriving from the past. Fully attuned to her culture, Morrison utilizes storytelling to reconstruct an erased cultural history, simultaneously restoring the slavery past and providing the people with a self-affirming history. It highlights mother and child, who engage with each other's desires and fears, which suggests the reclamation of their African ancestry. Additionally, the expert storyteller is, more often than not, represented by elderly black females; the role of the person demanding the story is assumed by the younger generation deprived of history by the debilitated and debilitating motherhood. Significantly, storytelling facilitates dialogue, suggesting the person's accrued capacity to incorporate the foreign past into him/herself, which prefigures or promises healing.

4.2 The Foreigner as Cultural Orphan

In Morrison's fiction, deprived of their African culture, most characters appear as the Kristevan foreigner in the racist society of America. In *Beloved*, the slave-owner Mr. Garner labels his slaves "men" in Sweet Home, in contrast with his

neighbours who bludgeon all black males into "boys." Reflecting on his life on Sweet Home, the freed slave Paul D says:

> Nobody counted on Garner dying. Nobody thought he could. [. . .] Without his life each of theirs fell to pieces. [. . .] Garner called and announced them men – but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave. *Was he naming what he saw or creating what he did not?* [. . .] [T]hey had been isolated in a wonderful lie [. . .] Protected and convinced they were special. [. . .] [B]eing so in love with the look of the world, putting up with anything and everything, just to stay alive in a place where a moon he had no right to was nevertheless there. (1997: 220–221, italics mine)

The hope of being treated as men becomes compelling to slaves who have long enough been dehumanized and deprived. Yet Mr. Garner's "open-mindedness" actually reflects his psychological need to justify his position as an authoritarian; securing his sense of self with well-regulated "properties," he is in fact afflicted with paranoid fears and fantasies. Additionally, branding them as men, he is incapable of empowering them to step into the symbolic world; the slaves' status as men only in Sweet Home paradoxically suggests their role as cultural captives or orphans, serving to confirm Mr. Garner's superior status as a successful, humane slaveholder in America.

After the eighty-six days of shackled existence he spends on a chain gang, Paul D has difficulty in sustaining a stable relationship: "he didn't believe he could live with a woman – any woman – for over two out of three months" (1997: 40). It is apparent that he has fallen prey to the lingering horror of slavery, which functions in part by fracturing human intimacy:

> After Delaware and before that Alfred, Georgia, where he slept underground and crawled into sunlight for the sole purpose of breaking rock, walking off when he got ready was the only way he could convince himself that he would no longer have to sleep, pee, eat or swing a sledge hammer in chains. (1997: 40)

Evidently Paul D is trying to fly from a life of inhuman bondage and subjugation. Correspondingly, Elizabeth Kella reads Paul D's emotional detachment as a compulsive symptom: "his compensatory assertion of individuality and free will through travel is figured as a gendered symptom of this trauma" (2000: 137). On the other hand, he is constantly haunted by his origin, especially after the fragmentation of Sweet Home: "Once, in Maryland, he met four families of slaves who had all been together for a hundred years: great-grands, grands, mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, cousins, children. Half white, part white, all black, mixed with Indian" (Morrison 1997: 219). The extended family made up of people of varying complexions awakens Paul D's feeling of being emasculated and or-

phaned by systemic violence. His solitary journey is therefore driven by a gnawing sense of foreignness, which is symbolized by the "tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be" (Morrison 1997: 72–73). Naturally, he watches the families "with awe and envy, and each time he discovered large families of black people he made them identify over and over who each was, what relation, who, in fact, belonged to who" (1997: 219). His inclination to stay on the move attests to his obsession with an ancestral presence under the family-fracturing strategy of slavery.

In *Sula*, the eponymous character is psychologically orphaned when overhearing her mother saying to her friends, "You love her, like I love Sula, I just don't like her" (1982a: 57). It sets her on a journey leading nowhere. In consequence, she figures as the Kristevan foreigner who "has lost [her] mother [. . .] [She] is a devotee of solitude" (Kristeva 1991: 5). Deprived of maternal bonding, there is nothing left for her, who is reduced to nothing and henceforth embarks on a ten-year wandering life to escape isolation and alienation. Put another way, Hannah's words leave permanent changes in Sula's psyche, bringing about the latter's self-exile. In a positive light, Sula's straying out of the community opens her up to the outside world and contributes to her role as an iconoclast. Always on the move, she engages in riveting one self to another, experimenting with a tentative ego. To analyze her by way of Kristeva's insight into the foreigner:

> [she] has no self. Barely an empty confidence, valueless, which focuses [her] possibilities of being constantly other, according to others' wishes and to circumstances. I do what *they* want *me* to, but it is not "me" – "me" is elsewhere, "me" belongs to no one, "me" does not belong to "me," . . . does "me" exist? (1991: 8, italics in original)

What Kristeva elaborates here is the sense of unhomeliness that mercilessly torments the foreigner. Sula's status as the foreigner stems from the collapse of Hannah as a selfobject inside her. Not surprisingly, as her life is about abjection – abjecting her family, her mother and even her double Nel – so too her life jettisons as much as possible to make way for an eerie spatial and temporal borderland, between inside and outside, beginning and end, life and death.

Returning to the Bottom community, Sula drifts from one relationship to another, readily projecting herself onto other people. Free of orders and borders, she abandons herself to insolent happiness and sexual promiscuity, and her scandalous excesses symbolize her breaking loose from familial and linguistic shackles. Arguably, Sula's excessive sexual desire suggests her unwillingness to part with the maternal body; alternatively, it suggests her newly-achieved freedom *qua* foreigner. Escaping maternal imprisonment, the foreigner is intoxicated with "a spe-

cial, somewhat insolent happiness" which "seems to prevail, *in spite of everything*, because something has definitely been exceeded: it is the happiness of tearing away, of racing, the space of a promised infinite" (Kristeva 1991: 4, original italics). Sula represents an intrinsic cultural foreignness, an unbridled freedom as opposed to a state of cultural live burial.

Sula survives the scourge of slavery, reappearing as Beloved in the novel of that name.[59] Patricia Hunt observes that "the Africans who underwent the horrific sea-change of the Middle Passage are simultaneously historical and spiritual presences" (1993: 443). In light of this, Morrison conspicuously blurs the boundary between life and death, inventing a baby ghost in the flesh to embody the presences, to revive the Sixty Million and more who have lost both their lives and their names across the Middle Passage in this fiction. Nine years after Baby Suggs' death, Beloved returns in the body of a young woman whose elusive, complex and contradictory identity is integral to our understanding of this novel. The ghost's neediness, emotionalism, baby-soft skin and lithe body imply lifetime imprisonment as well as support the hypothesis held by most of the characters that Beloved is the ghost of Sethe's baby daughter. Moreover, Beloved complicates her identity by describing her former dwelling-place as where "there will never be a time when I am not crouching and watching others who are crouching too" (1997: 210). It is a place that is meant to evoke two things: a womb where she is kept small, and a slave ship where there is "nothing to breathe down [. . .] and no room to move in" (1997: 75). Both the womb (which promises life) and the cellar of the slave ship (which signifies death) relate her to the darkness which marks black people as marginalized, invisible and ugly.

Beloved's language is strangely incoherent, repetitive, inconclusive and incomprehensible; her stream of consciousness, with its disjointed phrases and images, corresponds to both a one-year-old child and a trauma victim still trapped in the after-effects of slavery. The provocative, elusive refrain "a hot thing" suggests her incapacity to distinguish her mother from herself, and a face from a location; it

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[59] Morrison often revises her characters in her fiction. For example, she says in an interview that Beloved reappears as Dorcas in *Jazz* and the earlier love story is reconfigured in the Harlem milieu (Naylor 1994: 208). In another interview, she points out the affinity between Beloved and Wild in *Jazz*: "You see a pregnant black woman naked at the end of *Beloved*. It's at the same time . . . back in the Gold Gray section of *Jazz*, there is crazy woman out in the woods. The woman they call Wild [. . .] could be Sethe's daughter, Beloved. When you see Beloved towards the end [of *Beloved*], you don't know, she is either a ghost who's been exorcised or she's a real person [who is] pregnant by Paul D" (qtd. in Whitehead 2004: 156). Accordingly, Whitehead concludes that "Wild is both a wild woman who lives in the woods and the spectra of Beloved not yet laid to rest" (2004: 25–26). For further discussion of Morrison's work of revision, see Chapter 5.

may literally represent the heat of the ship as well as the hot iron branding Sethe and her children as animals. The visual signifier's power to proliferate lays claim to the plurality of meanings. Moreover, embedded in "I want her face a hot thing" (1997: 211) is Beloved's language of love – the only way a baby knows to depict it: "how can I say things that are pictures" (1997: 210). Her passion for images locates her in the prelinguistic, preoedipal register, and perhaps also to the unconscious reenactment of the horrendous scene of infanticide. In short, Morrison utilizes the refrain to convey Beloved's compulsion to tell the story of maternal silence and betrayal, to express her death-defying love or desire for her mother.

Beloved remains uncanny, remote and largely silent throughout the novel. Hysterical and creeping into the tranquility of reason, she represents what Sethe refuses to recognize as a part of herself under the chattel bondage or after it – the uncanny. Sethe is traversed by the desire for the Other after Beloved's reincarnation – what she has repressed or what she was unaware of before. Analyzing the strangeness aroused upon meeting the foreigner, Kristeva writes:

> The uncanny strangeness allows for many variations: they all repeat the difficulty I have in situating myself with respect to the other and keep going over the course of identification-projection that lies at the foundation of my reaching autonomy. (1991: 187)

It is apparent that the person's inability to reconcile himself to the uncanniness of the foreigner suggests his own foreignness. Similarly, throughout most of the novel, Sethe displays an unconscious discontent with living with the foreigner, both inside and outside.[60] Yet she is reduced to being a foreigner when she cedes whatever she has to Beloved in order to make reparation to the ghost after the latter's return. As the narrator observes from the angle of Denver, "It was as though her mother had lost her mind, like Grandma Baby calling for pink and not doing the things she used to" (1997: 240). In so doing, Sethe starts a life unfamiliar to her, surrendering herself entirely to Beloved's whimsical desires. Finally, she fails to keep up with the role of a good mother when she makes an effort to exonerate herself from blame for the infanticide; on the other hand, Beloved castigates Sethe for it, thus embodying the foreignness which is her unconscious (Kristeva 1991: 183). As a result, Sethe nearly falls apart, registering as a foreigner traversed and tormented by Beloved, who embodies past pain and terror.

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[60] The inside foreigner suggests her status as a slave mother; on the other hand, the outside foreigner is represented by the slave owner as well as her own people, who fail to inform her of the incoming slave catchers.

In *Love*, Morrison portrays a cluster of women grappling with varying mental diseases such as hysteria, paranoia, neurosis and psychosis. Enthralled by the spectral presence of Cosey, they are doubly castrated by racism and sexism, tragically ensnared and entrapped in the turmoil of past. In this fiction, the deep psychological damage done to the black female is first and foremost explored via Christine and Heed, who become possessed with each other's presence immediately after they meet on the Florida coast:

> *It's like that when children fall for one another. On the spot, without introduction.* [. . .] *If such children find each other before they know their own sex, or which one of them is starving, which well fed; before they know color from no color, kin from stranger, then they have found a mix of surrender and mutiny they can never live without. Heed and Christine found such a one*. (2004: 231, original italics)

Drawn towards each other with an emotion like "love at first sight" (Wyatt 2008: 212–213), the girls' fascination with each other finds its origin either in their dysfunctional family or their distant mother. What brings them together is a return to the time before the incursion of language. Yet Cosey forces himself into their life, cracking and warping their friendship into a family feud traversing most of their lives. As a dead but dominating patriarch, he impersonates the Lacanian Other, victimizing his kinswomen in the symbolic register. On the other hand, estranged from each other by the foreignness perpetrated on them by the patriarch-perpetrator, the pair identify with him, which conveys their desperate desire for an experience of life despite the horrendous aftershock of slavery.

Patterning their identity upon an imaginary counterpart, Heed and Christine are constricted in their capacity for active engagement with others. Therefore, their relationship proves essentially narcissistic, subject to aggressive elements whenever they are assailed by aching senses of foreignness and incoherence. Though isolated by the darkness symbolizing debilitating patriarchy, the double are drawn inescapably to each other, and their repetitious grappling with each other can be read as their engagement with the traumatic past. L observes that "*war is good for the lonely*" (2004: 161, original italics). In this view, fighting functions as their main communicative approach. Similarly, Nicolas Berdyaev suggests that "dispute, conflict, and even hatred are all social manifestations which often serve to suppress or to allay the sense of solitude" (1947: 71). Accordingly, the fighting reflects the women's claim for each other as the *objet a*; as the narrator of this novel claims, "the fights did nothing other than allow them to hold each other. [. . .] Like friendship, hatred needed more than physical intimacy; it wanted creativity and hard work to sustain itself" (2004: 82–83). Fighting proves an inescapable way to validation and valorization for the pair buried alive by the aftermath

of chattel enslavement. By wrestling with each other, they attempt to break up the containment of loneliness engendered by the outrages of slavery, thus transcending their sense of liminality and thrusting their way into the centre of the self.

Christine runs away from home while still a teenager, registering as the first foreigner-fugitive from the big house in the novel. Displaced by her double Heed, she flees the Resort, spending years away on the road. Her plunging into the outside adult world is readable as her effort to escape the self-annihilating solitude caused by the betrayal of her family as well as her double Nel. Yet, drifting from one place to another, she laments in her senile years that

> she hadn't escaped from anything. Maple Valley, Cosey's hotel, Manila's whorehouse – all three floated in *sexual tension* and resentment; all three insisted on confinement; in all three status was money. And all were organized around the pressing needs of men. (2004: 107, italics mine).

Arguably, all three inevitably and irrevocably add to her feeling of *foreignness*. Her predisposition to sexual exploitation speaks to her inability to set up safe and appropriate boundaries between herself and others. In *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis*, Stephen A. Mitchell suggests that

> the repetitive patterns within human experience are not derived, as in the drive model, from pursuing gratification of inherent pressures and pleasures (nor, as in Freud's post-1920 understanding, from the automatic workings of the death instinct), but from a pervasive tendency to preserve the continuity, connections, familiarity of one's personal, interactional world. (1988: 33)

The tendency of human beings to preserve a sense of connection and continuity impels them to repeat previous patterns of life. It is thus natural that every man Christine chooses thereafter bears a striking resemblance to Cosey: exploitative, possessive and wealthy. Tragically, by taking refuge in the outside world, she escapes nothing, since "every serious affair she'd had led straight to jail" (Morrison 2004: 105). Without exception, her lives both inside and outside the mansion are tarnished by female longing and male (the Other's) desire, which accounts for her tendency to enter into dangerous situations repeatedly. As the narrator observes, "her slide from spoiled child to tarnished homelessness had never been slow nor hidden" (2004: 101). Stumbling on unconditional love and impoverished by a life of abandonment, she experiences deeply the traumas of her grandfather's emotional abandonment, her father's death, her bosom friend's betrayal, and May's sterile materiality. It is arguable that Christine's "addiction" to exploitative sexual relationships corresponds to her efforts at compensatory restoration – her

desperate need to restore a merger fantasy with Cosey, who serves as the idealized parent imago for every one of his kinswomen.

Beloved haunts *Love* in the figure of Junior, a wayward teenage girl from the Settlement,[61] who spies on the warring women inhabiting the house on One Monarch Street. Emphasizing the harm done to black females, L observes, "*Naturally all of them have a sad story: too much notice, not enough, or the worst kind*" (2004: 5, original italics). Evidently she is commenting on dysfunctional black motherhood. In this context, scarred by a detached mother and a distant father, Junior's formative years are deprived of contents and colours. Additionally, the frequent assaults from her abusive teenage uncles foster hatred and hostility in her, catapulting her into the outside world. She registers as another foreigner estranged from her people: when she was eleven she ran away and "wandered for weeks without attention being paid" (2004: 65). Though having successfully extracted herself from the nightmarish life of the Settlement, she is worryingly crippled, both physically and psychologically. Her legs and hair convey the distress and desire plaguing the girl: "Dancer's legs: long, unhappy at rest, eager to lift, to spread, to wrap themselves around you" (2004: 41); and her hair: "soft, loud, mixing threat and invitation" (2004: 209).

As a wandering soul with "no past, no history but her own" (2004: 197), Junior recalls the "motherless child" Sula, and the rootless, family-craving Paul D. The years of homeless strife and struggle empower her to start a life from scratch among the feud-inflamed women: fully aware of her peripheral position in society as well as the grand mansion, she ingratiates herself with both of them immediately after her arrival at the anarchic household: "If she pleased both women, they could live happily together. All she had to do was study them, learn them" (2004: 140). Junior's ability to transgress social borders suggests her ability to coexist with her inherent foreignness; her scheming behaviour reflects her strong desire to survive an unstable and estranging world. The narrator of the novel says that "you had to admire any girl who survived on the street without a gun" (2004: 197). Fully cognizant of the intimate relationship between self-awareness and survival, Junior is equipped as a foreigner who has evaded supremacist slavery and sexism, inspiring self-love among other women in this novel.

Deprived of an idealized merger with the maternal figure, most female characters such as Sula, Denver and Junior are psychological orphaned and forced to live as

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[61] As the story develops, Morrison discloses that she is an outlaw from the Settlement, a community of impoverished black people on a nearby mountain slope.

foreigners to themselves and their community in Morrison's writing. Yet their estranged status contributes to their ability to move beyond the confines of maternal bondage, emerging as race-tampering and culture-building foreigners or ghosts. In contrast to their maternal figures, they display more indeterminacy and transgressive tendency in their characters, which paradoxically contributes to their ability to survive a peripheral existence and to inspire the others sharing with them a common fate. All of them enhance the construction of an egosyntonic community instead of its destruction, representing the force necessary for black people to attain psychic wholeness and to live in harmony within their community. Consequently, there exists no person who finds his/her full accomplishment without relating to foreigners. This logic applies to white as well as black coexisting in the past and present of American slavery.

4.3 Cannibalism as the Traumatic Loss of Self-Boundary

In Morrison's fictional world, the system of bondage fractures the black family, human connectedness and black subjectivity. In *Sula*, defiled and disorganized by the ravages of slavery, Eva invests her sense of self in her children in an effort to identify herself as whole and integrated under the legacy of slavery. She holds fantasies of mystic oneness with her children, the unsullied, unstymied parts of herself, to detoxify her sense of shame and stigma. A large part of her life is marked by deprivation and privation. After being abandoned by her husband, she identifies with the maternal body: she has one of her legs cut off by the train for ten thousand dollars to tide her family over hardship, an act which contributes to her exalted position in the family. It is arguable that she maims herself in display of her greatness and power: mutilated and disabled, she decorates and displays the empty place to establish herself as well-equipped and invulnerable. Eva's exhibitionism is suggestive of her faulty efforts at restoration of her grandiose fantasy. Yet her defensive efforts extend to the traumatic past, reflecting her need to transcend the pain of being female and black in America.

After her return from an eighteen-month absence with one leg, Eva remains unmarried and independent, inhabiting the Peace family together with her daughter Hannah, granddaughter Sula, and a whole mixture of stray boys. Though offering home and hearth for the members of the family, she scapegoats everyone, turning the family into a stage which reenacts her turbulent marital life with destructive effect. Preoccupied with the particular importance of her own autonomy rather than that of others, she sets fire to her adult son Plum, causes Hannah to become wanton and Sula unruly, silences Tar Baby, and bludgeons the deweys into insip-

id sameness. Whether defiant or submissive, children from the family have been wounded by the unempathetic, governing householder. Resisting being Othered by the white symbolic, Eva sacrifices Plum as he returns from the war shattered, debilitated, feeble-willed and vulnerable. Disappointed and disillusioned in him as her selfobject, she destroys him just as she mutilated herself many years ago. Yet what she endeavors to escape is her own decline and death. To draw on Lifton's theory of "perverse witness," Eva "attaches the taint of death to [her son] in order to reassert life's power" (Caruth 1995a: 141). Underlying the abysmal violence is her desire to identify herself with a narcissistic image of grandeur and greatness. Accordingly, the murder of Plum reveals the extent to which she is physically and psychologically scarred by the devastating effect of the cultural trauma.

Like Eva, Sethe in *Beloved* is afflicted with a nebulous sense of self. Judith Lewis Herman asserts that a sense of safety is formed "in earliest life in the relationship with the first caretaker. Originating with life itself, this sense of trust sustains a person throughout the lifecycle. It forms the basis of all systems of relationship and faith" (1992: 51). Sethe's undefined, flimsy self stems in large part from the dysfunctional caregiving she received during her infancy as well as in her formative and vulnerable years. In her years in Sweet Home, she inclines to rely on outside objects to maintain her sense of relatedness and sustain her tentative ego. For example, the narrator reveals, to validate her sense of belonging, she "had to bring a fistful of salsify into Mrs. Garner's kitchen every day just to be able to work in it, feel like some part of it was hers" (1997: 22). Yet the bodily violation conducted by schoolteacher's nephews annihilates all her fantasies of an integrated self. When hearing schoolteacher balancing "her human characteristics" with "her animal ones," she "bumped up against a tree"; her "head itched like the devil. Like somebody was sticking fine needles in [her] scalp" (1997: 193). The needles serve as mnemic symbols inscribed on her body. She is destined to repeat the decisive trauma in order to embed herself in the symbolic structure. Devalued and dehumanized, she defines herself in terms of maternity. In elaborating object relations in psychoanalytic theory, Stephen A. Mitchell observes, "There is a powerful need to preserve an abiding sense of oneself as associated with, positioned in terms of, related to, a matrix of other people, in terms of actual transactions as well as internal presences" (1988: 33). Accordingly, Sethe's efforts are defensive, readable as her desire to restore an idealized merger with her children as her selfobject.

Sethe's failure to fill the slavery-engendered fissure finally leads to her taking part in murder. Intrigued by the arrival of schoolteacher to reclaim her and her children, she kills one of her children, the literalization of her wrestling with her

own fate. Eventually, after the infanticide, life in 124 comes to an abrupt halt. What is worse, Sethe is further traumatized by being rejected by the local community: treating Sethe as a polluting person, the community shuns her house. Even Baby Suggs, who has devoted her lifetime to teaching her people to love themselves, falls apart inwardly as a result of the betrayal of her fellow people:

> to belong to a community of other free Negroes – to love and be loved by them, to counsel and be counseled, protect and be protected, feed and be fed – and then to have that community step back and hold itself at a distance – well, it could wear out even a Baby Suggs, holy. (1997: 177)

Arguably, Suggs has fallen victim to a paranoid-depressive state resulting from a life of deprivation: "'Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed [. . .] and broken my heartstrings too. There is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks'" (1997: 89). Finally, she abandons the symbolic language she employs to instruct her people to love themselves.

Beloved is symptomatic of the aphasia, the death-in-life existence of 124-dwellers. She returns to question a maternal love she can never bring herself to understand and to retrieve the preoedipal merger with her mother. It comes as natural that what can only be described as her relish for Sethe's face gradually evolves into a kind of cannibalism: "Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes" (1997: 57). Beloved's desiring gaze implies what she was deprived of many years ago – the sweetness of motherly love. In Nicholas Royle's words, "there is [. . .] no cannibalism without love, no love without cannibalism" (2003: 208). Thus, Beloved's interest in her mother insinuates her desire to incorporate the latter and to annihilate the distance between them.

Beloved describes her quarters on the slave ship as claustrophobically constricting, devouring and death-oriented. It signified black females' falling prey to white capitalist patriarchy. Moreover, in a perpetual cringe, Beloved's situation recalls and corresponds to the traumatic experience of the Sixty-Million and more from the Middle Passage who succumbed to the stifling darkness and horror of their never-ending journey to the soul-death of slavery. Additionally, Beloved's sufferings also speak to the crime of child abuse: "I am going to be in pieces he hurts where I sleep he puts his fingers there I drop the food and break into pieces" (1997: 212, original spacing). The place where Beloved sleeps is both the physical place in which she lies down and the site of her body itself – the place in which her innocence sleeps. She breaks into pieces because the man sexually penetrates her and her mother is unavailable or unable to rescue her from the man's clutches: "she took my face away" (1997: 212). The face is, in fact, Sethe's, which fails to empathize with Beloved in the traumatic event. Accordingly, this

passage can be interpreted as the historical rape of black American women as well as the accusation against the sexual assault of children whose mothers are at the same time debilitated under patriarchal slavery.

After Beloved's return, mother and daughters gather together in the all-female household, oblivious to the outside world. In keeping with the role of a perfect mother, Sethe deviates from her ordinary life, becoming entangled with her two daughters in inventing and fulfilling their whimsical wishes:

> At first they played together. A whole month and Denver loved it. From the night they ice-skated together under a star-loaded sky and drank sweet milk by the stove, to the string puzzles Sethe did for them in afternoon light, and shadow pictures in the gloaming. [. . .] [Sethe] played with Beloved's hair, braiding, puffing, tying, oiling it until it made Denver nervous to watch her. They changed beds and exchanged clothes. Walked arm in arm and smiled all the time. [. . .] The thirty-eight dollars of life savings went to feed themselves with fancy food and decorate themselves with ribbon and dress goods, which Sethe cut and sewed like they were going somewhere in a hurry. (1997: 240)

The three mix together without tags of mother and daughter, taking their chances in making a new start in the symbolic order. Saturated with the joys of childhood, this passage shows Sethe's language of mother love percolating through time to Beloved, emerging as a point where language fails and the imaginarized oneness triumphs. Mladen Dolar's insight into the double is useful here in analyzing Beloved's function for both Sethe and Denver:

> On the one hand, it [the double] enjoys at our expense, committing acts we would not otherwise (or rather would only ever) dream of. On the other, it does not simply enjoy but rather *commands* enjoyment, forcing us into a position of servitude to our appetites [. . .] Its uncanniness, therefore, stems from the same compulsion to repeat which the subject is powerless to resist. (qtd. in Parkin-Gounelas 2001: 110, original italics)

The emergence of the double reflects the subject's attempt to compensate for the lack forced upon him/herself by the Other. Accordingly, Sethe's enslavement to Beloved reflects her denial of her castrated status in the Other. Setting herself the task of excavating the site of Beloved's desire, Sethe soon loses possession of herself. What she desires to fill is, in effect, the Other's lack, which is implied by Beloved's insatiability and inconsolability. On the other hand, Beloved clings to Sethe to such an extent that she can hardly be left alone: "She want[s] Sethe's company for hours to watch the layer of brown leaves waving at them from the bottom of the creek" (1997: 240–241). Beloved's escalating demand for company suggests her as suffering from neurotic difficulties. Similarly, Sethe's interest in

fiddling with Beloved's hair eerily evokes the maternal violence of the earlier beheading scene. Accordingly, both Beloved and Sethe are suffering from obsession, that is, compulsive repetition of maternal *jouissance* that fuses pleasure and pain, and life and death.

As a revenant, Beloved wishes to switch places with Sethe: "When once or twice Sethe tried to assert herself – be the unquestioned mother whose word was law and who knew what was best, Beloved slammed things, wiped the table clean of plates, threw salt on the floor, broke a windowpane" (1997: 242). Beloved's proneness to aggressive and potentially violent behaviour could be analyzed in relation to Melanie Klein's elaboration on aggressiveness manifested in child's play: "Sometimes, he gives vent to his aggressiveness and resentment by being, in the role of parent, sadistic towards the child, represented by the analyst" (1985: 8). In this light, Beloved's violent behaviour resembles her mother's predisposition towards violence in stressful and traumatic situations. Klein goes on to elaborate on the fear of retaliation after a child has damaged a toy:

> He often puts aside such a toy, representing for instance a sibling or a parent, and ignores it for a time. This indicates dislike of the damaged object, due to the persecutory fear that the attacked person (represented by the toy) has become retaliatory and dangerous. (1985: 9–10)

By contrast, as a ghost intent on perforating symbolic bounds, Beloved is immune to death, let alone feelings of persecutory fear. What she desires is a total fusion with her mother: "Dressed in Sethe's dresses, she stroked her skin with the palm of her hand. She imitated Sethe, talked the way she did, laughed her laugh and used her body the same way down to the walk" (1997: 241). In *Knowledge as Desire*, Furth reads such imitative gestures by children as their effort to establish societal relations. In Beloved's case, instead of establishing contact through interpersonal and close interaction, she tries to colonize and cannibalize Sethe: she feeds off her mother, "getting bigger, plumper by the day" (1997: 239), while her mother becomes smaller; "Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur" (1997: 250). Correspondingly, Laura Di Prete reads Beloved's cannibalism as speaking to her function as the "foreign body" of the repressed traumatic memories:

> What we are witnessing is the direct consequence of the workings of traumatic latency. As the "foreign body" expands, as in other words the weight of unassimilable traumatic memory increases, the "real" body of Sethe [. . .] ceases to exist. Beloved swells as she feeds herself avidly with the stories of past traumas that, under her pressure, the inhabitants of 124 unwillingly share with her. (2006: 74)

In light of this, Beloved's destructive consumption of Sethe suggests the extent to which the latter has succumbed to the aftershock of her past traumas.

Sethe clearly fails to control Beloved psychologically, and any failure by her to attend to the latter's urgent need for mirroring triggers an immediate outburst of narcissistic rage. When Sethe, in the clearing, is able to make peace with Halle's memory, looking forward to a new life (with Paul D and her two girls), Beloved tries to strangle her mother, mimicking the brutal violence Sethe displayed many years ago. Exploring the aftermath of longtime captivity, Herman points out:

> Prolonged captivity undermines or destroys the ordinary sense of a relatively safe sphere of initiative, in which there is some tolerance for trial and error. To the chronically traumatized person, any action has potentially dire consequences. There is no room for mistakes. (1992: 91)

In this connection, Beloved's sense of safety has been destroyed by her claustrophobic experience in the ship; angry and spiteful, she displays her inability to balance herself in relation to others, for all relationships are filtered through extremity. Her matricide suggests her unconscious attempt at keeping away the anxiety of reexperiencing fragmentation, because Sethe's betrayal once again threatens her very effacement. At another level, her aggression is inextricably linked with her desire for maternal attention. As Julia Kristeva writes:

> *want* and *aggressivity* are chronologically separable but logically conextensive. Aggressivity *appears* to us as a rejoinder to the original deprivation felt from the time of the mirage known as "primary narcissism"; it merely takes revenge on initial frustrations. (1982: 39, original italics)

Identifying herself with her mother, Beloved's cannibalistic behaviour towards Sethe borders on self-extinction, speaking to her effort to detach or abject a psychic part (which is constituted by her mother) from herself to cope with the imminent threat of the maternal betrayal. At another level, knowing nothing about the inside/outside binary, Beloved figures uncannily as the Lacanian libido, refusing to be pinned down by the legacy of slavery. Thus, her recourse to death to deal with her mother's betrayal suggests her desire for mastery and freedom in the white symbolic world.

With an emotionally unavailable mother, her sister Denver emerges as a fragile child enmeshed in the difficulties of love. The moment she sees Beloved sitting on a stump not far from the steps of 124, she wants her. At first sight, Beloved seems to be sick. As Sethe remarks, "'Poor thing. And nothing in this house to give her for it. She'll just have to ride it out. That's hateful sickness if ever there was one'" (Morrison 1997: 53). However, Denver refutes her mother's observa-

tion, saying, "'She's not sick!'" For four days, Beloved "slept, waking and sitting up only for water." On the other hand, "Denver tended her, watched her sound sleep, listened to her labored breathing and, out of love and a breakneck possessiveness that charged her, hid like a personal blemish Beloved's incontinence" (1997: 54). Tending Beloved like an injured part of herself, Denver wants more from this "sleepy beauty" (Morrison 1997: 53), which arouses her desire for the lost maternal *jouissance*. It is possible to understand Denver's caregiving behaviour as her unconscious attempt to serve a selfobject function for Beloved, thereby experiencing this function vicariously. Denver's caretaking of Beloved is thus readable as her compensatory effort to amend the flaw in her mother. In "On Narcissism," Freud suggests that sickness and the condition of sleep imply a "narcissistic withdrawal of the positions of the libido on to the subject's own self" (2001e: 83). Accordingly, both Beloved and Denver uses Beloved's sickness to express their discontent over the maternal inability to provide enough mirroring function in their formative years.

In this novel, Denver is traumatized by a deadly and murderous mother, suspended in the preoedipal matrix and entombed in her mother's body, as evidenced by a recurring nightmare:

> She cut my head off every night. Buglar and Howard told me she would and she did. Her pretty eyes looking at me like I was a stranger. [. . .] Like she didn't want to do it but she had to and it wasn't going to hurt. [. . .] She looks over at Buglar and Howard – see if they all right. Then she comes over to my side. I know she'll be good at it, careful. That when she cuts it off it'll be done right; it won't hurt. After she does it I lie there for a minute with just my head. Then she carries it downstairs to braid my hair. I try not to cry but it hurts so much to comb it. (Morrison 1997: 206)

Through this eerie dream, in which motherly tenderness is interwoven with violence, Denver pronounces her anger over maternal silence and violence. Failing to master the motherly love, she compulsively repeats the dream. For her, in reference to another murder, the act of survival figures as "the repeated confrontation with the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to [her] own life" (Caruth 1996: 62). It is because Denver cannot grasp the unconscious meaning of death directly that "survival becomes for [her], paradoxically, an endless testimony to the impossibility of living" (Caruth 1996: 62). Denver's experiencing of the trauma of infanticide testifies, again, to the belated nature of trauma, since the infanticide is not experienced as it occurs: it is only registered in relation to another person (Denver *qua* Beloved's double), in another place and time. Eventually, this nightmare can be construed as Denver's faulty efforts to restore an idealized merger with the maternal imago.

To analyse according to Freud's wish-fulfilment[62] theory, the recurring nightmarish dream emerges as a distortion of a disguised, latent meaning; it manifests itself as Denver's desire for motherly care and attention, which is insinuated by the act of "braiding." Studying the dynamic inhering in war neurosis, Freud states:

> on the one hand, the mechanical violence of the trauma would liberate a quantity of sexual excitation, which owing to the lack of preparation for anxiety, would have a traumatic effect; but, on the other hand, the simultaneous physical injury, by calling for a narcissistic hypercathexis of the injured organ, would bind the excess of excitation. (2001a: 33)

In this connection, the dream reflects Denver's narcissistic cathexis of her injured self, which both aggravates and alleviates her trauma induced by insufficient maternal empathy. Furthermore, the nightmare figures also as a manifestation of what Freud terms the hysterical fantasy. As a matter of fact, Denver has never encountered decapitation.[63] Rather, her anxiety over decapitation mirrors Beloved's grievance towards Sethe. Freud points out that "impressions from our childhood may appear in dreams, which do not seem to be at the disposal of the waking memory" (1997b: 90). The apprehension Denver feels for Beloved relates back to her childhood memory of infanticide (Denver is informed of the murder by other people), which serves as a source of hysterical fantasy. Arguably, through fabricating a symptom, Denver identifies with Beloved, and the "identification," Freud claims, "is not mere imitation, but an assimilation based upon the same etiological claim, it expresses a 'just like,' and refers to some common condition which has remained in the unconscious" (1997b: 59). In this light, Denver's identification with Beloved arises from their common desire for maternal attention and love.

After Beloved's return, Denver tries to close Beloved and herself off in a "two-person kingdom" where her imagination produces hunger and Beloved functions as the food. Denver's hunger echoes her strong wish to be subjectivized in the symbolic register. Yet in so doing, she resembles Sethe, who locks up herself and her two daughters in the petrified castle of 124. Denver is in fact plagued by what Klein portrays as the paranoid-schizoid position. Her "relative security is based on turning the good object [Beloved] into an ideal one as a protection against the dangerous and persecuting object [Sethe]" (1997d: 49). Naturally, Denver is on

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62 By the term "wish-fulfilment," Freud refers to the dream-mechanism which works "in accordance with the principle that the non-fulfilment of one wish signified the fulfilment of another" (1997b: 59).

63 Rather, it is Beloved who fell victim to her mother's burst of violence many years ago.

edge when she becomes aware of Beloved's escalating demands, and is aroused to the situation that "if Sethe didn't wake up one morning and pick up a knife, Beloved might" (Morrison 1997: 242). Denver's anxiety arises from her failure to anchor a good object. Because of this, she falls apart when her sister disappears suddenly, leaving her in darkness and loneliness: "Death is a skipped meal compared to this. She can feel her thickness thinning, dissolving into nothing" (1997: 123). Apparently, Denver encounters the experience of abjection due to Beloved's transformation from a desired object to a border-absolving darkness; she is depersonalized by the latter's metamorphosis from the object to the abject – from presence to absence.

Eventually, Denver disengages herself from Beloved: "The job she started out with, protecting Beloved from Sethe, changed to protecting her mother from Beloved" (Morrison 1997: 243). Apparently, Denver has passed into the depressive stage, starting to treat her mother as a whole love-object; she ends up making reparation: seeing Sethe "carrying out Beloved's night bucket, Denver raced to relieve her of it" (1997: 242). Finally, psychotic (paranoid and depressive) anxieties decrease and feelings of love towards her mother arise, which, beyond doubt, signifies healing and recovery. Morrison's literary acumen rests in her probing of the process of trauma and healing from a double perspective: on one level, she emphasizes the overwhelming effect of cultural disabilities arising from the deep legacy of color-class hierarchy; on another, however, she provides more space for healing based on dialogue and mutual understanding.

Viewed collectively, Morrison shows slave mothers as both damaged (by slavery) and damaging, particularly insofar as their maternity occasionally turns lethal. Eva's killing of her son and Sethe's cutting of her daughter's throat prove to be their last gesture against their victimized or violated existence and the dehumanizing institution. Reflecting on Sethe's "too-thick" love, Paul D says, "For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love" (1997: 45). Sethe commits infanticide in an unconscious, dissociative state in order to go to the other side where her own mama was. Accordingly, her crime reflects her compensatory restoration of the preoedipal merger with her mother in the face of deprivation and disintegration. Contrasting Sethe who tries to locate herself in Beloved, Eva sets fire to Plum when the latter "wanted to crawl back in" – "[t]here wasn't space for him in [her] womb" (1982a: 71). In other words, she abjects her son as a part of herself when sensing the latter Othered by the lingering aftermath of the war. Additionally, at the moment of her crime, Eva is able to mark herself off from her son. Her crime is premeditated and purposeful, resulting from her preoccupation with her own grandiosity. Thus, her behaviour assumes an exhibitionistic character and emerg-

es as defensive. Unarguably, both Sethe and Eva challenge the definition of love in this novel. They dwell in a place where sexual difference disappears due to their lack of knowledge of the lack in the Other, which in turn inscribes them as powerful, phallic mothers. Clearly, both Beloved and Plum play as their mothers' *objet a* – what the mothers throw away yet fail to retrieve. More clearly, they are the abject phallus which symbolizes their mothers' subordination to, and desperate struggle against, the white symbolic bent on objectifying and debilitating black mothers.

4.4 Traumatic Dissociation in Rememorying the Maternal Silence

In *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud and Breuer propose that energetic reaction[64] to an affect-provoking event contributes to the liquidation or abreaction of the affects. Yet in the traumatogenic moment, the affects, for some reason, are repressed and "*have not been sufficiently abreacted*" (1957: 10, original italics). In an effort to pinpoint the traumatic origin[65] of both "*common hysteria*" and "*traumatic neuroses*," they come up with the concept of "*traumatic hysteria*":

> the causal relation between the determining psychical trauma and the hysterical phenomenon is not of a kind implying that the trauma merely acts like an *agent provocateur* in releasing the symptom, which thereafter leads an independent existence. We must presume rather that the psychical trauma – or more precisely the memory of the trauma – acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work. (1957: 6, original italics)

The authors are suggesting a dissociation in the time of traumatic reenactment. The decisive trauma exists as the double of the traumatized. This out-of-body experience is no doubt uncanny, suggesting the traumatized person as the locus of memory, whose proneness to repetitive hysterical symptoms functions to encode and inscribe the original trauma. Consequently, the precipitating trauma is corporealized or spatialized.

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[64] Freud and Breuer nominate a whole class of 'reaction' (conscious reflex acts) to the affect-engendering event: "from tears to acts of revenge" (1957: 8).

[65] In "Preliminary Communication" (1893), Freud and Breuer propose traumatic event as the precipitating, operative cause of a variety of different forms and symptoms of hysteria, claiming that "*our experiences have shown us, however, that the most various symptoms, which are ostensibly spontaneous and, as one might say, idiopathic products of hysteria, are* [. . .] *strictly related to the precipitating trauma"* (1957: 4, original italics).

In "The Intrusive Past," Van der Kolk and van der Hart elaborate on this aspect of traumatic dissociation as doubling: "Many trauma survivors report that they automatically are removed from the scene; they look at it from a distance or disappear altogether, leaving other parts of their personality to suffer and store the overwhelming experience" (1995: 168). It is evident that at the moment of trauma, the survivor has dissociated from his/her body. For example, in *Beloved*, Denver frequently fails to distinguish between waking and sleeping hours: "I was safe at night in there with her [Suggs]. All I could hear was me breathing but sometimes in the day I couldn't tell whether it was me breathing or somebody next to me" (1997: 207). During the night in Suggs' protective presence, she is able to pull herself together; yet she is dissociated from herself during daytime when dangerously exposed to her deadly mother. With its haunting symptoms, Denver's dissociation bespeaks the spatio-temporal structure of trauma.

Sethe's mental state after the infanticide dovetails nicely with Freud's description of melancholia. Far from being a conscious choice, her act proves suicidal – a violence inflicted on herself. Though not directly involved in Sethe's crime, the community's failure to inform her of the impending disaster partly brings on the latter's infanticide. After Baby Suggs' death, Sethe and Denver recoil further into 124 "full of a baby's venom" (Morrison 1997: 3): she has been isolated by the whole society. Consequently, Sethe is Othered by slavery, the betrayal of her mother as well as her own people, and, above all, the infanticide. To compound her misery, she is completely orphaned after the death of her mother-in-law Suggs *qua* a healing figure for her people. Feeling estranged and expelled by the very people she treats as part of herself, she refuses to attend Suggs' funeral service in order to avoid the community and social contact, and although she attends the burial, she refuses to "[join] in the hymns the others [sing] with all their hearts" (1997: 171). Silence proves to be a new language she invokes to protest her marginalized status in her own people. Describing the silence both "forced upon" and "within" the foreigner, Julia Kristeva writes, "Nothing to say, nothingness, no one on the horizon. [. . .] Saying nothing, nothing needs to be said, nothing can be said" (1991: 16). In this connection, Sethe's mutism suggests her faulty efforts at defensive restoration after the depersonalizing infanticide, which turns her into a foreigner in the local community; being labeled as the Other, Sethe cuts her life off from the once life-sustaining community, narcissistically investing in the fantasy of a grandiose, integrated self.

After the infanticide, Sethe fails to lay the baby to rest, plunging backwards into the past, a move which is suggested by Beloved's haunting of 124 even before her incarnation: "The women in the house knew [the source of the venom] and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way" (Morrison 1997:

1). The house is grieving and Sethe melancholic. Probing this, Juliet Mitchell observes, "in cases where the lost person cannot be given up and grief is excessive, this failed mourning can become psychotic: the person cannot withdraw his libido and thus hallucinates compensatory objects" (1974: 36). Haunted by the baby ghost embodying the shattering past, Denver marvels that "for a baby she [Beloved] throws a powerful spell" Yet Sethe replies, "No more powerful than the way I loved her" (Morrison 1997: 4). Evidently, Sethe falls prey to the past when failing to extricate herself from the spell of Beloved long after the latter's departure.

Recoiling into the self-contained female utopian realm, Sethe lives paralyzed inside herself, recalling Suggs whose grief could not be relieved after her people's betrayal and who took to her bed and died. Klein illuminates this psychic reality in this way:

> The ego has introjected a whole loved object, but owing to its immoderate dread of internalized persecutors, which are projected on to the external world, the ego takes refuge in an extravagant belief in the benevolence of his internalized objects. The result of such a flight may be denial of psychic and external reality and the deepest psychosis. (1988: 288)

Sethe internalizes the slaveowner as the persecutor. However, she projects the outside persecutor onto the local community, an act which steps back to the time of the infanticide. On the other hand, both her daughters function as the good objects that Sethe, apparently on the brink of falling apart, has striven to protect from the internalized persecutors. However, instead of showing any benevolence, Beloved is persecuting her; Denver highly vigilant. As a result, Sethe is buried alive in the "fortified castle"[66] of 124. Probing the mechanism of the "paranoid-schizoid position," Kristeva states, "projective identification dominates a narcissistic structure because the object is internalized from within and is deprived of its own qualities from without, as identity is assured only at the expense of support from the Other" (2001: 71). Here, Kristeva is suggesting the Otherness endemic to the object. From this perspective, the psychological distance between Sethe and her daughters originates from the persecuting, isolating force of the Other. Unable to recognize the lack between her and her daughters, Sethe runs the risk of losing herself to the Other.

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[66] A Kristevan term. See Kristeva (1982: 46).

Sethe's melancholia originates from her failure to recognize what she has lost – the idealized fusion with her own mother, and she attempts to commit suicide in order to go to the other side where her mother is:

> I wouldn't draw breath without my children . [. . .] My plan was to take us all to the other side where my own ma'am is. They stopped me from getting us there, but they didn't stop you [Beloved] from getting there. Ha ha. You came right on back like a good girl, like a daughter which is what I wanted to be and would have been if my ma'am had been able to get out of the rice long enough before they hanged her and let me be one. (Morrison 1997: 203)

Sethe's reluctance to give up maternal *jouissance* leads her to commit infanticide. In other words, she tries to conflate the loss of her mother with the loss of her daughter in order to neutralize the lack perpetrated on her by the white symbolic. The violent outburst then reflects her desperate effort to recapture what is forever lost – the maternal *objet a*. By so doing, she turns Beloved into an erotic object arising from her nostalgic longing for the past maternal plenitude.

As a person whose "future [is] a matter of keeping the past at bay" (Morrison 1997: 42), Sethe's memory is scanty and selective: she reproduces the halcyon days of happiness at Sweet Home more readily than its hurt and pain. Yet, embodying the slave past, Beloved challenges Sethe's evasion, thereby ushering the real into the latter's seamless memories. Story-craving and story-driven, Beloved breaks up Sethe's reticence and catalyses her wrestling with her past trauma:

> Then the mood changed and the arguments began. Slowly at first. A complaint from Beloved, an apology from Sethe. [. . .] Beloved accused her of leaving her behind. Of not being nice to her, not smiling at her. She said they were the same, had the same face, how could she have left her? And Sethe cried, saying she never did, or meant to – that she had to get them out, away, that she had the milk all the time [. . .] [t]hat her plan was always that they would all be together on the other side, forever. [. . .] Sethe pleaded for forgiveness, counting, listing again and again her reasons: that Beloved was more important, meant more to her than her own life. That she would trade places any day. Give up her life, every minute and hour of it, to take back just one of Beloved's tears. Did she know it hurt her when mosquitoes bit her baby? That to leave her on the ground to run into the big house drove her crazy? That before leaving Sweet Home Beloved slept every night on her chest or curled on her back? Beloved denied it. Sethe never came to her, never said a word to her, never smiled and worst of all never waved goodbye or even looked her way before running away from her. (1997: 241–242)

In this passage, Sethe and Beloved engage with their own psychic horrors and collide with each other's memories. Their relationship proves to be a reenactment of Sethe's relationship with her own mother. Incorporating past demons and pre-

sent desire, this episode involves the mother and daughter in an argument with each other, serving strikingly as a screen on which both mother and daughter project their suppressed memories. Correspondingly, Jennifer L. Holden-Kirwan comments that "the scene is tragic, as Sethe pleads for forgiveness from a woman who may not be her child, and Beloved begs for an explanation from a woman who may not be her mother" (1998: 422). Beloved faults Sethe for leaving her behind. Yet Sethe interlaces the memory with her own childhood memory of maternal betrayal, and, as a result, the infanticide escapes seamlessly into the decomposing memory through which she effortlessly displaces her past crime onto her own mother. It becomes clear then that Sethe's pleading also vocalizes her chronic anger at an irresponsible mother: "That to leave her on the ground to run into the big house drove her crazy" pervades her fanatical memories of abandoning her beloved child and her own memories of being abandoned by her mother. In addition, Beloved's enumeration of her mother's faults gives voice to Sethe's own grief over maternal betrayal. Consequently, their common desire for maternal love both combines and antagonizes them, because each seeks mirror-like attention from the other.

Sethe makes efforts to restore the past maternal plenitude. Accordingly, she tries to incorporate her daughter into her to maintain her own internal continuity. Conversely, she also attempts to insinuate herself into her daughter's ego as an anchoring ideal ego. Yet the rememory of the maternal betrayal is depersonalizing for both of them. Forever lost, the baby ghost *qua* the *objet a* acts as an unrelenting, criticizing ego ideal which finds fault with Sethe's slaying of her daughter and questions the very grandeur and greatness which the ego of Sethe has arrogated to itself. Here, the doubling of the ego and ego ideal is no doubt pathogenic, speaking to the lack of the Other stemming from the haunting real of slavery. Eventually, Sethe's repetitive attempt to justify her past before the baby ghost proves both compulsive and destructive, splintering her desire for girlhood, motherhood, and selfhood. In sum, bridging past and present, mother and daughter, life and death, the conversation proves harrowing and overwhelming, functioning as a dialogic discourse between conflicting desires. Significantly, the dialogical moment of encountering the fissure characterizing the splitting of the self signifies the process of achieving identity in relationship.

Deposited on Sethe's psyche, the infanticide serves as the memory trace that shapes the way she reacts to external excitations exacted on her at a later stage, setting limits to her aptitude for deciphering their nature. On seeing Mr. Bodwin,

the "man without skin"[67] coming to reclaim her children as slaves, Sethe attempts to charge at him with an ice pick:

> It is when she lowers her eyes to look again at the loving faces before her that she sees him. Guiding the mare, slowing down, his black hat wide-brimmed enough to hide his face but not his purpose. He is coming into her yard and he is coming for her best thing. She hears wings. Little hummingbirds stick *needle* beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thinks anything, it is no. No no. Nonono. She flies. The ice pick is not in her hand; it is her hand. (1997: 261–262, italics mine)

Symbolizing the horror of slavery, the white complexion fuses the slave catchers with the liberal white man, functioning to trigger Sethe's traumatic reenactment. Similarly, the "needle" acts as the connecting note which recalls the dehumanizing scene when schoolteacher instructs his nephews to transform Sethe into an expendable body. In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz observes, "When in contact with a veridical perception, the organism receives two kinds of messages, one from the sensory periphery of the nervous system, the other from consciousness, the second message confirming the veracity of the first" (1994: 30). Accordingly, at the moment of the traumatic reenactment, the infanticide provides the first message, that is, the memory trace, while the white complexion and the needle serve as the second message from the conscious, which confirms the veracity of the first.

Sethe finally becomes one with herself during the exorcism scene after attacking Mr. Bodwin. In an effort to redress her preceding blunder, she rises to point her weapon outside herself towards slavery: hence her aggressive action is rebellious and defensive. Studying ways of enhancing the healing of trauma, Glenn R. Schiraldi argues that a trauma survivor "can symbolically push away an offender or enact other nonverbal ways of protecting herself" (2000: 268). Accordingly, attacking Bodwin, who symbolically represents schoolteacher, Sethe at last pulls herself together to eradicate the monster who has fractured both herself and her family. Prevented by her people from injuring Bodwin, she is finally spared the fate of captivity (if she had succeeded, she would have been imprisoned again, both psychically and physically). At this moment, private and collective traumas intervene and fuse, and the relatedness between the community members proves crucial for fostering healing. Ulman and Brothers' understanding of healing is

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[67] Beloved employs the term to articulate her failure to register the white man as human being due to the atrocity inflicted on her during her forcible passage of African people from Africa to America – the Middle Passage (1997: 262).

illuminating here: their approach to treatment "utilizes the therapist as a fantasized selfobject facilitating the restoration and transformation of shattered fantasies of self" (1988: 4). In this light, instructed by her people acting as therapists, Sethe's traumatic encounter, that is, her rememorying of the precipitating trauma of the infanticide, is purged of its pathogenic origin and hence proves therapeutic, which harbingers a new spiritual, subjective self.

Wandering through eighteen years of life as a foreigner, Paul D is temporarily valorized upon meeting Sethe. Locating his self in her, he finds that they belong to each other. On the emergence of Beloved, however, he feels ostracized – not only by her but also by Sethe, who cedes herself to satisfy the insatiate baby ghost. Consequently Paul D's status corresponds to Kristeva's description of the foreigner, who "is a dreamer making love with absence, one exquisitely depressed" (1991: 10). It is natural that, while remaining deeply faithful to Sethe, he finds himself unable to look over her horrifying past, which implies his incapacity to compromise with his own foreignness.

Questioned closely by Paul D about her infanticide, Sethe finds it difficult to explain:

> Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain *one*. That she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. [. . .] Because the truth was *simple* [. . .] she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she *heard wings*. [. . .] And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. [. . .] Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were *precious* and *fine* and *beautiful*, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. (Morrison 1997: 163, italics mine)

It is apparent that there is a lack of confluence between the desires of Paul D and Sethe, though both are devalued and marginalized in the colonial world of America. As a result, Paul D's question triggers the reenactment of Sethe's infanticide. For the traumatized, the eruption of trauma often entails the dysfunction of linguistic skill; silenced by the horror of the precipitating trauma, he/she speaks through his/her body. As Judith Lewis Herman says: "as the narrative closes in on the most unbearable moments, the patient finds it more and more difficult to use words. At times the patient may spontaneously switch to nonverbal methods of communication, such as drawing or painting" (1992: 177). Paralyzed in the past, Sethe is deprived of the capacity to act or abject. Crossing the life/death border and defying language, the explanation is simple, because Sethe is circling around her *objet a*, something she is desperate to preserve as a part of herself both under, and after, slavery. Her effort to recruit Paul D's understanding extends the list of

her best things to him. Thus the circling signifies Sethe's binding effort to anchor the fleeting *objet a* when she senses a lack in the Other threatening to cannibalize her *objet a*. True to her hunch, Paul D disengages himself from her, saying, "You got two feet, Sethe, not four" (Morrison 1997: 165). At this moment, Sethe embodies the foreignness which functions to contrast the normalcy of Paul D: "[R]ight then a forest sprang up between them; trackless and quiet" (1997: 165). In fact, the forest grows inside Paul D, suggesting his liminal state of being with the aftermath of slavery.

In *Love*, like Junior, Heed registers as a psychologically orphaned woman as a result of the lingering effect of slavery. Born out of a dysfunctional black family, Heed was sold into the claustrophobic massive mansion where she is kept as a child bride and estranged from her bosom friend.[68] Heed's recollection of her early life overlaps with her secretary Junior's rememory of her early days at Correctional. Thus, rememory gets in the way of dialogue and effective communication:

> "Roman. His grandfather was a friend to my husband. They fished together. Papa had two boats, you know. One named for his first wife, and one named for me. . ."
>
> *Sixteen, maybe older. Nice neck.*
>
> ". . . he took important people deep-sea fishing. [. . .] Papa could mix with all kinds. . ."
>
> *He won't like this old-lady suit I got on.*
>
> "People just adored him and he was good to everybody. Of course, his will left me the most, though to hear some people, a wife shouldn't be provided for. . ."
>
> *Like the boys at Campus A shooting baskets, and us looking at them through the wire fence, daring them. Them looking back at us, promising us.*
>
> "I was lucky, I know that. My mother was against it at first. Papa's age and all. [. . .] And look how it turned out. Almost thirty years of perfect bliss . . ."
>
> *The Guards were jealous. Roughing them up because we kept on looking, greedy, like fans, watching those damp sweats rise.*
>
> [. . .]

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[68] For a detailed discussion of Heed's psychological deprivation in this novel, see section 7.1.

> "Are you listening to me? I'm giving you important information. You should be writing all this down."
>
> "I'll remember." (2004: 68–69, original italics)

In this passage, both Heed and Junior are slaves to their own desires. What connects and separates them is that each is obsessed with and animated by her own glorious past: Heed's prime years were highlighted by the oneness she enjoyed with her charismatic Papa, while Junior and her female fellow inmates threw themselves into ecstatic states and were greeted with reciprocal male interest and even jealousy. Underlying their rememory of their past plenitude and glory, however, is the desire for an idealized fusion with an omnipotent parent imago, which in turn reflects their insufficiently cathected early years. Accordingly, their discordance is symptomatic of the eruption of the real of the maternal silence into the symbolic order.

In *Sula*, Morrison introduces traumatic dissociation firstly with Shadrack, a war veteran shattered by directly confronting death. Emptied of life, he falls apart after seeing the head of a fellow soldier flying off while he was still running:

> Before he could register shock, the rest of the soldier's head disappeared under the inverted soup bowl of his helmet. But stubbornly, taking no direction from the brain, the body of the headless soldier ran on, with energy and grace, ignoring altogether the drip and slide of brain tissue down its back. (1982a: 8)

The violence done to Shadrack signifies the death drive, which allows for no respite from the horror. Captured by the opening assault of *Sula*, Philip Novak comments that "the violence involved in the elaboration of this image" lies "right on the surface: in the emphasis on the eruptive, disruptive action presented (because the narrative records not a sequence of events but an image, the soldier's head seems simply to explode)" (1999: 184). The image also conveys the disruptive, explosive effect it has on Shadrack's mind. Yet, at another level, Morrison makes an evident effort to aestheticize the image in order to avoid the endemic rawness and emptiness encoded in the concept of death: "There is even an element of lyricism, wistfulness ironized, in the description of the soldier's headless and heedless persistence, a gallantry summoned up by the 'energy and grace' of his body's inertial indomitability – a biological heroism" (1999: 185). The soldier, who moves on after death, offers himself as an unsentimental display of Morrison's attempts to bury him alive, that is, to inscribe him in the living, memorable history of America. Finally, the running soldier intrudes into Shadrack's innermost part: the movement of the headless torso arouses in him an uncanny, eerie feeling

of live burial, which dismantles his self-borders, bludgeoning him into the world of the living dead.

Shadrack's sense of the unreal emerges when he plunges into a freedom tainted with a feeling of foreignness: "Twenty-two years old, weak, hot, frightened, not daring to acknowledge the fact that he didn't even know who or what he was . . . with no past, no language, no tribe, no source, no address book [. . .] and nothing nothing nothing to do" (1982a: 12). The reader is presented with a catalogue failing to function, just as signifiers fail to valorise him as a symbolic speaking being. Correspondingly, Novak notes that "out of this vacuum, no meaning arises; meaning here does not play" (1999: 190). Accordingly, the direct confrontation with death has transformed Shadrack from a self-centred self to a foreigner to himself; he collapses with an uncanny feeling of unhomeliness although he easily finds his way back to his hometown. As with Sula, he registers as a motherless child existing outside of the Bottom community.

Though no longer in combat, Shadrack succumbs to severe shell-shock. As one of its after-effects, he is constantly assailed by the collapse of boundaries that once defined him symbolically. After being released from the confinement of the military hospital, he is overpowered by a hysterical sense of helplessness. Moreover, he goes on suffering from debilitating experiences such as his uncontrollable hands with proliferating fingers:

> Slowly he directed one hand toward the cup and, just as he was about to spread his fingers, they began to grow in higgledy-piggledy fashion like Jack's beanstalk all over the tray and the bed. With a shriek he closed his eyes and thrust his huge growing hands under the covers. Once out of sight they seemed to shrink back to their normal size. (Morrison 1982a: 9)

Evidently, terrorized by his own uncoordinated, monstrous hands, Shadrack collapses inwardly. Thus, the hands bear witness to the shattering effect of the soldier's unexpected death to Shadrack. This episode is also decipherable as Shadrack's faulty defensive efforts to restore his unsullied self as, psychologically, the anonymous solider is part of himself, that is, his selfobject.

In order to categorize his fear of death, Shadrack wages "a struggle to order and focus experience" on his way back home, which corresponds to his need for containment:

> It had to do with making a place for fear as a way of controlling it. He knew the smell of death and was terrified of it, for he could not anticipate it. It was not death or dying that frightened him, but the *unexpectedness* of both. In sorting it all out, he hit on the notion that if one day a year were devoted

> to it, everybody could get it out of the way and the rest of the year would be safe and free. In this manner he instituted National Suicide Day. (1982a: 14, italics mine)

What Shadrack is frightened of is in fact the unexpected irruption of death. He sets up National Suicide Day in response to his efforts to compartmentalize and sterilize death – his faulty effort of restitution. As Jonathan Dollimore contends, "death is not simply the termination of life [. . .] but life's driving force, its animating, dynamic principle" (2001: 192). Yet Shadrack's repetitive exposure and recourse to death shows that he is unconscious of the lack of the Other, thus fuelling his neurosis.

In order to cope with the aftershock of the trauma, Shadrack only works two days a week: "the rest of week he was drunk, loud, obscene, funny and outrageous" (Morrison 1982a: 15). His state corresponds to Herman's insight into the self-enacted dissociation showen by trauma victims: "Traumatized people who cannot spontaneously dissociate may attempt to produce similar numbing effects by using alcohol or narcotics" (1992: 44). Like Shadrack, many of the major characters struggle to extract meaning through dissociation from past traumtogenic events in their lives. For example, Plum retreats to bed after the war, seeking oblivion in drugs, which suggests his inability to ward off the war trauma; Denver leaves school and stops socializing with the community. However, as Herman further points out:

> although dissociative alternations in consciousness, or even intoxication, may be adaptive at the moment of total helplessness, they become maladaptive once the danger is past. Because these altered states keep the traumatic experience walled off from ordinary consciousness, they prevent the integration necessary for healing. (1992: 45)

In Morrison's writing, trauma-induced dissociation confines the victims to a narrowed life, casting them into a state of existential crisis. Therefore, Morrison emphasizes the participation of the black community in personal traumatic reenactment as an efficient way of rescuing black people from the after-effects of slavery.

4.5 Setting in Motion the Maternal Signifier

In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth claims that history, like trauma, comes into being when co-implicating people of diverse cultural identity. Clearly, Caruth suggests history as sustaining the private/public binary. Reflecting on Caruth's argument, Petar Ramadanovic points out that there is no such thing as a shared past among people from disparate cultures and races: "The Jewish diaspora and

the African American diaspora have had, at most, a parallel historical development. The coincidences in these histories full of traumatic events are due to extrinsic reasons, to colonialism or racism" (2001: 84). Clearly, what combines and co-implicates the Jewish refugee and the African American fugitive is a foreignness planted in them by either the colonizer or slave trader/owner. As Ramadanovic emphasizes, "it is because of the singular character of trauma [. . .] that we can encounter each other, and that we are implicated in each other's traumas" (2001: 90). Eventually, Ramadanovic exhorts the modern subject to become a "diasporic subject": it is "not you whom I become, nor do you suddenly change places with me, but it is the other (other to me, other to you) – the unnameable, the strange" (2001: 91). To become the "diasporic we" is equivalent to living with/as the Kristevan foreigner. In Morrison's fiction, healing emerges when the traumatized character learns to reconcile him/herself with the lack endemic to dysfunctional black motherhood, thereby becoming a cosmopolitan being.

In *Beloved*, Denver finally steps out of the jail of 124, where she has felt isolated, devoured by the claustrophobic mother-daughter togetherness. After realizing that Beloved is but a stand-in for the maternal phallus, she sets in motion the object of her desire – from Sethe, to Beloved, to her teacher, to the community, to school, and so on. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva welcomes this stage as the burgeoning of self:

> Letting current flow into such a 'fortified castle' amounts to causing desire to rise. But one soon realizes, during transference, that desire, if it dawns, is only a substitute for adaptation to a social form [. . .]. On the way, as if hatched by what, for others, will be desire, the patient encounters abjection. It seems to be the first authentic feeling of a subject in the process of constituting itself as such, as it emerges out of its jail and goes to meet what will become, but only later, objects. (1982: 47)

Kristeva clearly suggests abjection as a prerequisite for the emergence of a symbolic subject in relation to an object. From this perspective, Denver's thrusting herself out of 124 suggests her abjection of her phallic mother, reconnecting herself to the self-confirming object.

Denver is empowered to venture into the community when visited by the ghost of her grandmother, Baby Suggs: "'You mean I never told you nothing about Carolina? About your daddy? You don't remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do [. . .]? I never told you all that? Is that why you can't walk down the steps? My Jesus my.'" When questioned closely by Denver what to do in a world where "there was no defense" for black people, Suggs says, "Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on" (Morrison 1997: 244). What Suggs instructs Denver to learn

is the historical knowledge of slavery, which is integral to the formation of Denver's subjectivity. In this connection, Carol E. Henderson says:

> Although Denver bears no physical marks or scars directly attributable to slavery – she was born in a "middle passage" of sorts, born when Sethe was on the run – her connection to slavery is immediate because of her mother, her father, her sister Beloved, and her grandmother Baby Suggs. (2002: 99)

Introjected as an idealized parent imago, Suggs figures as an inseparable part of Denver's psychic self by holding her up to the guiding leadership of her ideals. As an ancestral figure, she passionately exhorts Denver to rememory, to pursue the knowledge of the cultural trauma of slavery in order to take on her responsibility in a liberating way to achieve psychic wholeness. Denver's rememory suggests her journeying into the otherness of herself (the Other self), evolving into the Ramadanovian "diasporic subject." When isolated, finding herself in a foreigner position, and finally forced out of the pre-oedipal society, she enters into the community, which empowers her to re-enter the mother/daughter dyad to liberate her mother from the devouring past embodied by Beloved, to provide what she lacks in 124 (as well in the white Other) – love. To analyse this from a Kristevan point, she finds herself after integrating her mother's and her own foreignness, which derives from slavery trauma. From this aspect, her knowledge of her intrinsic foreignness paradoxically participates in her identity construction. Eventually she evolves into an autonomous, diasporic subject.

Significantly, stemming from a dysfunctional black motherhood, foreignness unites Morrison's traumatized characters. Sethe finally abjects Beloved *qua* both her child and her mother. By so doing, she reconciles herself with the foreigner inside her and orientates herself towards healing. Beloved disappears when Sethe is capable of living as a foreigner in post-slavery America; she flees 124 when her mother integrates herself into the local community. In this way, the community is rehabilitated by women blighted by maternal betrayal. Deprived of an idealized union with their parent imago,[69] most female characters in the novel are psychologically orphaned and forced to live as foreigners to themselves and their communities. Therefore, the antagonism between the 124-inhabitants and the rest of the community epitomizes the imposition of dominant ways of knowing and looking. It is quite significant that the local community finally reconciles itself to its inherent foreignness projected onto Sethe and Beloved; reaccepting Sethe as a member of themselves, it learns to live with the foreigner, which enhances collective healing. Furthermore, epitomizing the foreignness arising from the colonizing

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[69] This again relates to the trauma of maternal silence.

slavery, Beloved incites her mother and the rest of the local community to reconciliation and final fusion. Eventually and significantly, both Sethe and the rest of the community are healed from the influence of slavery. Individual healing signifies a communal one: it is achieved through communal communication, which in turn contributes to self-connection.

When the women assembled outside 124 to rescue Sethe from the tyranny of Beloved, they

> surprised themselves by their absence of fear when they saw what stood next to her. The devil-child was clever, they thought. And beautiful. It had taken the shape of a pregnant woman, *naked* and smiling in the heat of the afternoon sun. [. . .] Her smile was dazzling. (1997: 261, italics mine)

The charm and charisma emanating from the "devil-child" suggests that she is a psychic part of the local people. In her naked attractiveness, she is reminiscent of the Lacanian *objet a* ensconced inside everyone; to borrow Morrison's words in *Love*, she is "*the winsome baby girl curled up somewhere inside, between the ribs, say, or under the heart*" (2004: 5, original italics). The psychological closeness the community feels for Beloved reflects its desire to transgress the symbolic in order to restore the lost maternal *jouissance*. Both embraced and dreaded, Beloved bespeaks the community's complex attitude towards its own past. Put another way, the strangeness attached to Beloved comes not so much from the community's consciousness of the lack in Beloved as from their awareness of the contingency and inadequacy accompanying their daily lives.

Morrison's seventh novel, *Paradise*, introduces themes of intraracial schism and isolation among black people resulting from the racist culture of America. Reverend Richard Misner, the new minister of "Calvary Church" and a foreigner from outside the town, tempts "the young to step outside the wall, outside the town limits, shepherding them, forcing them to transgress, to think of themselves as civil warriors" (1999: 145). To clarify, he encourages them to unite their foreignness and become the Kristevan foreigner. Correspondingly, Elizabeth Kella claims that, "for Misner and for the young people of Ruby, the world beyond the town limits does contain racism and injustice, but it also contains opportunities for connecting with other African Americans and for engaging in meaningful social struggle" (2000: 233). For the young, to transgress the town border involves coming face to face with the ravages of the inhuman institution, the overturning of the nostalgic plenitude and paradise promised by the town of Ruby. Yet to step out also implies what Ramadanovic terms "entanglement," to join the demonized black women inhabiting the Convent. Accordingly, entanglement suggests a departing into a point before Othering and individuating. Through depositing a col-

lective trauma transcending culture, space and time, Ramadanovic exhorts the modern subject to cross cultural borders and band together into a diasporic we wherein, paradoxically, the future lies. In this connection, Misner incites the younger inhabitants to step out of the town to embrace a new world in order to invent themselves under the aftershock of slavery.

While the title of *Love* is entangled with various forms of that emotion, it represents the dead, omnipresent and omniscient L as well. Reduced to humming after her death, L claims to be "*an old woman embarrassed by the world*" (2004: 4, original italics); murmuring to herself musically, she expresses her "*objecting to how the century is turning out*" (2004: 4, original italics). Music arguably suggests her as an African spiritual figure whose love provides her women children with womblike oneness and ecstasy. In this sense, L's humming conveys her worry about, and agony over, the black women who have fallen prey to capitalistic patriarchy, which in turn suggests the white hegemonic voice which continuously victimized black people in the nineteenth century. Therefore, the humming is a special speech which L utilizes between two languages – her maternal language and the white-supremacist one. Consequently, she figures as a distraught mother engaging Cosey, who is endangering the lives of her daughters.

Throughout the novel, L distinguishes herself from the rest with her knowledge of the lack structuring the Other – the violence inflicted on black psyches by predatory, capitalist culture. Enthralled by Cosey's charisma when she first met him in the sea, L runs all the way to his door nine years later, when she hears that "Cosey was looking for house help" (2004: 72). Yet, when distraught with worry, she poisons the man she adores and desires in order to restore peace to the Cosey family. In this novel, L's role as a protector and healer is highlighted by her murder of Cosey to restore peace among his kinswomen, despite her fascination with him. She and Cosey are, in effect, portrayed as doubles, polarized as two extremes in relation to the latter's women: Cosey verbalizes destruction and doom, while L always supplies support and solace for his women; L's longing for familial peace is balanced by the real-hole[70] symbolized by the disembodied ghost Cosey. Figuring as an agent of death (the real) to Cosey, L enhances healing and connection between his women.

A powerful African maternal figure, L is fully aware of the source of the darkness overshadowing the mansion – it is Cosey, who embodies and encapsulates the lack of the white Other; she has virtually transcended the life/death boundary and

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[70] Here, I employ the "real-hole" to refer to the gap of the real in Lacan's model.

escaped the castrating Other through hunting down and domesticating Cosey. In the end, she is totally free, freed of the Other's desire. Kristeva taps into this kind of freedom: "Free of ties with his own people, the foreigner feels 'completely free.' Nevertheless, the consummate name of such a freedom is solitude" (1991: 12). Freeing herself from Cosey, L is absorbed in solitude, which impels her to project herself onto all the victimized females in the novel. She only restores peace to the mansion by dispersing the darkness permeating the mansion with what she lacks, that is, love. L's love is similar to Lacan's notion of love. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan points out that "Lacan often said that 'love' may *be* curative, but not because it is love (an idealized closure). Rather, because it allows us to give what we lack in the Other; to not give up on the Other; to not give up on desire" (1991: 58, original italics). From this perspective, Morrison offers an explicit expression of a timeless spiritual, ancestral love as opposed to the lack inflicted on black people by the white symbolic. Yet of no less significance, by revising the real as love, she provides more space for the healing of the scars of the cultural trauma of slavery in her fiction. Her foregrounding of the uncanny and the real coheres with her desire to restore the African spiritual self, rendering it an integral part of the psyches of all black people.

Through portraying L as a healing agent transcending life and death, Morrison revises Baby Suggs, endowing her with death-defying maternal love; she dismembers Beloved, projecting her on to L and Cosey, who double for each other. Significantly, L's suicidal[71] love revises Sethe's too-thick love and Eva's self-centred love. By divorcing Cosey from L, Morrison revises mother love, thus orienting her fiction towards healing. Her experiment bespeaks her radical post-modernist project, and, crucially, suggests a cross-cultural feminist literature intersecting race, class, gender and ethnicity, thereby allowing space for a broader sense of the real.

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[71] L's murder of her double Cosey is in effect a violence inflicted on herself .

5 THE EROTICIZATION OF THE BLACK OTHER

> The slave was only considered a subject insofar as he was criminal(ized), wounded body, or mortified flesh.
>
> – Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, 1997.

> Post-structuralist feminists seem unaware of the "Other Lacan" who teaches us that the phallic signifier has no signified, that this signifier only symbolizes the learning of difference as an effect which posits a materiality in language which differentiates the word *qua* meaning from the word *as* the sense of its meaning(s). That is, meanings always point to other meanings, to missing pieces.
>
> – Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, "The Sexual Masquerade: A Lacanian Theory of Sexual Difference," 1991.

This chapter seeks to explore the function of black people as the phallus for white people in America. In an interview, Morrison says, "White people's reaction to something that is alien to them is to destroy it. That's why they have to say Black people are worthless and ugly" ("Conversation" 1994: 8). Here she is suggesting white people's incapacity to coexist with foreigners, which engenders black people's position of abjection in the colonizing culture. As a result, black people exist as orphans in a culture particularly informed by racist norms. Dehumanized or marginalized, they subsist as a complement to white people, and to the white symbolic. Black people's affinity with the phallus suggests the extent to which they have fallen victim to the castrating and categorizing letters of a language enjoined by white norms. In other words, only after they are castrated, serving as the site to which whites penetrate, do they obtain symbolic identity – as marketable, exploitable bodies. Moreover, so defined, they guarantee the position of white people as speaking beings in the symbolic order.

This degradation of black people into expendable bodies is attributable to white supremacist dominance. In "Reflections on Race and Sex," bell hooks points out that "sexuality has always provided gendered metaphors for colonization" (1990: 57), and continues:

> Free countries equated with free men, domination with castration, the loss of manhood, and rape – the terrorist act re-acting the drama of conquest, as men of the dominating group sexually violate the bodies of women who are among the dominated. (1990: 57)

She links woman's social degradation with male phallocentric domination. Eroticized or demonized, black women have to define themselves according to white norms which designate them as sexually deviant, available bodies. In Morrison's writing, black females' degradation into the category of the body is "represented by the slave-driver Schoolteacher's [sic] pseudo-scientific ledgers, which transform feeling flesh into dead specimens of science and machines of (re)production" (Dobbs 1998: 564). With this, the novelist attacks white supremacy established on the exploitation of black people as well as the white colonizing gesture of commodifying Otherness.

In Morrison's works, the journey to, or knowledge of self takes place in the realm of the unconscious – as the eruption of the real into the symbolic. Africanism, which addresses the marginalized, interstitial existence of black people in America, is highlighted by the author to explore the real of slavery and to enhance healing for her people. Implicated in the issues of cultural trauma, an emergent Africanism appears as the focal point for the interpretation of the past and the construction of collective identity for African American people. Aroused by a strong sense of historical responsibility, Morrison's novels undertake to unearth what has been omitted in the slave narratives; this proves an audacious yet efficient way to recover the enigmatic real (truth) from the reality of American history, and reveals the future to African American people.

5.1 Africanism as the Real: Absence versus Presence

In Lacan's system, displaced by symbolic signifiers, the real evokes past memories and provokes thinking, manifesting itself as the automatic functioning of the unconscious: "the real is that which always comes back to the same place – to the place where the subject in so far as he thinks, where the *res cogitans*, does not meet it" (Lacan 1977: 49). For Lacan, the process of thinking/recollection (traumatic reenactment) succeeds only to a certain point where the signifying chain stalls and shows an abyss, a gap:

> Recollection is not Platonic reminiscence – it is not the return of a form, an imprint, a [sic] *eidos* of beauty and good, a supreme truth, coming to us from the beyond. It is something that comes to us from the structural necessities, something humble, born at the level of the lowest encounters and of all the talking crowd that precedes us, at the level of the structure of the signifier, of the languages spoken in a stuttering, stumbling way. (1977: 47)

The process of recollection is inaugurated and impelled by the real, which appears as a fissure, a vacancy in memory toward which the signifier gravitates. Put dif-

ferently, irreconcilable with the symbolic order, the real starts the process of recollection by activating the signifying chain. Through this process, the real constructs its absence as presence. For example, representing the real of slavery trauma, Beloved's reincarnation is foreboded by the clash between the real and the symbolic: "It took him [Paul D] a while to realize that his legs were not shaking because of worry, but because the floorboards were [. . .] The house itself was pitching. Sethe slid to the floor and struggled to get back into her dress" (Morrison 1997: 18). It is apparent that Paul D has bumped into Sethe's rememory of her traumatic past – the infanticide. Consequently, Sethe's signifying chain is ruptured by the unexpected pressing-in of something into her, that is, Beloved. On the other hand, as an immemorial and indelible residue of the trauma, Beloved suggests her mother's subversion of the symbolic order.

By way of the subverting function of the real, Lacan extends the structure of language to the subject: he represents the subject as what the signifier stands for, or, more radically, a signifier:

> One therefore does not speak to the subject. It speaks of him, and this is how he apprehends himself; he does so all the more necessarily in that, before he disappears as a subject beneath the signifier he becomes, due to the simple fact that it addresses him, he is absolutely nothing. But this nothing is sustained by his advent, now produced by the appeal made in the Other to the second signifier. (2006: 708)

Lacan presents a rather paradoxical logic here: while "the letter kills," the subject is "born in so far as the signifier emerges in the field of the Other" (2006: 719; 1977: 199). By designating the subject as a signifier, he has extended the topological structure elaborated earlier in section 3.1 to the formation of human beings. In treating the subject topologically, he joins together the inside (the unconscious domain of the subject) and the outside (the conscious part of the subject) into a "complete" speaking subject. It is thus not surprising that the Lacanian subject is from the very start divided from him/herself due to the debilitating effect of the symbolic dimension. Lacan's repeated recourse to topology to illustrate his doctrine of the unconscious has to do with his tendency to dismantle a consistent, coherent construction of the subject and to disrupt the border between what is normal and abnormal.

The subject emerges through becoming or subjecting him/herself to the splitting signifier. Petar Ramadanovic's conception of the subject is similar to Lacan's formulation of the subject as the signifier. In *Forgetting Futures*, he studies Caruth's notion of trauma as unclaimed experience, stating that the modern subject "is recognized by its inextricable ties to what cannot be experienced and sub-

jectivized fully. And this unfinished becoming, surviving, and being with others, is the form of the subject's being and its history" (2001: 5). Accordingly, the subject is defined, shaped and subjectivized via his/her interaction or communication with other people. In other words, the subject can only sustain itself as a signifier in relation to another subject *qua* signifier.

The haunting real causes and evidences the pulsative presence of the unconscious, which speaks to the subject's symptomatic existence in the symbolic register. In his unpublished seminar XV, elaborating his graphic illustrations of the split subject, Lacan says, "either I am not thinking or I am not" (qtd. in Fink 1995: 45). In this connection, Fink explains, "The subject is split between ego [. . .] and unconscious [. . .], between conscious and unconscious, between an ineluctably false sense of self and the automatic functioning of language (the signifying chain) in the unconscious" (1995: 45). The unconscious is actually the unconscious thought, which sabotages the false sense of being held by the symbolic subject. Split yet driven forward by the signifier, the Lacanian subject takes on a never-ending mission of unwinding, breaking and bringing to light what is submerged and repressed – the real. On the other hand, effaced yet remaining ineffaceable, the real leads to the interstitial existence of the subject in the symbolic order.

Lacan's tendency to designate the subject as the subject of the unconscious by way of language reflects the way the unconscious is embedded in culture: subjected to the Other, "the subject, while he may appear to be the slave of language, is still more the slave of a discourse[72] in the universal movement of which his place is already inscribed at his birth" (2006: 414). The Lacanian subject is useful to analyse in Morrison's works the marginalized, interstitial existence of black people in the racist culture of America; alienated by the predatory culture, nearly all characters are impelled by the desire for psychic wholeness and cultural identity. Yet they can only sustain themselves as a signifier, which suggests the insignificant position of them in a social order equating blackness with the Other. Eventually, they appear as a racial, somatic expression of the Lacanian real whose abject position is crucial to white people's sense of Americanness in the colonizing culture.

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[72] For Lacan, this discourse is an equivalent of culture as he attempts to convert "the ethnographic duality of nature and culture" into a "ternary conception of the human condition – nature, society, and culture – the last term of which may well be reduced to language, that is, to what essentially distinguishes human society from natural societies" (2006: 414). Incontestably, Lacan designates the unconscious as both culture-building and -undermining.

In "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," Morrison examines the American literary canon as well as contemporary and noncanonical literature for an Afro-American presence in an effort to set up "a theory of literature that truly accommodates Afro-American literature" (1988: 135). She describes the American literary cannon as a "protected preserve of the thoughts and works and analytical strategies of whitemen" (1988: 124). Compellingly, she claims that the nineteenth-century Eurocentric posture in literature, that is, evasion of blackness "may have resulted in lobotomizing that literature, and in diminishing both the art and the artist" (1988: 138). Always disposed to disrupt, delve into, and decipher, literature aligns itself with the uncanny with its ability to present the absent. From this perspective, the Eurocentric orientation eviscerates the American literary canon, depriving it of its sense of the uncanny. For this reason, Morrison proposes that "the presence of Afro-American literature and the awareness of its culture both resuscitate the study of literature in the United States and raise that study's standards" (1988: 126–127). To expound her argument, she studies Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* from the American canon, analyzing how the author weaves his awareness of and antithesis to racism into his writing; yet for Morrison the white whale allegorically signifies "whiteness idealized" (1988: 143) – whiteness *qua* a privileged signifier of power which simultaneously exploits and escapes blackness in American cultural and literary life. In so doing, she challenges the exclusion of black experience as well as African American writers from the American literary canon, thereby criticizing the flight from blackness whose cultural resilience forms the basis of black survival.

Morrison's work interests itself in exploring the uncanny, which speaks to her inclination to defuse the myth revolving round the scourge of slavery in American history. She proposes "the ability of writers to imagine what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar" as "the test of their power" (1993: 15). This ability to compound the familiar with the unfamiliar marks literature as the locus of disruption and dislocation, a cultural borderland brimful of disagreement, disorder and dialogue. In an introductory essay to *Literature and Ethnicity*, Benito and Manzanas remark, "the concept of the border(lands) has proved a most fertile one in the current critical debate. But the term 'border' is in itself a 'borderish' concept or hybrid term which implies both a line of division and a line of encounter and dialogue" (2002: 1). Morrison hails this site of cultural interaction as the locus of cultural survival: she highlights in her novels the cultural borderland populated by African American people both to enhance cultural dialogue and, more importantly, to empower an "American Africanism" which is "a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American" (Morrison 1993: 38). This spectral American Africanism recalls the Lacanian real, which looms as an open mesh of holes and gaps – excesses of meaning. Con-

sciously or unconsciously, Morrison leaves gaps in her writing to prepare it for multiple interpretations.

Looking at the scope of Afro-American literature, Morrison writes:

> the most valuable point of entry into the question of cultural (or racial) distinction, the one most fraught, is its language – its unpoliced, seditious, confrontational, manipulative, inventive, disruptive, masked, and unmasking language. (1988: 136)

This language is unquestionably black, embedded in an African cultural past. Expelled by the white symbolic language, the language is unobtrusive, suggestive and penetrating, addressing an Afro-American presence in canonical literature. In "The Seams Can't Show: An Interview with Toni Morrison" (1977), Morrison points out that her "way is usually to say less rather than more in writing. To try to say a lot in a line" (Bakerman 1994: 35). In order to mean much by saying little, she relies on "the symbol structure" which often functions as "the route into a character or a scene":

> You have to find the key, the clue. In language all you have are those 26 letters, some punctuation and some paper. So you have to do everything with just that.
>
> A metaphor is a way of seeing something, either familiar or unfamiliar, in a way that you can grasp it. If I get the right one, then I'm all right. But I can't leap in with words, I have to get a hook. That's the way I think; I need it, the phrase or the picture or the word or some gesture. I need that thing over Sula's eye [the birthmark, "shaped something like a stemmed rose," on Sula's eyelid]. (Bakerman 1994: 35)

Morrison treats the clue as one of the closest things to story, whose recurring appearance recalls and resembles the unrelenting, repetitive incursion of the Lacanian real into the symbolic. Put slightly differently, featuring the symbol structure, the language recalls the symptomatic appearance of the real, which, though effaced, leaves indelible traces in the symbolic.

Morrison employs a language featuring paradoxes, emphasizing variety, vibrancy and indeterminacy. In the interview quoted above, she talks about "the work and even the struggle which go into the preparation of a novel, emphasizing, "The point is so that it doesn't look like it's sweating like that *effort*, you see? It must appear effortless! [. . .] I mean the seams can't show" (Bakerman 1994: 31, original italics). The seam speaks to the gap between love/desire and lack/absence, provoking or impelling the author to employ a language capable of blurring the line between them. For example, her first novel *The Bluest Eye* begins "*Quiet as*

it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1914" (1994: 5, original italics). "Simple, uncomplicated" yet "devious, even loaded," the sentence is employed by the author to drive the reader into a desire to know a secret, or, more exactly, to break a silence, to speak the unspeakable (Morrison 1988: 148–149) – Pecola was having her father's baby. Morrison's language does its work in a silent, traceless and beautiful way, evoking what is buried alive in readers' innermost selves. Defying binary distinctions such as self/other, good/evil and past/present, she emphasizes the vanishing point of white symbolic meaning, proposing instead a crossing point at which a variety of perspectives collides, clashes and converges. Moreover, she experiments with revising her own characters[73] and her worldview[74] throughout her novels. Consequently, straddling between black and white worlds, she figures prominently as a border-dismantling foreigner in post-slavery America.

In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison claims that the Afro-American presence manifests itself in American literature

> through significant and underscored omissions, startling contradictions, heavily nuanced conflicts, through the way writers peopled their work with the signs and bodies of this presence – one can see that a real or fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to their sense of Americanness. (1993: 6)

Featuring interruptions, or discontinuities, American Africanism testifies to black people's unconscious and unseen existence, which serves to make possible a distinctive Americanness. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Lacan says that "the unconscious first appears to us as a phenomenon – discontinuity, in which something is manifested as a vacillation" (1977: 25). From this perspective, American Africanism is a background, absent presence from which the "quintessential American identity" (1993: 44) springs.

The background introduced by the experience of the unconscious is not absent. Probing the "impact of Afro-American presence on modernity," Morrison writes:

> We can agree, I think, that invisible things are not necessarily "not-there"; that a *void* may be empty but not be a vacuum. In addition, certain absences are so stressed, so ornate, so planned, they call attention to themselves; ar-

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[73] This has been discussed in section 4.2, with Morrison's revising of Sula as Beloved in the novel of that name.

[74] For instance, Doreatha Drummond Mbalia elaborates on Morrison's developing class consciousness throughout her literary creations in his critical work, *Toni Morrison's Developing Class Consciousness* (2004). Also, I will analyze Morrison's reconfiguration of her concept of "love" in her eighth novel *Love* in Chapter 6.

> rest us with intentionality and purpose, like neighborhoods that are defined by the population held away from them. (1988: 136, italics mine)

The void is reminiscent of the Lacanian real, whose haunting presence, albeit absent, sets in motion symbolic signifiers. Correspondingly, Lacan contends, "rupture, split, the stroke of the opening makes absence emerge – just as the cry does not stand out against a background of silence, but on the contrary makes the silence emerge as silence" (1977: 26). The explosive cry renders audible the silence; it serves as a signifier, diachronically pointing to the silence, that is, the void of the real. For this reason, there is not an unruptured background of unity anterior to the discontinuity presented by the symptomatic appearance of the unconscious. Put another way, the background of silence is not a "closed *one*" against which the cry emerges. According to Lacan, it is "the *one* of the split, of the stroke, of rupture" (1977: 26, original italics). In this connection, shaped by an emergent, disruptive Afro-American presence, the unity and coherence held by the constructed identity is false and untrue.

In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison renames the Afro-American presence "American Africanism" (1993: 6). By this term, she explores the marginalized existence of black people, investigating "into the ways in which a nonwhite, Africanlike (or Africanist) presence or persona was constructed in the United States, and the imaginative uses this fabricated presence served." What she brings to light here is the interstitial presence of black people that manifests itself through its effects. She further writes that she uses the term to represent the "denotative and connotative *blackness* that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people" (1993: 6–7, italics mine). The blackness suggests virtually the invisibility perpetuated on black people by white supremacy (or dominance). In other words, it is suggestive of the absent presence of black people in America.

Morrison calls into question the silence imposed on black texts in general, and feminist discourse in particular, in her critical works. In "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," examining the scope of American literature, she sadly observes that she is absent from it (1993: 136); in parallel, in *Playing in the Dark*, she observes, "An instructive parallel to [the] willed scholarly indifference [to black texts] is the centuries-long, hysterical blindness to feminist discourse and the way in which women and women's issues were read (or unread)" (1993: 14). Morrison's interest in exploring the concept of blackness in her fiction is inextricably bound up with her strong sense of historical responsibility for her people. Addressing black people's marginalized existence, American Africanism emerges in her texts as the

unobtrusive blackness that lurks in and illuminates the history of American history.

Given that the real of slavery is suppressed in American historiography, it is natural that American civilization could accommodate darkness or blackness. As if unsatisfied with the invisibility and ugliness that hegemonic white culture has imparted to her people, Morrison is inclined to exhibit her exploratory power in the realm of the unknown blackness, which functions as a battle plain on which black people fight, engage and imagine the demons of America. Throughout her work, blackness is tightly entangled with the fate and cultural position of African American people in the often predatory culture of America: it is firstly drenched with the hue of the complexion of black people, recalling the "bound and violently silenced black bodies" (Morrison 1993: 38), reverberating with the soul-death forced on black people in American history; secondly, it is permanently related to overwhelming, supernatural, and enigmatic forces onto which humans project their failure, sense of powerlessness and internal aggression; thirdly, it accommodates both the desire for and the fear of borderlessness. Viewed collectively, darkness holds out the promise of a release from consuming desire and the pain of being individuated; it is the tacit death drive that contrasts with the clamorous colours of life. In this connection, seething with disruptive forces, the Afro-American presence strives to disrupt that white supremacy which stuns black people (like Baby Suggs in *Beloved* after the infanticide) into silence, thereby displacing the "autonomy, authority, newness and difference, absolute power" (1993: 44) held by sovereign America.

In *Beloved*, Africanism emerges as what Stamp Paid, a figure of salvation, observes as the jungle which white people "planted in [black people]": "Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle" (1997: 198). Correspondingly, Tuire Valkeakari claims, "In the United States, black identities are negotiated in a national setting where the discriminatory aftereffects of white settlement history still make their presence felt in various areas of social and political life" (2004: 3). Yet Stamp Paid goes on to suggest that the jungle symbolizes white violence done to black people:

> But it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it. (1997: 198–199)

Obviously, the jungle reflects the negative perceptions of blackness, stereotypes perpetuated on the black Other by the dominant white discourse. As bell hooks eloquently contends, "[Stereotypes] are a fantasy, a projection onto the Other that

makes them less threatening. Stereotypes abound when there is distance" (1992: 170). In addition, the jungle recalls the forest[75] which springs up between Paul D and Sethe when the former fails to bring himself to be reconciled with the latter's past.

The jungle spreads until it becomes an impassable barrier between black people and pits them against each other. In *Black Looks*, hooks suggests that the negative, stereotyped images of blackness which reflect the violence done to black people by the white Other have been tragically internalized by the victimized and dehumanized; she discusses the violence black women do to children, and to one another. Significantly, hooks probes the degradation and objectification black females suffer at the hands of white supremacist capitalist racism and sexism: "the crisis of black womanhood can only be addressed by the development of resistance struggles that emphasize the importance of decolonizing our minds, developing critical consciousness" (1992: 60). She encourages her people to abject the stereotyped image perpetuated on them in order to enter into language and become the speaking subject. This has been the achievement of Morrison in her novels.

5.2 The Black Other and the Abject Phallus

In her fiction, Morrison illuminates the particular abject position of black people in the whitened world of America. Put differently, black people are marginalized, denied symbolic meaning, serving as the privileged signifier of lack in the Other. For this reason, they act as the phallus for white people, which is reminiscent of woman's succumbing to masquerading in order to assume in Lacan's system phallic power. Moreover, black females *qua* the phallus provide the site which people inhabiting a relatively higher social position penetrate in order to get valorised in the symbolic register. Probing the specific role of black women in America, Hortense Spillers writes, "I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented" (1994: 454). Spillers implies that black females function as a phallic signifier in relation to which people of a higher social rung define themselves in racist white patriarchy. Building upon Spillers' designation of black females as a necessary signifier, Vanessa D. Dickerson suggests the complementing role of the black female body to white people as well as black men in "Summoning Some-

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[75] It is discussed in chapter 4 to study traumatic dissociation.

Body." She goes so far as to contend that the black female body "has been anti-Victorian as it has not shared the 'impenetrable mystery' [. . .] Linked instead to a knowable corporeality and to reproduction, the black female body has not been interiorized as ideal but localized as thing" (2001: 196). Accordingly, the black female body functions as the abject of the abjection which facilitates the appearance of the others as culturally accepted and defined. Eventually, black females, albeit abjected, figure as the phallus for white people as well as black males.

Morrison highlights the masochism which marks black people's participation in the white symbolic throughout her work. In *The Bluest Eye*, she makes clear what it means to surrender to the paternal Word enjoined by the white racial discourse:

> He must enter her surreptitiously, lifting the hem of her nightgown only to her navel. He must rest his weight on his elbows when they make love, ostensibly to avoid hurting her breasts but actually to keep her from having to touch or feel too much of him.
>
> While he moves inside her, she will wonder why they didn't put the necessary but private parts of the body in some more convenient place – like the armpit, for example, or the palm of the hand. Someplace one could get to easily, and quickly, without undressing. She stiffens when she feels one of her paper curlers coming undone from the activity of love; imprints in her mind which one it is that is coming loose so she can quickly secure it once he is through. She hopes he will not sweat – the damp may get into her hair; and that she will remain dry between her legs – she hates the glucking sound they make when she is moist. When she senses some spasm about to grip him, she will make rapid movements with her hips, press her fingernails into his back, suck in her breath, and pretend she is having an orgasm. (1994: 84)

Clearly, in faking an orgasm and functioning as the phallus for her husband, the woman cedes her pleasure and her body altogether to the latter. Julia Kristeva asserts that "in a symbolic economy of production and reproduction centred on the paternal Word (the phallus, if you like), one can make a woman believe that she *is* (the phallus) even if she doesn't have it" (1986: 144, original italics). For the woman, the closest way to power is to take on the lack in the Other. As Judith Butler claims:

> For women to "be" the Phallus means, then, to reflect the power of the Phallus, to signify that power, to "embody" the Phallus, to supply the site to which it penetrates, and to signify the Phallus through "being" its Other, its absence, its lack, the dialectical confirmation of its identity. (1999: 56)

Yet, in acting out the lack enjoined by the white hegemonic symbolic order, the black woman has virtually lost herself. Exploring this transition, Susan Willis

writes, "Morrison translates the loss of history and culture into sexual terms and demonstrates the connection between bourgeois society and repression" (1982: 35). From this perspective, the black woman's assumption of the phallic role in marriage reflects the castrating, debilitating effect that white-dominated culture has on black women.

In *Sula*, Jude's[76] expectations of marriage reflect the self-ignoring, or even self-sacrificing devotion of black women to life in wedlock:

> The more he thought about marriage, the more attractive it became. Whatever his fortune, whatever the cut of his garment, there would always be the hem – the tuck and fold that hid his raveling edges, a someone sweet, industrious and loyal to shore him up. (1982a: 83)

Jude's words reflect the marginalized position of black women after entering marriage. To employ Butler's words, he seeks a woman as a phallus which, "signified by the paternal law, [is] both its object and its instrument and, in structuralist terms, the 'sign' and promise of its power" (1999: 58). To clarify, Nel functions to fill his appetites, providing him with his desired, imaginary wholeness.

Studying the phallus-based relationship between man and woman, Laura Mulvey says, "The paradox of phallocentrism in all its manifestations is that it depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world" (1999: 833). In this view, split by the symbolic lack, Nel supplies the site which Jude's anger and fear penetrates: "So it was rage, rage and a determination to take on a man's role anyhow that made him [Jude] press Nel about settling down. . . he wanted someone to care about his hurt, to care very deeply" (Morrison 1982a: 82). Jude's rage stems from the failure and frustration he has experienced in a white-dominated culture. Ironically, he assumes ascendancy over his wife as the powerful, protective husband, though the latter provides him with the shelter from the outside world of hurt. To borrow Butler's words, the "power is wielded by [Nel's] feminine position of not-having, that [Jude] who 'has' the Phallus requires this Other to confirm and, hence, be the Phallus in its 'extended' sense" (1999: 56). From this perspective, performing the function of the phallus valorizes Nel's culturally marginalized position, paradoxically insinuating her falling victim to the desire produced in a white colonizing, patriarchal, heterosexual culture.

Sacrificing herself according to patriarchal norms, Nel is in fact buried alive by loneliness. Yet she brings up Sula's failure to establish a relationship with other

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[76] Nel's husband.

people, pointing out that Sula is lonely. Sula answers, "'Yes. But my lonely is *mine*. Now your lonely is somebody else's. Made by somebody else and handed to you. Ain't that something? A secondhand lonely?'" (1982a: 143, original italics). What Sula suggests here is that Nel has to masquerade herself in order to match her husband's desire. Clearly, Sula insinuates the degree of castration that Nel has experienced upon entering into patriarchal culture, surrendering to the phallus. By contrast, Sula's loneliness derives from her failure to locate herself in the Other, which, in turn, spares her from the pain of heterosexual patriarchal castration.

In *The Bluest Eye*, the protagonist Pecola figures as the abject phallus for the local community. Emblematizing ugliness and inferiority, she is eroticized and demonized by her parents as well as the local people. In the Afterword of this novel, Morrison writes, "The extremity of Pecola's case stemmed largely from a crippled and crippling family" (1994: 210). Yet, throughout the novel, the author spares no effort to point out that Pecola's tragedy derives from the system of slavery bent on maligning and marginalizing black people:

> In exploring the social and domestic aggression that could cause a child to literally fall apart, I mounted a series of rejections, some routine, some exceptional, some monstrous, all the while trying hard to avoid complicity in the demonization process Pecola was subjected to. That is, I did not want to dehumanize the characters who trashed Pecola and contributed to her collapse. (Morrison 1994: 210–211)

It is apparent that Morrison draws on Pecola's tragedy to highlight the psychic harm done to the whole community, which has internalized the slavery-induced self-hate, projecting it onto Pecola, who is actually an integral part of their psyche. Correspondingly, Tuire Valkeakari reads Pecola's victimization as resulting from scapegoating performed as a communal ritual: "Because the *The Bluest Eye*'s scapegoaters symbolically project their blackness or alleged 'uncleanliness' onto an individual who is then purged from their midst, their behaviour functions [. . .] as a ritual of cleansing and purification" (2004: 105). The scapegoaters abject Pecola in an effort to identify themselves as speaking beings in the white symbolic. To utilize Kristeva's ideas concerning the genesis of the abject, the locals, "weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within" (1982: 5). As a result, Pecola is tragically jettisoned by her people as well as the white racial discourse into the realm of the real. Bearing the burden of blackness, she is the spatialized real of slavery, the abject phallus of the local community.

Abjecting Pecola after demonizing her, the local people become temporarily valorized in the white symbolic:

> 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 [. . .] felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. [. . .] 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. [. . .] We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength. (Morrison 1994: 205)

In short, the local people dump what they despise on Pecola, whose existence means that her tormentors have a name to put to their demon. Arguably, Morrison is mimicking white people's supremacist tendency to trash black people, standing astride their "ugliness" in order to identify themselves as culturally superior and elevated. As she contends in *Playing in the Dark*, "It was this Africanism, deployed as rawness and savagery, that provided the staging ground and arena for the elaboration of the quintessential American identity" (1993: 44). In short, whiteness is privileged at the expense of blackness. Yet since the local black residents can never strip themselves of their blackness, the symbolic identity they obtain through demonizing Pecola as representative of ugliness is false, far from sustaining their fantasized beauty: "And fantasy it was, for we were not strong, only aggressive; we were not free, merely licensed; we were not compassionate, we were polite; not good, but well behaved" (Morrison 1994: 205). The local people are involved in a debilitating structure of domination, which induces their compulsive searching after the never-obtainable whiteness. In contrast, Pecola is symptomatic of the trauma resulting from the deep legacy of racial shame; she dies and is resuscitated as Sula in the eponymous novel.

In *Sula*, refusing to conform to traditional values and customs, Sula represents what Mary Douglas terms the "polluting person": "[She] is always in the wrong. [She] has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone" (1995: 114). Accordingly, Sula embodies the sense of foreignness inherent in the structure of the Bottom community against which inhabitants define themselves and organize the community. Sula's abject position in the local community results from her refusal to fill the lack of the Other:

> Eva's arrogance and Hannah's self-indulgence merged in her and, with a twist that was all her own imagination, she lived out her days exploring her own thoughts and emotions, giving them full reign, [sic] feeling no obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her. (1982a: 118)

It is apparent that Sula fails to define herself in relation to other people, symptomatic of the conflict permeating the Peace family as well as the Bottom community. However, she acts as the phallus for the local people inasmuch as she is demonized as the Other onto whom other black characters project their fear of death and disintegration. As a corporeal discourse, she voices what is otherwise unspeakable, thereby embodying the Lacanian real. This can be seen from her defiance of law and traditions – her refusal of the Other as reality. Combining the attributes of the real and the phallus, Sula reveals the intrinsic lack of the privileged signifier; accordingly, she embodies Morrison's literary strategy to dismantle white supremacy and to disrupt the stereotyped image of black people.

5.3 The Absent Black Real as the *objet a*

In Morrison's novels, the institution of slavery makes American people of African origin marketable bodies, thereby reducing them to the real. Analysing Lacan's concept of the real, Slavoj Žižek observes that

> for Lacan, the 'Real' is not [. . .] a purely negative category, a designation of a limit without any specification of what lies beyond. The Real *qua* drive is, on the contrary, the *agens*, the 'driving force', of desiring. This 'active' (and not purely negative) status of drives, of the presymbolic 'libido', induces Lacan to elaborate the myth of 'lamella'. In it, he deploys – in the form of a mythical narrative, not of a conceptual articulation – the 'real genesis', i.e., what had to occur *prior* to symbolization, *prior* to the emergence of the symbolic order. (2006: 192, original italics)

Žižek's insight illustrates the real as an activating, emergent force; it has functions equivalent to the *objet a* in Lacan's system. In this connection, demonized as the real, black people drive the machine of desire produced through the cultural straits of race hierarchy. Yet they are tragically abjected as a dehumanized category of expendable bodies – the Other. Lacan contends that "there is no Other of the Other" (2006: 688). By this formula, he underlines the radical nature of the Other, which amounts to questioning a free and self-governing ego in the symbolic register. In this context, black people are incapable to act as the Other of white people since the latter have already been Othered by the symbolic order; spawned by the Other, white people's object of desire is radically and irreversibly the Other. In other words, marked with the lack, the black Other is virtually the real, symptomatic of white people's desire for the forever unattainable Other. Consequently, the true cause of white people's desire is the symbolic void which is filled in and incarnated by the black Other.

Sula manifests itself as a work of madness, foregrounding paradox, from the name of the community (the Bottom) to the family named Peace.[77] Deborah E. McDowell claims that *Sula* "is rife with liberating possibilities in that it transgresses all deterministic structures of opposition" (1988: 79). Throughout the novel, Morrison makes evident efforts to dismantle binary oppositions, to make absence presence. Located at the Bottom, which is situated spatially at the top, the story evokes a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity: juxtaposing bottom with top, Morrison ushers in a new world full of binary oppositions and contradictions. As the story moves on, the demolition of the Bottom's old shacks to make room for the Medallion City golf course highlights the displacement of a vibrant community teeming with assorted activities, thus signifying the encroachment of homogeneity upon what was once unique, distinctive and vibrant.

A sense of the dispossessedness inflicted on black people by the after-effects of chattel bondage pervades *Sula*. In "The Roots of the Body," Karin Luisa Badt suggests that "the town was literally 'uprooted,' torn from the land [. . .] [becoming] the now bottomless Bottom," concluding that "rootlessness is the result of racist oppression" (1995: 569). Accordingly, the paradox and dynamic inhering in the name Bottom concerns Morrison's attempt to designate slavery as the real which fragments the black characters as well as the story. Robert Grant remarks that "the narrative content and technique are complementary in their appreciation of how the devices of memory 'create' presence out of absence" (1988: 94). What is created out of the absence is a nostalgic past of fullness. To clarify, the real *qua* absence drives the machine of memory in this novel.

In this novel, the empty place suggestive of Eva's missing leg serves as a memory body of the violence done to her by the shattering effects of slavery. In "Circles and Circles of Sorrow," Philip Novak points out that *Sula* "is an almost uninterrupted registering of violence, of violation, of destruction and self-destruction, played out in the form of addiction and alcoholism, self-mutilation, murder, and mass suicide" (1999: 185). Abandoned by her husband, Eva amputates one of her limbs to tide the Peace family over times of hardship; her missing leg is one place which reflects Morrison's obsession with the missing place in the novel. Linked with an unexplained, uncanny eighteen-month absence, the leg is suggestive both of the real of slavery and a protective maternal discourse: "she left all of her children with Mrs. Suggs, saying she would be back the next day. Eighteen months

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[77] The name Bottom stems from a "nigger joke" in which a slave is fooled by a "good white farmer" into taking a piece of hilly land described as "'the bottom of heaven – best land there is'" (1982a: 5), while ironically the Peace family is brimming with conflict and clashes.

later she swept down from a wagon with two crutches, a new black pocketbook, and one leg" (1982a: 34). In sacrificing her leg, Eva takes on phallic power. Paradoxically, in order to assume the phallus, she has to be castrated by the letter of the Other in the first place. Accordingly, Eva's status as a matriarch in the Peace family derives from the fact that she has succumbed to victimizing slavery. Significantly, in conflating loss and power, Morrison once again insinuates the fraudulence inherent in the phallus. It emerges naturally that Eva does not "wear overlong dresses to disguise the empty place on her left side. Her dresses were mid-calf so that her one glamorous leg was always in view as well as the long fall of space below her left thigh" (1982a: 31). Making absence presence, the empty space that indicates her missing leg uncannily embodies her maternity, evidencing her inclination to define her body in maternal terms.

In "Spacing and Placing Experience," Patricia McKee studies the rambling, many roomed house of the Peace family, pointing out that "even rooms are reduced to ways in and out of other rooms, so that any space may become itself a spacing, a distance between: not so much a room as room to get in and out" (1997: 46). The rooms are reduced to ways to facilitate contacts and communications between self and other. Accordingly, the ways are the path to the maternal body, representing Eva's maternity. Correspondingly, Susan Willis states that the house "gives physical evidence of Eva's confrontation with and manipulation of the written laws of white society, whose unwritten laws would have condemned her to a life of poverty" (1982: 40). Eva's effort to manipulate the white symbolic manifests itself as her "capacity to control and manipulate boundaries. [. . .] Eva lets things slip, even fly out of spaces in what seems an equally obsessive insistence on the permeability of boundaries" (McKee 1997: 46). The boundary Eva attempts to dismantle is the demarcating line that renders her divided from herself. In tampering with it, she attempts to fuse with the *objet a* severed from her after being born into the chattel system, "at one point hurling herself out a window of her bedroom to try to save her daughter Hannah, who has caught fire in the yard" (1997: 46). In consequence, Eva emerges uncannily as the floating *objet a*, defying the distinction and distance between self and Other.

Another place that suggests Morrison's concern with the missing experience is the place where Chicken Little sank in the river. Thrown by Sula from "shrieks of frightened joy" directly into the water, which cannot inundate his "bubbly laughter," the black boy bears witness to Sula's tendency to brutalize the bodies of others in order to valorise herself:

> Sula picked him up by his hands and swung him outward then around and around. His knickers ballooned and his shrieks of frightened joy startled the

> birds and the fat grasshoppers. When he slipped from her hands and sailed away out over the water they could still hear his bubbly laughter.
>
> The water darkened and closed quickly over the place where Chicken Little sank. The pressure of his hard and tight little fingers was still in Sula's palms as she stood looking at the closed place in the water. (1982a: 60–61)

Sula's loosening grip on Chicken Little can be deciphered as her compulsive repetition of the trauma precipitated by her mother's pronouncement that she does not like her;[78] playfully swinging Chicken over the river's edge, she is rememorying the trauma of maternal silence through circular movement. In a similar vein, Paula Gallant Eckard observes, "Hannah's hurtful words leave Sula devoid of empathy and conscience. A wounded, egocentric adolescent, she sends Chicken Little to a watery death, making no attempt to rescue the child after he slips from her grasp into the river" (2002: 57). Yet the "bubbly water" and the "pressure" of his fingers function as mnemonic signifiers which anticipate Chicken Little's return. It is then arguable that the little boy acts as the *objet a*[79] that Sula throws away yet fails to retrieve: "They [Sula and Nel] expected him to come back up, laughing. Both girls stared at the water" (1982a: 61). Therefore, the little boy whose body "drifts homeless in the river for three days because the bargeman does not believe a black body to be worth 'placing' properly" (Badt 1995: 569) is destined to return to haunt the living memory of Sula in particular and other Bottom-dwellers in general. Linking "the experience of missing" to white slave history, McKee remarks that Morrison "insist[s] on the reducibility of alterity as she converts such unoccupied spaces into places on the basis of previous occupants" (1997: 38). Emptied of contents, the place gives embodiment to the real, which speaks to the violence perpetrated on black people by the white supremacist culture.

Chicken Little functions in fact as a reminder of the psychological damage done to all the black people by the violence of the system of slavery in this novel:

> As Reverend Deal moved into his sermon, the hands of the women unfolded like pairs of raven's wings and flew high above their hats in the air. They did not hear all of what he said; they heard the one word, or phrase, or inflection that was for them the connection between the event and themselves. For some it was the term "Sweet Jesus." And they saw the Lamb's eye and the truly innocent victim: themselves. They acknowledged the innocent

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[78] Sula was overwhelmed by her mother's announcement of not liking her in an earlier scene. See chapter 4.

[79] It recalls the game used by Freud's grandson to alleviate the feeling of unhappiness resulting from the absence of his mother. See my analysis of the *fort-da* game in Chapter 2.

> child hiding in the corner of their hearts, holding a sugar-and-butter sandwich. That one. The one who lodged deep in their fat, thin, old, young skin, and was the one the world had hurt. Or they thought of their son newly killed and remembered his legs in short pants and wondered where the bullet went in. (1982a: 65)

The mourners are actually mourning for their own loss under slavery and its aftermath. Philip Novak reads this passage as manifesting Morrison's suggestion of the "disinterest" required by bearing witness to the death of another which inevitably results in self-interest: "the death we witness whenever we bear witness to death is always in some sense our own. [. . .] To acknowledge death at all is to acknowledge one's own death, the death that one harbors as a condition of existence" (1999: 189). The mourners' disinterest in Chicken's death arises from the fact that they themselves have fallen victim to the ravages of the cultural trauma, therefore deeply involving them in their own traumatic pasts. Consequently, the innocent victim curled up under their hearts is the *objet a* that has been removed by slavery.

Though marginalized as an abject, Sula functions to energize the Bottom residents. The lack she symbolizes binds the Bottom-dwellers together and sets them in motion, thus providing their existence with content and meaning; through wrestling with the demons signified by Sula, they redefine themselves in relation to each other. After her death, the quest for a better life launches the whole community into a march headed by Shadrack on National Suicide Day. The gathering destroys the tunnel that has denied jobs to the people dwelling in the Bottom: "old and young, women and children, lame and hearty, as best they could, the tunnel they were forbidden to build" (1982a: 161). The dead Sula clearly breathes life into the stultifying and stultified community. In parallel, Doreatha Drummond Mbalia observes: "Not only does Sula cause the people of the Bottom to unify, albeit temporarily, but also she injects them with a dose of defiance, resistance, and aggressiveness" (2004: 47–48). Embodying blockages or knots, Sula spurs the local people to desire, to extricate themselves from an existence of live burial. In this light, Sula's existence takes on the effects of the real (the structural impasse), which triggers the production of meaning.

Targeted as the abject, Sula's death inevitably brings down the close-knit community by the end of the story. Her death carries off the abject against which the local people band themselves together. Yet the abject is virtually a foreignness stemming from predatory American culture. Because of this, the community's collapse is caused by their refusal to accept their endemic foreignness resulting from the absence of a protective maternal discourse (maternal silence); it follows inevitably that the community falls on evil times, finally falling apart after her

death, which signifies the dismantling of symbolic meaning; it repeats Sula's compulsion to repeat the death drive.

The novel suggests Sula as incarnating the cause of desire: she provokes people who are closest to her and denied access to meaning to express themselves in a literal, bodily language. According to Morrison, Sula is invented as a "distilled" "woman of force" (Parker 1994: 63). Naturally, she fills in the empty space of the real. Bruce Fink suggests that "the real is perhaps best understood as *that which has not yet been symbolized*, remains to be symbolized, or even resists symbolization" (1995: 25, original italics). From this perspective, Sula is the real object, the *objet a* which, removed from black people by the institution of slavery, lends meaning to the people engaging a system that denies them basic human rights. Symbolizing both slavery and the unsullied pasts, she is larger than life.

Like Sula, Hannah registers as one of the women of mystery. Commenting on Hannah's strangeness, Morrison says:

> she is not a selfish person. There is also nothing sinister about her, although she is lazy. She doesn't want an affair, a relationship, or a meaningful anything. She is not about the possession of other people. She has a streak of kindness about her. [. . .] Hannah is uncomplicated and really and truly knows nothing about jealousy or hostility. (Parker 1994: 63)

As a sexually selfish woman, Hannah is totally *desexualized* by the author – she is driven by no desire other than sex: "she does not flaunt or boast or go around trying to look cute" (1994: 64). In other words, she does not define herself as the expendable phallus according to white-dominated racist, patriarchal values, and thus remains invulnerable to its debilitating effect. Accordingly, she has transcended the symbolic order.

However, Hannah's "pacific"[80] appearance in the town suggests her as a speaking being. To clarify, she appears as a symbolic signifier in relation to others in the local community. Morrison points out, "Hannah makes a statement of lust about [the other women's] husbands. Even though they may not want their men to be sleeping with her, it was a compliment to know that somebody else wanted them"

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[80] Differentiating between Sula's strangeness and Hannah's and Eva's, Morrison observes, "Essentially, they [Eva and Hannah] were pacific in the sense of what they did do. They wanted to make things come together; you know, bring it together. Hannah didn't want to disturb anything. She did her work and she took care of people and so on; and Eva was generous, wide-spirited, and made some great sacrifices" (Stepto 1994: 16–17). In contrast to Sula who annihilates borders and dismantles order, Hannah and Eva make efforts to establish order in a disorganized world.

(Parker 1994: 63). The word "compliment" evokes a screen of narcissism, which tells a story of desire underneath – it brings into play the male-oriented, exploited, enslaved identity of black women. For the women embroiled in the narcissistic quest for symbolic meaning, who spend their whole lives keeping a man, Hannah's sexual prowess and promiscuity incites neither anger nor animosity. Moreover, the town-dwellers "all gossip about her but they miss her when she is gone. And they take care of her when she burns and weep for her when she dies" (1994: 63). In fact, the townspeople are deploring the loss of a mirror which reflects their "perfection" in a world scarred by lack and absence. Consequently, Hannah's excessive sexual desire testifies to her affinity with the *objet a* that continually circles around the townspeople who miss her when she dies.

Sula's freedom to traverse between life and death also falls on the baby ghost in *Beloved*. In search of psychic as well as actual food, she moves effortlessly between Sethe, Denver and Paul D as their double, ironically attesting to their eviscerated psyche after the scourge of slavery. Her physical presence, at once commemorated by Sethe and Denver and held at a distance by other people in the local community, is emblematic of racial Otherness intrinsic to the townpeople in the novel, dwelling in a marginalized symbolic register. After her return, she isolates Denver, dislodges Paul D, and drives Sethe to the verge of psychologically falling apart. Carol E. Henderson suggests that the presence of the ghost, as

> the fleshly manifestation of the wounded slave psyche [. . .] ensures that [the] process [the formation of an African American identity] will not be an easy one as each character learns to view his or her scars differently through individual soul-searching and ritualistic healing. (2002: 13)

As the darker, unitary but more authentic self of the local people, she is the split-off sector of the black psyche, the wrenched-open version of the other characters, embodying their fractured ego hovering on the edge of the unconscious. She evokes the land of the unconscious where the cultural trauma of slavery emerges in bits and images, impelling the reader to witness, to participate and to coalesce their past and present experiences.

As an embodied spirit, an enduring revenant, Beloved overlaps with history and loss. Her polyvalence answers Sethe's desire for a preoedipal merger: she incarnates both the baby ghost and Sethe's long-dead mother when returning to reunite with Sethe and becoming pregnant by the end of the story. Moreover, her escalating demand for love and attention suggests her as an underfed wanderer, thus insinuating the inhuman transatlantic journey which has devoured the Sixty-Million and more. Consequently, Beloved's defying of categorization inscribes her as the Lacanian real. As an indelible real of the legacy of racial shame that hurts, she

incarnates the past that the traumatized community struggles to lay to rest, emerging as the Kristevan abject jettisoned by the white Other into the abominable real. Yet, refusing to be ostracized, she serves as a cultural symptom, playing a critical role in passing on cultural traditions. Moreover, disrupting the life/death border, she brings the primal, protective African mother into history, catalyzing people closest to her to overcome the petrifying slavery-induced live burial, thereby enhancing their psychic growth and healing.

Analyzing the importance of the maternal body to the identity formation of American people of African origin in Morrison's work, Badt contends, "Daring to want – that is the explosive power that sets all of Morrison's novels in motion" (1995: 573). In this view, empowering the other people moving about on the margin of life to want, the baby ghost gives body to the libido: serving as what Sethe was deprived of and, therefore, desirous of, she embodies the *objet a*, which in inciting the final episode of abjection and conciliation, she incarnates the Kristevan abject.[81] Embodying somatic hysterical symptoms, her intrusion into the symbolic world can be read as the traumatized black people's engaging with the aftermath of slavery-spawned trauma. Consequently, Beloved functions as a new language which Morrison invents to inscribe the depredation of slavery-related trauma and what it rules out yet releases – the rampant desire to love and to be loved. James Phelan reads Beloved as a "spite ghost, manipulating lover, selfish sister, and all-consuming daughter. But also innocent – and representative – victim" (1997: 226). In a somewhat similar vein, Robert L. Broad regards Beloved as

> a puzzled and puzzling, poly-generational, mnemonically tortured, uncertain spirit whose resurrection brings wildly unpredictable results, such as making a whole woman of the spoiled child Denver, and shattering the woman of iron, Sethe. (1994: 192)

Accordingly, she brings African people as well as the reader into confrontation with the slavery past of America, providing this novel with a psychological edge and thematic depth. Conflating life and death, Beloved epitomizes Morrison's tendency to convey the impact of history precisely as being what cannot be grasped.

The overwhelming, pervasive presence of the ghost corresponds to the memory of slavery constructed as a primal scene, in relation to which individual/collective identity takes shape throughout Morrison's novels. The formulative power of

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[81] Sethe reclaims oneness with herself, Denver and Paul D through abjecting Beloved by the end of the novel.

slavery can only be considered through its function as an unspeakable memory combining the whole African American people: "It was slavery, whether or not one had experienced it, that defined one's identity as an African American, it was why you, an African, were here, in America" (Eyerman 2001: 16). Despite highlighting a collective trauma implicating all black people, slavery further distinguishes itself with its inescapable belated infliction on "a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (2001: 2). In this light, Beloved's foray into the community eighteen years after the murder conforms to the fact that at one point, cultural trauma "need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all" (2001: 2). Morrison employs Beloved to expose the real of slavery and to incite the interactions among the desire-ridden characters tyrannized by the legacy of slavery.

In Morrison's work, slavery comes up as a disengaging point in the history of America. Eyerman observes that "as opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric" (2001: 2). The rupture, however, impels black people to search after what they are deprived of throughout their whole lives – the *objet a*. The search after the object of fantasy coalesces American people of African origin into a diasporic we, functioning as the starting-point of cultural identity. Correspondingly, Eyerman points out, "the notion of a unique African American identity emerged in the post-Civil War period, after slavery had been abolished" (2001: 1). Yet the lack inherent in the object of desire equates it with the real, thus suggesting the fraudulence inherent in African American identity. Accordingly, Morrison explores slavery and race as the real, employing it as an effective means to break the state of live burial forced on black people by the white Other.

5.4 The Death Drive Expressed through Live Burial

The concept of "live burial"[82] looms in Freud's and Breuer's joint essay "Preliminary Communication" (1893). Discussing the lingering effects of events experienced so long ago, the authors claim that "the fading of a memory or the losing of its affect depends on various factors" such as "*whether there has been an energetic reaction to the event that provokes an affect*" (1957: 8, original italics). The authors further identify reaction as "the whole class of voluntary and involuntary reflexes – from tears to acts of revenge – in which [. . .] the affects are dis-

[82] In section 2.1, live burial is discussed as the death drive.

charged." Apparently, the authors deal mainly with traumatizing events or moments, since tears or acts of revenge serve as an effective means of abjection; accordingly, the affect which derives from psychic trauma refers to negative feelings such as mortification or sense of disintegration. The authors go on to write, "If this reaction takes place to a sufficient amount a large part of the affect disappears as a result. [. . .] If the reaction is *suppressed*, the affect remains attached to the memory" (1957: 8, italics mine). It is buried alive, and therefore remains unconscious to the traumatized person. Correspondingly, James Strachey writes, in the case of hysterical patients, "the affect remains in a 'strangulated' state, and the memory of the experience to which it is attached is cut off from consciousness" (1957: xviii). Yet the affective memory keeps on coming back after a period of incubation. Consequently, the affective memory is not effaced; unburied and unliquidated, it tampers with the memory and weighs on the body, emerging belatedly and recurringly in the form of haunting, hysterical symptoms.

In *Beloved*, Halle, Sethe's dead husband, is buried alive in Sethe's memory, functioning as the emergent real whose eruption into the symbolic world petrifies and paralyzes her. When hearing from Paul D that her husband was *present* as a silent witness at the scene of her violation at the hands of the slaveholders who tried to hold her down and take her milk, Sethe is reduced to "pacing up and down" (1997: 69). At last, she laments:

> I am still full of that [the violation], God damn it, I can't go back and add more. Add my husband to it, watching, above me in the loft – hiding close by – the one place he thought no one would look for him, looking down on what I couldn't look at at all. And not stopping them – looking and letting it happen. [. . .] There is also my husband squatting by the churn smearing the butter as well as its clabber all over his face because the milk they took is on his mind. (1997: 70)

Paul D's words makes Halle's absence presence; the unitary self Sethe has tentatively formed in relation to her children is violently annihilated by her knowledge of her husband's invisible presence at the scene. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Lewis Herman writes: "The damage to the survivor's faith and sense of community is particularly severe when the traumatic events involve the betrayal of important relationships" (1992: 55). In this light, Sethe's trauma takes on added force when it emerges as a violation of family ties.

Halle collapsed immediately after witnessing his wife's victimization and degradation. High above in the loft, forced into the role of an accomplice, he felt he was the captive being figuratively raped by the slaveholders. In this connection, Carol E. Henderson comments, "his role as protector and provider for his family

was horribly distorted under the system of slavery. Surely, the knowledge of this reality had to have had a detrimental effect on Halle's psyche" (2002: 95). Halle collapsed inwardly due to the unbearable stigma, shame and an annihilating sense of solitude. As Sethe says, "if he was that broken then, then he is also and certainly dead now" (1997: 70). Losing control after being psychically violated, Halle was, and still is, the abject whose haunting presence fractures her sense of self. Greatly traumatized, Sethe speaks silently, "I don't want to know or have to remember that, I have other things to do: worry, for example, about tomorrow, about Denver, about Beloved, about age and sickness not to speak of love" (1997: 70). As a defensive restoration, she redefines herself in relation to other people and meaningful things.

Halle's reaction represents the silence or voicelessness inflicted on black people by the white symbolic under slavery. Henderson argues that "Halle's 'witnessing' underscores that body language is a viable form of communication, a viable form of bearing witness to things beyond imagining" (2002: 95). Yet body language is but a system of somatic signifiers of the past trauma which in turn suggest Sethe's reduction to a hysterical symptom. With her husband's "betrayal" only disclosed to her eighteen years later after the precipitating trauma, Sethe is driven to reweigh herself; for her, the ghostly presence witnesses and evidences her metamorphosis from a unitary being to someone other than herself during the violation. Consequently, "her brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day" (1997: 70). Enslaved by the presence of the haunting past, Sethe loses continuity with herself: she confesses to Paul D that she desires to be buried alive in that timeless moment together with Halle: "And how sweet that would have been: the two of them [Halle and Sethe] back by the milk shed, squatting by the churn, smashing cold, lumpy butter into their faces with not a care in the world" (1997: 70). Eventually, her mind is also filled with the milk that had debilitated her husband. Halle's presence as the intrusive real finally divides Sethe from herself; on the other hand, dissociating herself from the original trauma, Sethe is temporarily relieved of the damage done to her by her husband as well as schoolteacher.

In *Sula*, the title character gives body to the death drive. She psychologically collapses after hearing her mother's depersonalizing pronouncement. Her effort to disaffect the death drive, that is, her psychological resistance, brings about the laying down of a permanent memory trace of the state of excitement whose haunting return suggests the death drive. Sula's feeling of fragmentation after lovemaking best exemplifies the way the death drive features the dynamic between binding and unbinding:

> there was utmost irony and outrage in lying under someone, in a position of surrender, feeling her own abiding strength and limitless power. But the cluster did break, fall apart, and in her panic to hold it together she leaped from the edge into soundlessness and went down howling, howling in a stinging awareness of the endings of things. (Morrison 1982a: 123)

Sula breaks down after having sex with Nel's husband because she is making love with absence. The position of surrender reminds Sula of the lack of love in the Other. Hence, the howling is interpretable as her binding effort to disinfect the unbinding death drive arising from her mother's earlier pronouncement which "sent her flying up the stairs" (1982a: 57). It becomes strikingly evident that through Sula Morrison probes into the dynamic and dialectic of the death and life drives. They clearly interact and overlay each other, thus accounting for Sula's repeatedly falling victim to sadness and solitude in sexual intercourse.

On her deathbed, Sula reflects on her failure to inscribe herself in the symbolic: "If I live a hundred years my urine will flow the same way, my armpits and breath will smell the same. [. . .] I didn't mean anything. I never meant anything" (Morrison 1982a: 147). Sula's words imply her failure to identify herself as a symbolic signifier in relation to other people, by Eva's strong belief that "Sula had watched Hannah burn not because she was paralyzed, but because she was interested" (1982a: 78). In a similar vein, Rachel Lee links Sula's meaninglessness to her "non-relation to another" (1994: 576). Yet it is incomplete to read Morrison's invention of Hannah's death merely as a dreadful martyrdom; flushing with pleasure, Sula must have seen something amazing, a woman wriggling into death: "I stood there watching her burn and was thrilled. I wanted her to keep on jerking like that, to keep on dancing" (1982a: 147). The "smoke-and-flame bound" (1982a: 76) Hannah dances till the flames sear her last beauty. Beautifully harmonizing with the sparkling, crackling fire, Hannah's flaming, wiggling body articulates her desire for stable definitions, thereby bringing into light the limitations of the language circumscribed by the legacy of slavery. Additionally, in an act reminiscent of her brutalizing of Chicken's body, Sula's interest in her mother's smoking body signifies both irresistible white desire and the white violence enacted upon black bodies.

Sula welcomes death as a strategy of survival: she employs death as a release from desire as well as the pain of being split in the symbolic register. Further, she is conscious even in death:

> While in this state of weary anticipation [of death], she noticed that she was not breathing, that her heart had stopped completely. [. . .] Then she realized, or rather she sensed, that there was not going to be any pain. She was not

> breathing because she didn't have to. Her body did not need oxygen. She was dead.
>
> Sula felt her face smiling. "Well, I'll be damned," she thought, "it didn't even hurt. Wait'll I tell Nel." (1982a: 149)

She did not need oxygen because she could breathe more freely in death. She comments on her deathbed that every colored woman is dying like her. "'But the difference is they dying like a stump. Me, I am going down like one of those redwoods, I sure did live in this world'" (1982a: 143). It is then arguable that Sula experiments with death in order to probe the meaning of life.

In contrast to Sula, who encapsulates evil and death, Cosey in *Love* radiates charisma even in death. As a silent and disembodied character, he fuses the real and the symbolic: he is only remembered and fleshed out when the characters embark on their unconscious traumatic reenactments. When the story begins, May, Christine's mother and Cosey's daughter-in-law, has already been driven insane by "widowhood, overwork, no sex, and SNCC" (2004: 113). "*Bred to hard work and duty, and took to the business like a bee to pollen*" (2004: 121, original italics), she leads a life hinging on male desires. As L observes, "*If I was a servant in that place, May was its slave. Her whole life was making sure those Cosey men had what they wanted*" (2004: 119, original italics). May's relinquishment of selfhood is certainly not healthy, bordering on idolatry. Analogously, Sethe tries to confirm her tentative sense of self by bringing "a fistful of salsify into Mrs. Garner's kitchen" (1997: 22) to beautify her workplace in Sweet Home, and to validate her sense of belonging. At the psychoanalytic level, Sethe's gesture is self-confirming. As hooks proposes in "An Aesthetic of Blackness," the individual is shaped by the space he/she inhabits and art is of crucial importance for a people demonized and deprived of the right to look (1990: 103–105). Unlike May, who weans her daughter at three months, Sethe is obsessed with the thought of getting her breast milk to her child even as a fugitive. However, both May's thralldom to man and Sethe's formation of a tentative self with the aid of flowers reflect their exhibitionistic, defensive restoration of a grandiose self. Yet, like the beautiful boy Narcissus, who is emaciated by and dying from desire for a never-obtainable mirror image, their sense of wholeness is on some level a fantasy identification with an external, inaccessible image.

After the death of his son, Cosey lost interest in everything but fishing and harmonizing with tipsy friends. When his role as an "ideal ego" tilts, May dedicates herself to the hotel, the last symbol of the glamorized Cosey world. It comes as no surprise that she crumples with the collapse of the hotel; for years, she takes to kleptomania, engaging in displacing and hiding things, a habit which is triggered

by the destabilizing of colored-owned business brought by the Civil Rights Movement:

> She is frantic with worry that the hotel and everybody in it are in immediate danger. That city blacks have already invaded Up Beach, carrying lighter fluid, matches, Molotov cocktails; shouting, urging the locals to burn Cosey's Hotel and Resort to the ground and put the Uncle Toms, the sheriff's pal, the race traitor out of business. (Morrison 2004: 91)

Evidently May is suffering from paranoia. With a life invaded, occupied, turned into scum, "she covered her bedroom windows with plywood painted red for danger. She lit lookout fires on the beach. Raised havoc with Boss silk when he refused her purchase of a gun" (2004: 113). She carried a helmet even in her father-in-law's funeral. Surprisingly, she is invested, in her insanity, with "clarity" (2004: 113); even Christine, estranged from her mother primarily for her activist views, realized years later that "May's understanding of the situation was profound" when she was confined with Heed in snubbing, backbiting, and scuffling proximity (2004: 113). Morrison concludes May's life by showing the belligerence between life and death:

> Before her real death she was already a minstrel-show spook, floating through the rooms, flapping over the grounds, hiding behind doors until it was safe to bury evidence of a life the Revolution wanted to deprive her of. Yet she might rest easy now, since when she died in 1976. . . Her ghost, though, helmeted and holstered, was alive and gaining strength. (2004: 94)

Feeling intruded upon, lost and paranoid, May bears witness to the plight of black people marginalized by the colonizing culture. Refusing to be laid to rest, she raises hell from the other side. Rendered voiceless, a perfect victim, she runs the risk of losing the reader's interest. Yet the parallel of her life-in-death and death-in-life provides the ground for Morrison's most subtle, conflicting play with the uncanny; it corresponds to her attempt to bury her characters alive, and thus to resuscitate them at a later time. Through May, Morrison probes into the dualism and dynamic tension between absence and presence, and life and death.

It is notable here that, though the Civil Rights Movement brings forth directly May's paranoia, it is Cosey who inflicts consuming desires on her; interweaving symbolic, capitalist success and patriarchal dominance, he disturbs, in subtle and forceful ways, their construction of reality. By extension, though Cosey is not the only malefactor accountable for his kinswomen's peripheral position, his presence functions as a meditation on the psychic harm that accompanies the women who fail to disengage themselves from the self-sabotaging longing for the patriarch. Never still, always hungry, Cosey is seductive and elusive in his combination of

power and deceit, and love and death. Uncannily, the novel is haunted by the darkness featuring the absence-presence of Cosey, the devouring predator, who slashes and threads his way into the psychic interior of his women.

Extending the conception of love beyond the frontier of life, Morrison examines and emphasizes the shattering effects perpetuated on the black psyche. In her work, black people define and defy death in haunting ways which transgress the border between life and death. Defying symbolic definition and categorization, the ghosts who have disturbed and phantomized the black communities they once inhabited linger on: for example, exorcised from the local community, Beloved disappears, with her footprints coming and going; Nel takes over Sula's life and lives on; emerging largely as a disembodied person, Cosey weaves together the hate and desire of all his women in his absence, while May fuses life and death both in life and death. What Morrison would like to suggest is that the traumatic impact of slavery can never be fully obliterated. The compulsive repetition of the line "not a story to pass on" (1997: 274) by the end of *Beloved* serves as a reminder that the pain of slavery will never cease to haunt the psyche of all American people.

6 BLACK LOOKS

> In our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it – that is what we call the gaze.
>
> – Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 1977.

> [Toni Morrison's] novels are about the African American experience *in* white-dominated America and about how that experience is defined by African Americans' historical and continuing relationships with whites. If whites have defined themselves against the African American other, Morrison's characters have no alternative but to define themselves against the white presence.
>
> – Philip Page, *Dangerous Freedom: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels*, 1995.

> The "trauma" in question is slavery, not as institution or even experience, but as collective memory, a form of remembrance that grounded the identity-formation of a people.
>
> – Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma*, 2001.

This chapter probes the dynamic relationship between the eye and the gaze ('black looks' in bell hooks' terms) which is important to the formation of black subjectivity. Lacan's revising of the ego-affirming, maternal gaze from the imaginary order into the castrating gaze of the Other reveals his obsession with the intrinsic lack of the Other. In other words, to look entails the recognition of the shattering effect of the symbolic. In this connection, Ruth Parkin-Gounelas points out that the looking eye "is met not by the confirmation of its own self-presence but rather by the gaze of the other [. . .], which displaces it" (2001: 17). To illustrate this objectifying effect, Lacan represents the gaze with the death's head, designating it as signifying the lack of the Other: "From the moment that this gaze appears, the subject tries to adapt himself to it, he becomes that punctiform object, that point of vanishing being with which the subject confuses his failure" (1977: 83). As a result, "the struggle to reinstate equilibrium, to recover subject status begins" (Schreiber 2001: 121). This process conveys a double sense of looking and being looked at, reflecting Lacan's tendency to revise the gaze in order to coordinate the materiality of the real; in other words, the gaze is an object, a form of the *objet a*.

Dino Felluga (2003) comments that Lacan complicates his position on the gaze by depositing a split between the eye's look and the gaze. The lack inherent in the modified conception of the gaze speaks to the object position of the subject in relation to it. Put differently, the subject's participation in the symbolic reduces him to the object he desires: "for the subject, who thinks he can accede to himself by designating himself in the statement, is nothing but such an object" (Lacan 2006: 693). Lacan's attempt no doubt reflects his regarding of the gaze as the *objet a*, the lack of which results in the erasure of the specular image[83] crucial to identity formation. Because of this, his concept of the gaze is useful to analyse the construction of African American identity which is intimately intertwined with the institution of slavery.

As a site wherein Morrison deposits something both unspoken and unspeakable (of black people), slavery in American history exists as, to borrow Judith Lewis Herman's words, "certain violations of the social compact [. . .] too terrible to utter aloud" (1992: 1). Emerging enigmatic, unexplained and overwhelming in effect, slavery is belatedly constructive of a race, potentially "unit[ing] all 'African Americans' in the United States" (Eyerman 2001: 1). This chapter interests itself in deciphering the trauma of slavery as the spatialized real to address, firstly, the aftershock of slavery; and secondly, the symptomatic[84] existence of black people in post-slavery America. For this reason, it interprets the cultural trauma in corporeal terms, that is, the invisibility *qua* the abject imposed upon black people by the white supremacist objectifying gaze.

Studying Cathy Caruth's discussion of the Jews as a nation in *Moses and Monotheism*, Petar Ramadanovic writes, "Nation is thus a symptom of history. It is a symptom of a fundamental fragmentation that the united collective, the projected independent culture or tradition, attempts to recuperate" (2001: 92). In this connection, the effort of black people to maintain their race entails the restoration of the cultural trauma. In this light, the searching after racial identity triggers black people's consistent effort to pin down the floating, unbinding *objet a* (represented particularly by the white gaze) and to integrate it into themselves. Yet the lack inherent in the *objet a* reduces it to the spatialized real, which suggests the dis-

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[83] The specular image refers to the reflection of one's own body in the mirror. In Lacan's system, it is synonymous with the ideal ego: as Katrien Libbrecht points out, "the human subject recognizes the specular image as being its own, presents the anticipation of real mastery. Both anticipation and recognition are crucial in man's relation to the specular image" (2001a: 88).

[84] The word "symptomatic" firstly suggests that black people embody the lack of the white Other; secondly, however, it speaks to their interstitial existence under the white objectifying gaze in supremacist America.

sembling effect of the white symbolic to black people. Because of this, African American identity exists as a symptom of slave history; it speaks to black people's compulsive, repetitive effort to recentre themselves in the face of the object white gaze. Accordingly, to be represented by slavery entails an unrelenting fight to see and to be seen.

In Morrison's texts, the power in looking stems from a racial pride rooted in an African cultural past, signifying healing. For instance, Sethe shows her willingness to reflect on her past with "the single slow blink of her eyes" (1997: 37). Similarly, in *Black Looks*, bell hooks emphasizes that the power in looking contributes to the formation of a positive black subjectivity. Reduced to invisible, marketable bodies, traumatized black people are either deprived of the courage and capacity to look, or lose interest in looking. Accordingly, for them, looking refers more often than not to gazing back at the dehumanizing white gaze. In this connection, Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber remarks that

> the ostracized position of the marginalized culture, however, enables its members to reshape the controlling culture. The loss of outer approval that accompanies the inaccessibility of a positive reflected self – the sense of *nothingness* – ironically empowers marginalized members of society. (2001: 16, italics mine)

Arguably, marked with invisible darkness, the sense of nothingness activates the abjection of the crushing white supremacy, which in turn empowers black people to embark on a quest for truth and self-restoration. Crucially, for black people, the process of healing starts with the transformation of the object of the white gaze into the gazing subject.

6.1 Looks that Kill: the African American as the Symptom of Slavery

In Lacan's system, the grammatical subject is split, shifting, complementing the lack suggested by the gaze: Lacan portrays the gaze as "the object on which depends the phantasy from which the subject is suspended in an essential vacillation" in the scopic relation (1977: 83). The subject's repetitive efforts to recenter him/herself in relation to the castrating gaze recall Freud's compulsion to repeat. Lacan observes that

> *consciousness* matters only in its relation to what [. . .] I have tried to show you in the fiction of the incomplete text – on the basis of which it is a question of recentring the subject as speaking in the very *lacunae* of that in which, at first sight, it presents itself as speaking. (1977: 83, italics mine)

"Consciousness" thus addresses the awareness of the lack endemic to the Other. As an empty space, the lacuna suggests the eruption of the real into the symbolic order. Logically, the subject's attempt to present him/herself as speaking is destined to fail and his/her compulsive repeating of this traumatic moment turns him/her into a symptom.

White people invoke the gaze as one of the primary means of marginalizing and subordinating black people. In *Black Looks*, bell hooks claims, "An effective strategy of white supremacist terror and dehumanization during slavery centered around white control of the black gaze" (1992: 168). In a similar vein, Morrison's work portrays the ongoing engagement with the real of slavery-induced trauma in the form of dealing with the nullifying white gaze. Clearly, the gaze derives from the Other: "The gaze I encounter [. . .] is, not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other" (Lacan 1977: 84). This means that the white controlling gaze is detrimental to black subjectivity by exerting a shattering effect on the black psyche, preventing the establishment of a lovable black self. Petar Ramadanovic remarks that "race is the function of the way we think that the other sees us" (2001: 134). In Morrison's work, the other is equivalent to the white Other which relentlessly impinges on black people the extent of castration or mutilation they have suffered under chattel slavery. With their entire being determined by the dehumanizing white gaze, American people of African descent emerge as a symptom in scopic relation to the white gaze.

6.1.1 The Object Gaze as Spatialized Real

In *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud documents a case history in which his patient Katharina reported that, as a result of finding her uncle in sexual intercourse with her cousin Franziska at the age of sixteen (see Introduction), she was overwhelmed with an anxiety attack: "Everything went blank, my eyelids were forced together and there was a hammering and buzzing in my head" (1957: 128). The anxiety attack was made up of hysterical symptoms resulting from her efforts to cleanse the intruding death drive. She depicted other symptoms such as that she could "always see an awful, [unrecognizable] face that looks at [her] in a dreadful way" (1957: 126). The dreadful, dissembling gaze from the unfamiliar face was ghostly, recalling the death's head gazing back at the ambassadors in Hans Holbein's painting (see 3.3). Additionally, her psychic life was disturbed, organized around this look. After promptings from Freud, she confessed that this look belonged to her uncle, who had forced his way into her bed, making sexual advances to her when she was fourteen. It is apparent that Katharina's precipitating trauma is spatialized and incarnated as she "thinks all the time someone's stand-

ing behind [her] and going to catch hold of [her] all at once" (1957: 126). As discussed earlier in the Introduction, this uncle was actually her father, whose unsettling gaze contrasts with the maternal, self-confirming gaze in the Lacanian mirror stage.

The father reminds the reader of the Freudian castrating father as well as the Law of the Father, a term coined by Lacan as an internalized resolution to the oedipal conflict. Accordingly, the gaze of the Other is virtually the object gaze, as opposed to the maternal gaze, which facilitates the child's emergence as a speaking subject in the symbolic register. In his ground-breaking treatise *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W. E. B. Du Bois comes up with the term "double-consciousness" to describe black people's tendency to look at themselves through a white lens as a survival tactic in America:

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (1986: 364–365)

Black people are thus psychologically doubled and divided from themselves. The mantle of invisibility perpetrated on a people whose skin pigment is their most visible feature induces a peculiar wrenching and even fracturing of the soul. It impels them to identify with white aesthetic norms and to fantasize about mastery and unity. However, this illusion is always under the surveillance of white supremacy, which gives rise to a radical split black subjectivity lurking behind the black complexion. Analogously, in Morrison's work, double consciousness suggests the failure of black people to establish a unified self in a culture predisposing them towards derealisation, dissociation or depersonalization.

In Morrison's works, the objectifying/object gaze refers to the supremacist gaze white people bring to bear on their black Other. For example, in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison portrays looking as a form of violence:

> When he was still very young, Cholly had been surprised in some bushes by two white men while he was newly but earnestly engaged in eliciting sexual pleasure from a little country girl [named Darlene]. The men had shone a

> flashlight right on his behind. He had stopped, terrified. They chuckled. The beam of the flashlight did not move. (1994: 42)

Caught in the act of making love, Cholly is tragically emasculated; to compound the situation, he is forced to go on penetrating the girl in the dehumanizing gaze. The Lacanian gaze, with its cutting, castrating edge, is useful to illuminate the nature of the white gaze to Cholly: "the gaze presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of what we find on the horizon, as the thrust of our experience, namely, the lack that constitutes castration anxiety" (Lacan 1977: 72–73). In consequence, Cholly is so emasculated, abused and devastated by the gaze that "even a half-remembrance of this episode, along with myriad other humiliations, defeats, and emasculations, could stir him into flights of depravity that surprised him – but only himself" (Morrison 1994: 42–43). His traumatic relationship to the gaze attests to what hooks reads in history classes: "white slaveowners (men, women, and children) punished enslaved black people for looking [. . .] The politics of slavery, of racialized power relations, were such that the slaves were denied their right to gaze" (1992: 115). After the depersonalizing event, "he could think only of the flashlight, the muscadines, and Darlene's hands" (Morrison 1994: 150). Evidently, he is so violated by the gaze that his world is reduced to images, which signifies his recoiling from the white symbolic order.

Denied the right to look at the moment of trauma, Cholly has his psychological insight hampered or hindered afterwards. He collapses inside: the next day, he "floated about aimlessly, doing chores as he was told. All the glamour and warmth the adults had given him on the previous day were replaced by a sharpness that agreed with his mood" (Morrison 1994: 150). Morrison makes explicit the fact that Cholly is suffering from anomie, "a rootlessness that arises when individuals internalize socially inculcated needs and desires but face structural impediments to realizing them" (Mayberry 2007: 7). Messed-up by the gaze, he has broken through the confines of the white supremacist symbolic, emerging as a floating *objet a*: "Cholly was free. Dangerously free. Free to feel whatever he felt – fear, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity. Free to be tender or violent, to whistle or weep" (Morrison 1994: 159). His self can only be restored by an idealized merger with the maternal body. Yet as a cultural orphan, he is doomed to repeat his traumatic past, which is evidenced by his brutal raping of his daughter: "The impotence he experiences with Darlene fuels the sexual confusion and self-loathing that drunkenly coalesce in his daughter's rape years later" (Eckard 2002: 39–40).

In her work, Morrison employs the object gaze to portray the unsettling presence of white colonizers for black people. In the Afterword to *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison asserts that "racial beauty was not a reaction to the self-mocking, humorous critique of cultural/racial foibles common in all groups, but against the damaging

internalization of assumptions of immutable inferiority originating in an outside gaze" (1994: 210). With clarity, the author criticizes white racial supremacy for making efforts to transform a people into marketable bodies, involving them in an escalating cycle of self-destruction and violence. Similarly, Susan Neal Mayberry contends:

> If Morrison has the courage to connect Cholly and Mr. Henry and Soaphead Church with the most heinous of crimes against nature, just as she will do with Bill Cosey in *Love*, she also has the clarity to contextualize their pedophilia in terms of white Western tenets of sexual repression, competitive ownership, physical beauty, and romantic love. (2007: 14)

In Morrison's fiction, the black males' incursion into black female bodies bears witness to the former's defensive gesture in a white supremacist society bent on emasculating and eviscerating them. Discussing the power in looking, hooks writes:

> Connecting this strategy of domination to that used by grown folks in southern black rural communities where I grew up, I was pained to think that there was no absolute difference between whites who had oppressed black people and ourselves. (1992: 115)

hooks' words suggest that the appropriative white gaze is internalized by the very people who are succumbing to its destructive and depersonalizing force. In the same way, Deborah Ayer Sitter aptly points out that "the meaning of slavery's impact on a people [. . .] involves the way internalization of oppressors' values can distort all intimate human relationships and even subvert the self" (1992: 18). Accordingly, internalizing racism or oppressive values, black people have tragically perpetuated the violence of slavery exerted on their psyches.

Beloved opens with a baby's violence and venom, upon which Baby Suggs comments that "not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief" (1997: 5). Clearly, Suggs speaks to the grief of the Sixty Million and more. In this connection, Kevin Everod Quashie reads Beloved as a "memory body" of the legacy of slavery, "the narrative of and a voice for the disremembered and dead of the Middle Passage. She, Beloved, is a story composite, and the multiple and unfounded stories about her as well as those that constitute her slip and shift as they materialize" (2004: 112). It is not surprising then that Beloved drives her two brothers away from home even before her return; shortly after his arrival at 124 Bluestone, Paul D is saturated and startled by "a pool of red and undulating light that lock[s] him where he [stands]" (Morrison 1997: 8). Identifying the spirit as Beloved's rather than Baby Suggs,' who died "soft as cream"

(1997: 9), he exerts himself to exorcise the baby ghost – Sethe's infanticide-induced traumatic past, which compels Beloved to return to the symbolic world.

In Morrison's writings, the real is also inscribed on black bodies as symptomatic, somatic memory. The episode of Sethe's infanticide, however, illustrates the process of the formation of bodily symptoms due to the depletion of psychic energy. Endangered by the sight of the slave catchers, Sethe "did not look at them; she simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, missed and tried to connect a second time" (1997: 149). It is evident that her efforts to ward off the slave catchers (death signifying for black people) completely exhaust her, thus facilitating the unconscious depositing of mnemic symbols on her body as somatic symptoms: exhausted and eviscerated, she goes wild and unconscious, her "eyes with no whites [. . .] gazing straight ahead"; she "looked blind" (1997: 151; 150). Though failing to enter into consciousness, the death drive is unconsciously registered as psychopathological symbols on Sethe's body. Inscribing the original trauma, the mnemic symbols serve as a silent witness of the unconscious process of the banishing into the unconscious of the infanticide. Sethe suffers paralysis of her perception, and her mental state corresponds to what Freud and Breuer term "hypnoid states": these "share with one another and with hypnosis [. . .] one common feature: the ideas which emerge in them are very intense but are cut off from associative communication with the rest of the content of consciousness" (1957: 12). From this perspective, the memory trace of the infanticide functions as an internal excitation, lying dormant until resuscitated by the interposition of the conscious system at a later stage – traumatic reenactment.

After being reunited with Sethe, Paul D finds her eyes "did not pick up a flicker of light. They were like two wells [two blind spots] into which he had trouble gazing" (Morrison 1997: 9). In Morrison's texts, trauma resulting from encountering the object gaze is signified by the characters' psychological blindness. Sethe's blindness recalls the violence done to and perpetuated on black people by the dominant white Other. As bell hooks reminds us, "Black slaves, and later manumitted servants, could be brutally punished for looking, for appearing to observe the whites they were serving, as only a subject can observe, or see." In other words, "to be fully an object then was to lack the capacity to see or recognize reality" (1992: 168). After the self-enforced (actually, the white Other-enforced) misery, Sethe is totally dispossessed, divested of the ability to look as there remains nothing for her to appreciate and assimilate as good objects of the gaze. Similarly, suggesting racial, cinematic erasure of black female presence, hooks writes, "That some of us chose to stop looking was a gesture of resistance, turning away was one way to protest, to reject negation" (1992: 121). Therefore, disloyal-

ty and betrayal by her own people finally drives Sethe to what Baby Suggs calls "the desolate center where the self that was no self made its home" (1997: 140).

The public manifestation of private trauma is perhaps best realized in the infanticide scene. The scene emphasizes Sethe's spectacality[85] that brings disgrace on Suggs. It emerges as natural that when "Sethe was aiming a bloody nipple into the baby's mouth[,] Baby Suggs slammed her fist on the table and shouted, 'Clean up! Clean yourself up!'" (Morrison 1997: 152). Yet the infanticide turns schoolteacher into a spectacle as well. hooks tells us that

> in white supremacist society, white people can "safely" imagine that they are invisible to black people since the power they have historically asserted, and even now collectively assert over black people accorded them the right to control the black gaze. As fantastic as it may seem, racist white people find it easy to imagine that black people cannot see them if within their desire they do not want to be seen by the dark Other. (1992: 168).

It is apparent that the distance between Sethe as a spectacle and schoolteacher as the privileged spectator is annihilated when the latter is brought into headlong confrontation with his own loss in the Other: Sethe's paroxysm of violence has transformed the objects to be exploited, brutalized and eroticized into abjects: "Right off it was clear [. . .] that there was nothing there to claim. The three [. . .] pickaninnies they had hoped were alive and well enough to take back to Kentucky, take back and raise properly to do the work Sweet Home desperately needed, were not" (Morrison 1997: 149).

Developing Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, Homi K. Bhabha posits that the subaltern culture's mimicry of the dominant one produces "a subversive strategy" and enables new subjectivities to surface through the "return of the subject as agent" (1994: 185). Accordingly, Sethe's infanticide is interpretable as her mimicry of the dominant white culture's tendency to brutalize black bodies. Schreiber claims, "A weakening of the subject status of the dominant segment enables the marginalized or emerging culture to shift from object to subject status" (2001: 6). Repelling the intruding slave capturers, Sethe's crime is no doubt revolutionary, releasing her from a subordinate status. From this perspective, Morrison utilizes Sethe's "blindness" to challenge white supremacist control of the black gaze. Put another way, Sethe's "blindness" suggests her active attempts to abject the past. To sum up, Sethe's blindness insinuates her soul-death as well as her rebellious gesture against a culture bent on eradicating African cultures,

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[85] Miriam Thaggert's word for being made into a spectacle.

destroying black communities and families, annihilating any sense of their ancestral line, and perpetuating negative perceptions of blackness.

The internalized oppressive discourse is also disclosed by Beloved's ghostly gaze. One day she and Denver go into a dark, cold house to get cider:

> "What is it?" asks Denver.
> "Look," she points to the sunlit cracks.
> "What? I don't see nothing." Denver follows the pointing finger.
> Beloved drops her hand. "I'm like this."
> Denver watches as Beloved *bends over, curls up and rocks*. Her eyes go to no place; her moaning is so small Denver can hardly hear it.
> "You all right? Beloved?"
> Beloved focuses her eyes. "Over there. Her face."
> Denver looks where Beloved's eyes go; there is nothing but *darkness* there.
> "Whose face? Who is it?"
> "Me, It's me."
> She is smiling again. (Morrison 1997: 124, italics mine)

Beloved's gaze suggests the blindness and invisibility whites have projected on to black people. Denver sees nothing in the darkness when following Beloved's pointing finger. Yet something terrible happened there in the past. Petar Ramadanovic points out that "Beloved begins to see, and sees herself in the darkness of the shed where she was killed" (2001: 135). It is apparent that the original trauma is spatialized in the dark beyond the lapse of time. Beloved is rememorying and engaging the decisive trauma: she "bends over, curls up and rocks." The rememory activates the body memory of the infanticide and sets the memory body of Beloved in motion. Moreover, it recalls Beloved's description of her former residence, which evokes the traumatic experience of the Sixty-Million and more from the Middle Passage. Though unable to see anything, Denver is apparently unsettled by an omnipresent Other gazing back at her from the blind spot, that is, the darkness. In other words, she encounters Beloved's trauma, which addresses the collective loss of all black people's identity.

Paul D comes to pick Sethe up from work after reconciling himself to her past. His gesture of tenderness rejuvenates both of them: "Half an hour later, when they reached the city's edge, Sethe and Paul D resumed catching and snatching each other's fingers, stealing quick pats on the behind. Joyfully embarrassed to be that grown-up and that young at the same time" (Morrison 1997: 129). Yet Beloved's sudden emergence breaks up the intimacy Sethe and Paul D have just tentatively set up: "Floating toward them, barely visible in the drifting snow, was a figure [. . .] so complete was the attention she and Paul D were paying to themselves they both felt a jolt when they saw her close in" (1997: 130). The "floating" Be-

loved aligns with the dangerously free Cholly, as both of them dovetail with Lacan's concept of the ubiquitous *objet a*. What startles Sethe and Paul D is the uncanny, paranoiac feeling of being spied on by an omnipresent Other. To borrow Lacan's words, "The world is all-seeing, but it is not exhibitionistic – it does not provoke our gaze. When it begins to provoke it, the feeling of strangeness begins too" (1977: 75). From this perspective, Beloved's sudden appearance, complete with her eyes focused on Sethe, disrupts the lovers' nostalgic reverie: "Beloved did not look at Paul D; her scrutiny was for Sethe" (Morrison 1997: 61). hooks points out that "the absence of recognition is a strategy that facilitates making a group the Other" (1992: 167). In this light, constructing Paul D's presence as absence, Beloved is reminiscent of the cloak of invisibility white people project on to their dark Other.

Insatiable and vampiric, Beloved emerges as a psychotic symptom of other characters, suggesting the lethality of being entrapped in a haunting past. She "had no coat, no wrap, nothing on her head, but she held in her hands a long shawl. Stretching out her arms she tried to circle it around Sethe" (Morrison 1997: 61). The shawl which encircles Sethe's neck serves as the preoedipal bond locking mother and daughter tightly together. Moreover, the word "circle" evokes the "circled cross" that marks Sethe's mother as a marketable body: Sethe recalls that her mother once "opened up her dress front and lifted her breast and pointed under it. Right on her rib was a circle and a cross burn right in the skin" which was to enable the young Sethe to recognize her mother if "you can't tell me by my face." When questioned closely by the girl, "But how will you know me? [. . .] Mark me, too," her mother slapped her. Sethe didn't understand then until she had a mark of her own (1997: 61). Tragically, Sethe's failure to decipher the nature of slavery drives her to mark her own daughter with a similar brand (the scar on Beloved's neck). As a result, "Beloved never has the opportunity to come into her own, to find a central self by moving beyond the stage of her infantile ego" (Samuels & Weems 2003), a failure which accounts for her exclusive demand for her mother. Naturally, Beloved's commandeering gaze recaptures Sethe from Paul D: "'Crazy girl,' said Sethe. [. . .] And stepping away and in front of Paul D, Sethe took the shawl and wrapped it around Beloved's head and shoulders." Inevitably, Paul D feels suddenly seized by a soul-searing solitude: "Paul D felt icy cold in the place Sethe had been before Beloved came. [. . .] When he saw Denver silhouetted in the lamplight at the window, he could not help thinking, 'And whose ally you?'" (Morrison 1997: 130).

Paul D's traumatic relationship with and reaction to Beloved's gaze originate from his confronting of the dehumanizing gaze of Mister, "the smiling boss of roosters" (1997: 106) of the Sweet Home plantation. On his way to prison in Al-

fred, Georgia, after trying to kill Brandywine (the man schoolteacher has sold him to), Paul D experiences one of the most depersonalizing experiences in his life. He is totally debilitated and degraded, with his feet shackled, his mouth bridled, his neck connected to the axle of a buckboard. This feeling, however, is compounded when confronting Mister, whose life he has saved at birth and whose freedom and unfathomable self-pride, ironically, dwarf him: "Crooked feet flapping. Comb as big as my hand and some kind of red. He sat right there on the tub *looking* at me. I swear he *smiled*" (1997: 72, italics mine). Signifying white racial discourse, Mister's object gaze has shattered Paul D's feeling of wholeness; in addition, it compels him to align himself with his diseased fellow slaves who, without exception, succumbed to the cancer of slavery:

> My head was full of what I'd seen of Halle a while back. I wasn't even thinking about the bit. Just Halle and before him Sixo, but when I saw Mister I knew it was me too. [. . .] One crazy, one sold, one missing, one burnt and me licking iron with my hands crossed behind me. The last of the Sweet Home men. (1997: 72)

Eventually, Paul D is aroused to the realization that he would never be a "Mister," figuratively or literally. Moreover, his lack of a surname and sharing his first name with his two brothers suggest his degradation by white supremacy. He recalls and laments: "'Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn't [. . .] I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub'" (1997: 72). Ironically, it is through Mister that Morrison represents the emasculating effect of white racist castration on Paul D. In this connection, Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber writes, "Morrison's text creates the gaze of the Other by moving from a montage of differing perspectives and points in time to focus on the uncanny, often in the form of 'inhuman' behavior – the unspeakable – and thereby fissuring the text" (2001: 120). Morrison employs Mister to convey the animalistic violence inflicted on black people by white racist supremacy.

In *Love*, the object gaze belongs to the disembodied ghost Bill Cosey, who splinters the selves of his kinswomen, removing connection and community via the darkness permeating his mansion. Darkness is employed by Morrison to convey the extent to which the women fall victim to the patriarch. A dead and overbearing patriarch as well as a charismatic spiritual leader of the local community, Cosey fractures female friendship, reducing his kinswomen to nervous wrecks in his big mansion. On the other hand, mesmerised by both his living and dead presence, all the women are ensnared and entrapped in the turmoil of the past fusing pain and nostalgic plenitude; wresting with each other to rupture the darkness and silence which signify slavery-induced solitude, they desire to define themselves as subjects of agency in white racial domination.

Foregrounding the female world brimming with darkness, Morrison throws light on the psychic rupture planted between the black women by the patriarch. The women's tragedy lies in their fanatical seeking for oneness in his object gaze. Read through Lacan's lens, the patriarch's gaze "reflects [no other than the women's] nothingness" (1977: 92). It is not surprising that all the women, blighted by their rampant desire for the deceased patriarch, emerge as sentient puppets on his lightless stage. The darkness insinuates their inability to extricate themselves from the imaginary order; they are virtually women who have regressed to being children, embroiled in the mirror stage, desirous of community and cohesiveness. Moreover, their obsession with Cosey's spectral presence contributes to his impregnable status in the local community. To adapt Catherine Belsey's idea of the nature of the Lacanian real, Cosey, "though not there-for-a-subject, lost, in other words, to the organism-in-culture that speaking beings become, continues to exist and will, in the end, reclaim [the women]" (2005: 6). He embodies the Lacanian real which shatters the mirrored recognition that enables the women to define themselves as speaking subject.

Epitomizing both the real and splitting language (the Other), Cosey emerges as one of the most enigmatic figures in Morrison's works. He embodies the traumatic pain and anguish of white colonizing, capitalist domination, whose lingering effect goes on victimizing black people. His isolating force is first spotted by Junior Viviane, a wayward, scheming teenage girl, employed by Heed to disinherit Christine. Upon her first visit to the Cosey mansion, Junior is transfixed by the pervasive darkness there: "It seemed to her that each woman lived in a spotlight separated – or connected – by the darkness between them" (Morrison 2004: 28). The clash between the spotlight and the darkness conveys the characters' need to be mirrored (due to grossly unempathic parenting) and to merge with an ideal ego. Put another way, the spotlight is employed by the author to foreground the characters' exhibitionistic display of grandiosity. As if to diffuse this darkness, Morrison dramatizes Christine's ethereal, spectral entering into Heed's room: "Christine entered carrying a tray. No knock preceded her and no word accompanied her. She placed the tray on the desk where Heed and Junior faced each other and left without meeting a single eye" (2004: 31). Complementing the darkness permeating the mansion, the blinding spotlight suggests the debilitating power of both capitalism and paternalism. Naturally, Christine's ghostly presence reminds the reader of the foreignness, invisibility, and silence white people have planted in black people. Additionally, the darkness is readable as the two elderly women's efforts to repress the emergent past charged with desires and demons, that is, the preoedipal bond which designates them as inseparable doubles.

Black people's traumatic relationship to the gaze has informed black parenting. In this novel, Morrison also highlights the harm inflicted on children by black mothers: "*Sometimes the cut is so deep no woe-is-me tale is enough. Then the only thing that* [. . .] *explains the craziness heaping up, holding down, and making women hate one another and ruin their children is an outside evil*" (2004: 5, original italics). Locating the evil outside of the women, Morrison points to the overpowering influence of white hermeneutics in post-slavery America. Incarnating the "outside evil," Police-heads[86] emerge as "*dirty things with big hats who shoot up out of the ocean to harm loose women and eat disobedient children*" (2004: 5, original italics). Chief Buddy aligns himself with Police-heads, with his round hat and badge, coming from a white family "that had named a whole town after itself and gave epic-movie names to its streets" (2004: 44). When returning runaway Christine (after she tries to kill Dr. Rio's Cadillac) to May, he watches the mother "smacking her [daughter's] face so hard Christine's chin hit her shoulder" (2004: 111–112). The scene is made extremely painful by having May's violence witnessed by the white Sheriff. In this light, the violence reminds the reader of the masochistic nature of women's participation in the phallocentric patriarchal order.

Viewed collectively, the ghost/foreigner, planting foreignness in their own people, internalizes and symbolizes the oppressive values, acting as an agent for the white Other. Battered down by a life of either degradation or displacement, most marginalized people are denied a constructive dialogue between self and other, and hence divested of autonomous speaking egos. Drawn into the dynamic relationship between past and present, and self and other, which is suggested by their involvement in the ghost's/foreigner's traumatic reenactments, they uncannily reenact their unbearable past. Yet more significantly, underlying all these repetitions directed by the ghost or demonized foreigner is the stultifying slavery, the real victimizer which keeps black people in a perpetual state of submissiveness.

6.1.2 The Split between the Eye and the Gaze

In *The Bluest Eye*, Cholly's wife Pauline frequents the cinema in an attempt to shake off the degradation of poverty as well as her own internalized ugliness; escaping along with millions of others, into the fantasies of Hollywood's classic cinema of the '30s and '40s, she reflects Morrison's active explorations of the theory of "the construction of visual pleasure and looking relations in dominant cinema" (Guerrero 1990: 763). Debilitated by her looks according to the white

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[86] Male authority figures who represent Lacan's the Other.

aesthetic, Pauline has to project her desire of fullness on to a screen of narcissistic fascination. To some extent at least, the featured star on the screen with whom she identifies promises to recenter her as speaking in the cinema: "*They'd cut off the lights, and everything be black. Then the screen would light up, and I'd move right on in them pictures*" (Morrison 1994: 123, original italics). Correspondingly, Laura Mulvey claims that "the cinema has structures of fascination strong enough to allow temporary loss of ego while simultaneously reinforcing the ego" (1999: 836). For Pauline, the light-threaded darkness proves to be an efficient way of escaping the controlling white gaze.

What enthrals the protagonist is only a screen image which temporarily screens off her invisibility in the dominant culture. Moreover, the light projected onto the screen makes the background darkness in which Pauline immerses herself emerge. This darkness signifies the white racist symbolic which marginalizes black people as the dark Other. Correspondingly, Edward Guerrero remarks that

> the operation of this look resides at the nexus of contradiction and irony for Pauline in ways that it doesn't for the white female spectator. For while many white, feminist critics argue that women suffer negation of self by having to identify with a sexual object displayed for the pleasure of the male gaze at the screen, Pauline as a woman, and as one of color, must suffer this negation in a compounded sense, for her like hardly exists anywhere on the screen. She is therefore forced to look at and apply to herself a completely unrealizable, alien standard of feminine beauty and to experience the dissatisfaction resulting from the contradiction. The problem for Pauline with the dominant *gaze* built into classic cinema is that, in her specific situation, it conjures up the triple devaluation of being female, black, and poor. (1990: 764, original italics)

Pauline's looks of desire are constantly undercut by the pre-existence of a white, racist, sexist gaze. While promoting a fantasy of wholeness, the gaze has in effect disintegrated her distinctive subject status: "she was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen" (Morrison 1994: 122). For this reason, rather than a reciprocal gaze, what returns Pauline's looks is a blind spot suggested by the pervasive, devouring darkness, which has virtually disintegrated her sense of self.

In *Beloved*, Morrison elaborates the dynamic between the eye and the gaze through the conflicts between Sethe's daughter and two sons: "Howard and Buglar, had run away by the time they were thirteen years old – as soon as merely looking in a mirror shattered it (that was the signal for Buglar)." For Buglar, looking in the mirror involves not identification but rupture. What makes the image so

depersonalizing is that the mirror he is looking into is somehow returning his gaze. A further, close study of the story shows that his look is returned by the baby ghost whose "fury at having its throat cut" (1997: 5) paralyzes the house at 124 Bluestone Road. Equally, for Denver,

> to go back to the original hunger was impossible. Luckily for Denver, looking was food enough to last. But to be looked at in turn was beyond appetite; it was breaking through her own skin to a place where hunger hadn't been discovered. (1997: 118)

For Denver, "looking" suggests the desire to break the invisibility that forecloses the unmediated gaze of recognition, whereas "to be looked at" entails the rememory of a mother grossly unempathic to her need for mirroring in her formative years.

In *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine Hong Kingston also probes the split between subject(ive) seer and object(tive) seen. In this novel, the author revises Chinese oral traditions in written form to orchestrate Chinese American women's experiences in predatory white culture. Feeling buried alive by the loneliness induced by the structures of domination, Brave Orchid finally raises enough money to pay for her sister Moon Orchid's plane fare. When they eventually meet at the airport after a thirty-year-gap, each is startled at how old the other looks: "Their hands reached out as if to touch the other's face, then returned to their own, the fingers checking the grooves in the forehead and along the sides of the mouth" (1989: 118). Their confrontation with each other thirty years later no doubt reminds them of the lapse of time and death:

> "You're an old woman," said Brave Orchid.
> "Aiaa. *You're* an old woman."
> "But *you* really are old. Surely, you can't say that about me. I'm not old the way you're old."
> "But *you* really are old. You're one year older than I am."
> "Your hair is white and your face all wrinkled."
> "You're so skinny."
> "You're so fat."
> "Fat women are more beautiful than skinny women." (1989: 118, original italics)

While thin people live longer, fat people, according to Chinese tradition, are suggestive of a life of opulence. No matter whether fat or skinny, the symbolic nonetheless proves castrating and debilitating for both of the "two women with faces like mirrors" (1989: 118). Casting light on the eruption of the real, it illuminates the conflict between the imaginary and the symbolic order: before confronting their mirror images, both women live in their fantasized world of eternality, and

the encounter with their double brings them back to the harsh reality of the splitting symbolic they have lived through. There is clearly a mimetic origin in the formation of doubling; the women's retorts to each other convey their unhomely experience on the borderline between outside and inside, past and present, and life and death.

This split is also experienced by Helene in *Sula*. The daughter of a Creole whore working in the Sundown House, she grows up with her grandmother, who takes her away from the haunting red shutters, raising her "under the dolesome eyes of a multicoloured Virgin Mary." The surrogate mother is far from being a mirroring, empathizing caregiver: "counseling her [Helene] to be constantly on guard for any sign of her mother's wild blood," (1982a: 17) she has in effect buried her granddaughter alive under a culture that sunders re-affirming bonds among black people, which is suggested by Helene's feeling of ascendency over her people.[87] Learning that her grandmother is dying, she returns to New Orleans with her daughter Nel. Arrogating to herself cultural privilege and power, she experiences a boundary crisis under the supremacist gaze of a white conductor on the train:

> The conductor let his eyes *travel* over the pale yellow woman and then stuck his little finger into his ear, jiggling it free of wax. "What you think you doin', *gal*?" [. . .] *So soon. So soon*. She hadn't even begun the *trip* back. Back to her grandmother's house in the city where the red shutters glowed, and already she had been called "gal." All the old vulnerabilities, all the old fears of being somehow flawed gathered in her stomach and made her hands tremble. (1982a: 20, italics mine)

It is evident that Helene is collapsing inwardly. Her experience is best explained by bell hooks' interpretation of the word "travel" in "Representation of Whiteness": "From certain standpoints, to travel is to encounter the terrorizing force of white supremacy," (1992: 174) to travel is to be transformed from speaking subject to silenced object. In this connection, looked up and down, and stripped of dignity, Helena suffers the cultural trauma of slavery, which equates blackness with bodies. In this connection, Gloria Anzaldúa presents the black body as the landscape through which black people are racially marked, "written all over . . . carved and tattooed with the sharp needles of experience" (qtd. in Henderson 2002: 13). From this perspective, Helene's body is refigured as the landscape dot-

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[87] Helene's feeling of ascendency over her people manifests itself as follows: "Since there was no Catholic church in Medallion then, she joined the most conservative black church. And held sway. It was Helene who never turned her head in church when latecomers arrived; Helene who established the practice of seasonal altar flowers; Helene who introduced the giving of banquets of welcome to returning Negro veterans" (1982a: 18).

ted with marks of disgrace and violence done to her by the white supremacist viewer.

Morrison elicits from the abusive and abrasive conductor an imagined white wholeness, dependent on his capacity to control his racial Other. Even more significantly, the author makes explicit that it is Helene's isolation from her own people that compounds her feeling of annihilation: "Her glance moved beyond the white man's face to the passengers seated behind him. Four or five black faces were watching [. . .] She saw their closed faces, their locked eyes, and turned for compassion to the gray eyes of the conductor" (1982a: 21). Finally, Helene's efforts to placate and please the supremacist conductor reduce her to a hollow, disturbing smile, which in turn functions to register and perpetuate the latter's sense of cultural superiority:

> Then, for no earthly reason, at least no reason that anybody could understand, certainly no reason that Nel understood then or later, she smiled. Like a street pup that wags its tail at the very doorjamb of the butcher shop he has been kicked away from only moments before, Helene smiled. Smiled dazzlingly and coquettishly at the salmon-colored face of the conductor. (1982a: 21)

The image of the black woman petrified under the weight of the dominant culture offers a spectacle. Helene's image is not only for consumption by the conductor but for viewing by her daughter as well as other black people. Clearly, Morrison stresses that Helene's separation from own people renders irredeemable her degradation into the category of commodified body; she is buried alive by the conductor's gaze as well as the "locked eyes" (1982a: 21) of her own people. Emptied of content and stripped of a centred self, Helene experiences a suspended feeling of being traversed by the abject. On the other hand, Nel

> felt both pleased and ashamed to sense that these men, unlike her father, who worshiped his graceful, beautiful wife, were bubbling with a hatred for her mother that had not been there in the beginning but had been born with the dazzling smile. (1982a: 22)

It is apparent that Nel is plagued with foreignness resulting from the objectifying gaze of both the white supremacist and her own people. For this reason, she tries to detach herself from her debilitated and debilitating mother. And the more petrified Helene's appearance is, the more distance exists between her and Nel.

Nel strives to pulls herself together through abjecting her mother. In "The Oppositional Gaze," hooks notes "cinematic racism" – the "violent erasure of black womanhood." She contends that "even when representations of black women

were present in film, our bodies and being were there to serve – to enhance and maintain white womanhood as object of the phallocentric gaze" (1992: 119). Therefore, hooks provides a strategy for acknowledging black female spectatorship, even in films that negate black female presence: "Identifying with neither the phallocentric gaze nor the construction of white womanhood as lack, critical black female spectators construct a theory of looking relations where cinematic visual delight is the pleasure of interrogation" (1992: 126). This moment of interrogation is actually the abjection of the stereotyped image of black women; it proves crucial for positive identity formation of black female spectators. Similarly, for Nel, her declamation "'I'm me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. Me'" (Morrison 1982a: 28) signifies her abjection of her mother together with her internalized white aesthetic norms.

6.1.3 Compensatory Restoration of the Gaze of the Other

> By Whiteness, I refer to a master signifier (without a signified) that establishes a structure of relations, a signifying chain that through a process of inclusions and exclusions constitutes a pattern for organizing human difference. This chain provides subjects with certain symbolic positions such as "black," "white," "Asian," etc., in relation to the master signifier.
>
> – Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race.*

In the above passage, Seshadri-Crooks represents Whiteness as equivalent to the Lacanian phallus for representing race. Given the lack endemic to the white Other, Whiteness is an imaginarized object of perfection for people who organize their identity in relation to this privileged signifier. From this perspective, black people's desire for whiteness is engendered by the white supremacist gaze bent on commodifying, objectifying black people. Accordingly, black people's obsession with the unobtainable whiteness reduces them into a phantomatic symptom, engaging in eliciting meaning from slavery.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola is objectified by the gaze of her own people as well as the white Other. In *Sacred Words and Secular Visions*, Tuire Valkeakari links Pecola's abject position to her carry[ing the local people's] 'burden' of being black": "When they fix their gaze upon her, they, consequently, only see an embodiment of the blackness that they cannot lovingly embrace either in themselves or in Pecola" (2004: 104–105). Hence, Pecola is reminiscent of the death's head in Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (see 3.3). Her obsession with the bluest eye conveys, firstly, her feeling of loneliness in response to the white gaze which

reduces its racial Other to invisible ghosts; and secondly, her desire for a unitary self.

The internalized outside gaze finally brings the onset of Pecola's madness. By the end of the story, she is torn between a black viewed and a white supremacist viewer, celebrating her newly-obtained blue eyes. Acting as the splitting gaze of the Other, the bluest eye finally reduces her to a schizophrenic. Correspondingly, Laurie Vickroy points out that Pecola defends herself against the pain of not being loved by "reexperiencing others' gazes with what she believes is an acceptable, if not lovable, appearance. Ironically, this delusion makes her more of an outcast, because her madness spooks everyone, including her mother" (2002: 91). Pecola's tragedy derives from her failure to detect the lack inhering in the master signifier Whiteness. Obsessive in nature, her desire for Whiteness leads inevitably to psychosis. Slavoj Žižek claims that

> what happens in psychosis is that this empty point in the other, in what we see and/or hear, is actualized, becomes part of effective reality: in psychosis, we effectively hear the voice of the primordial Other addressing us, we effectively know that we are being observed all the time. (1996: 90–91)

What Žižek suggests here is the agency of a primordial lack which, lurking in the dark, invalidates the speaking voice. In this connection, Pecola's "obtaining" of the blue eyes suggests her psychological blindness, which in turn signifies her moving further into the marginalized area excluded by hegemonic white racism.

In *Beloved*, Denver avails herself of the trace of the collective memory of slavery to elicit meaning from her storytelling:

> Now, watching Beloved's alert and hungry face, how she took in every word, asking questions about the colour of things and their size, her downright craving to know, Denver began to see what she was saying and not just to hear it: there is this nineteen-year-old slave girl – a year older than herself – walking through the dark woods to get to her children who are far away. She is tired, scared maybe, and maybe even lost. Most of all she is by herself and inside her is another baby she has to think about too. Behind her dogs, perhaps; guns probably; and certainly mossy teeth. She is not so afraid at night because she is the color of it, but in the day every sound is a shot or a tracker's quiet step. (1997: 77–78)

In recounting her mother's adventure, Denver gleans knowledge of her own history. It is apparent that her acute sense of loneliness is alleviated by the storytelling – by moving into her mother's life and piecing together past fragments. Berdyaev observes that solitude "can only be overcome on the existential plane by the confrontation of the Ego with another Ego, with the Thou, with the subject" (1947:

70). Yet this other Ego is no other than a mirror image of the ego – the ideal ego, as manifested by Berdyaev's observation that "in reality, the Ego is seeking communion with another Ego, with the Thou. It longs to find another Ego, a friend, who would identify himself with it and thus confirm it, who would admire it, listen to it; in a word, reflect it" (1947: 71). The communion between the Egos is based on narcissistic self-love. In this connection, Denver reestablishes her mother as her ideal ego, which facilitates her entering both her mother's and her own worlds:

> Denver was seeing it now and feeling it – *through Beloved*. Feeling how it must have felt to her mother. Seeing how it must have looked. And the more fine points she made, the more Beloved liked it. So she anticipated the questions by giving blood to the scraps her mother and grandmother had told her – and a heartbeat. The monologue became, in fact, a duet. (Morrison 1997: 78, italics mine)

The fleshing out of her mother's story nurses Beloved's interest; it simultaneously endows Denver with the capacity to establish connections, which in turn opens her to dialogue and changes. Projecting herself on Beloved, Denver steps out of herself and into her mother; projecting herself on her mother, she reclaims Sethe as her selfobject or proclaims herself as the selfobject of Sethe, which follows the knowledge of her position of primacy in her mother's eyes.

Through the nostalgic return to the past, Denver dissolves the discordance between her eye and *Beloved*'s gaze. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, Lacan posits a special moment when the subject sees in the object his own gaze, which facilitates the emergence of agency – "*seeing oneself seeing oneself*" (1977: 74, original italics). Correspondingly, Slavoj Žižek comments that Lacan's formulation deals with the "very illusion of perfect self-mirroring that characterizes the Cartesian philosophical tradition of the subject of self-reflection" (1991: 114). To clarify, the object gaze from the Other is temporarily replaced by the mirroring gaze functioning to confirm the idealized image of the self. Accordingly, Denver is desire-ridden, seeing herself seeing – through Beloved's eyes. As she claims, "It was lovely. Not to be stared at, not seen, but being pulled into view by the interested, uncritical eyes of the other" (Morrison 1997: 118). Unquestionably the "uncritical eyes of the other" evoke the self-confirming maternal gaze (in the mirror stage), which all the children inhabiting the house of 124 are desirous of in this novel. Beloved's obsession with Sethe's face reflects her desire to be mirrored by the latter's eyes: "the woman is there with the face I want the face that is mine [. . .] I want her face a hot thing" (1997: 211).

The moment of nostalgia is also illustrated by Narcissus (see 5.4), who sees someone in the water gazing at him with unmediated recognition and interest. Yet Žižek emphasizes that "the function of the nostalgic object is precisely to *conceal* the antinomy between eye and gaze – i.e., the traumatic impact of the gaze *qua* object – by means of its power of fascination." Put another way, the subject is unaware of the eye of the Other gazing back at him/her. It follows that as soon as the subject becomes conscious of the gaze, "the fascination is dispelled" (1991: 114, original italics) and the gazing subject is transformed into the object of vision. As studied earlier, darkness functions as the object gaze to bring out the interesting metamorphosis from object to abject in Morrison's works. For example, Beloved's sudden disappearing into darkness leaves Denver desolate and nearly devoured by the sense of death. Apparently, darkness acts as a reminder of the real which constantly sabotages the function of the signifying chain.

In *Love*, Christine is enthralled by Junior's presence: "the girl will do anything." Moreover, she admires "the bold eyes, the mischievous smile. Her willingness to do any errand, tackle any difficulty, was a blessing for Christine" (2004: 197). But more than that, Junior appears to be sympathetic and empathic: "[She] listened. To complaints, jokes, justifications, advice, reminiscences. Never accusing, judging – simply interested. In that silent house talking to anybody was like music" (2004: 197). Yet, insufficiently mirrored by her parents, Junior falls short of the ability to empathize with others, which is evidenced by the earlier elaborated episode of the overlapping rememories of two desire-ridden women Heed and Junior.[88] However, buried alive in her nostalgic past, Christine is unable to recognize the real embodied by Junior. As Žižek suggests, "In nostalgia, the gaze of the other is in a way domesticated, 'gentrified'; instead of the gaze erupting like a traumatic, disharmonious blot, we have the illusion of "seeing ourselves seeing," of seeing the gaze itself" (1991: 114). From this perspective, Christine's fascination with Junior reflects her desire to be mirrored by an understanding, ego-confirming other. Yet to adapt Žižek's words regarding the function of nostalgic object, Christine's feeling of affinity for Junior blinds her "to the fact that [Junior] is already gazing at [her]" (1991: 114). To clarify, Christine is incapable of reading Junior as a desiring and scheming girl. It is thus possible to read Christine's enthralment by Junior's interested gaze as delusionally self-confirming, and it may ultimately derive from her compensatory efforts to merge with an idealized parent imago.

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[88] See Chapter 4.

Morrison highlights schism among black people by displacing the black mother and putting in her place the ideal ego Cosey, who emblematizes debilitating, dissembling capitalist paternalism. Studying the identity the child forms in the imaginary stage, Juliet Mitchell observes that it is based on "a mis-recognition; the self is always like another, in other words, this self is constructed of necessity in a state of alienation: the person first sees himself in another, mother or mirror" (1974: 40). The word "mis-recognition" stresses the fact that the perfection suggested by the mirror image derives from the archaic narcissistic fantasy of the ego. As discussed earlier in chapter 2, the individual's efforts to merge with the ideal ego signify his/her attempts to restore an idealized merger with the mother. Yet in *Love*, the mother figure L is silenced, displaced, reduced to a background musical hum. Furthermore, Cosey emerges as the sole screen onto which the local people project their fantasy of wholeness and perfection, which is inseparable from his role as a successful entrepreneur symbolized by the Cosey Hotel and Resort located in the Florida coast area. L points out that "*It comforts everybody to think of all Negroes as dirty poor, and to regard those who were not, who earned good money and kept it, as some kind of shameful miracle*" (2004: 120, original italics). In this light, Cosey emerges as a collective ideal ego of people trying desperately to pull themselves together and to identify with an outside subject in the lingering, self-sabotaging aftereffects of slavery.

In this novel, Cosey's kinswomen revolve around his will in the vacuum he has left behind, which renders Cosey a signifier of totality – the phallic signifier. Vida Gibbons, once a worker at the Cosey Hotel and Resort, admires him for employing her and so freeing her from the swamp and cannery. It is thus no wonder that, like so many others, Vida "had looked on him with adoring eyes, spoke of him with forgiving smiles. Proud of his finesse, his money, the example he set that goaded them into thinking that with patience and savvy, they could do it too" (Morrison 2004: 44). Cosey functions as an ideal ego of Vida as well as other black people still struggling on the lowest social rung in a racist America; further, his halo captivates black tourists, who "felt a tick of entitlement, of long-ing [sic] turned to belonging in the vicinity of the fabulous, success-ful [sic] resort controlled by one of their own" (2004: 46). Accordingly, as a successful patriarch, he arouses the desire of black people for self and identity under the inescapable aftershock of predatory white culture.

Read by Christine at first sight as "an underfed child" (2004: 25), Junior is an outlaw from the Settlement, a community of impoverished black people on a nearby mountain slope. After her intrusion into the mansion as a live-in secretary, she falls straight away under the spell of Cosey's ghost through his picture and stories about him. Her fascination with him accords with her desire for an ideal-

ized merger with the parent imago in order to become valorized and subjectivised in the symbolic register. On the other hand, the ghost infuses new life into Junior when whispering, "Nice hair," "Take it," "Good girl," "Sweet tits," "Why not?"; he provokes her grandiose exhibitionism, and she just "enjoy[s] herself in front of him" (2004: 136, 140). Moreover, Junior's exhibitionistic tendency is further evidenced by her audacious sexual bravura with Romen. However, in so doing, she makes faulty efforts at defensive restoration of the fantasy of a grandiose self which has been shattered by her neglectful and unempathic parents.

Viewed as a whole, the women's fascination with Cosey arises unexceptionally from their desire for the phallus in the white symbolic, which in turn suggests that they were not, or not sufficiently, cathected in their formative years – maternal silence. They scramble for the attention of the powerful, potent patriarch, attempting to restore the idealized merger with the parent imago in order to identify themselves as speaking beings in the symbolic. Fetishized as the ideal ego, the black patriarch seems to promise a life of plenitude and profusion for his desire-ridden kinswomen. Yet he turns out be the hole of the real which has victimized nearly all of them, a symbolic agent articulating death (instead of power) for the women. Accordingly, the women's fascination with him reveals the extent of their subjection to the Other: they are stuck in the imaginary phase, which disrupts intersubjective communication and psychic connection.

It is arguable that Morrison invents Cosey to represent African American identity. In her work, she examines the question of race for black people by way of their search for cultural identity embedded in both slavery and a pride in the past. Functioning precisely as the fraudulent phallic signifier, Cosey combines the two conflicting entities and conveys the complexity of African American identity. As Morrison remarks, "'race' is still a virtually unspeakable thing, as can be seen in the apologies, notes of 'special use,' and circumscribed definitions that accompany it" (1988: 126). Accordingly, African American identity emerges as a symptom of class exploitation and racist domination. The invocation of race can be construed as Morrison's attempt to restore the castrated fantasy object for black people to disrupt the representation of the canonical text.

6.2 Looks that Heal: Abjecting the Objectifying Gaze

Morrison tries to empower the black look in an effort to make visible the black self or enable a new black subjectivity to surface in her work. In *Making Whiteness*, Grace Hale links "representation" with "the power of looking" (qtd. in Eyerman 2001: 9). Ron Eyerman develops her ideas, claiming that representation

is "associated with the capacity to see and the possibility to make visible" (2001: 9). In so doing, Eyerman emphasizes both the invisibility perpetuated on black people and the power of looking for them to disrupt the stereotyped image and to invent themselves under the dehumanizing supremacist gaze. In Morrison's work, the looks that heal refer to the revolutionary gazing back of black people in the company of a self-confirming community[89] or in an ancestral presence. For this reason, she replaces the white nullifying gaze with the black ancestral gaze, which aligns itself in turn with the maternal gaze which is integral to and favorable for identity formation in the imaginary order in Lacan's theoretical system. In "Fixing Methodologies," Barbara Christian claims, "in my [Caribbean] tradition, ancestral spirits must be nurtured and fed, or they will be angry or, at the least, sad" (1997a: 366). Significantly, the ancestral presence provides an ambiance which empowers black people to return the gaze, thereby obtaining agency in Morrison's fiction. In so doing, Morrison provides a possible way for black people to step out of the shadow of the white object gaze, thereby obtaining healing from the scars stemming from the hierarchical class-caste relationship between black and white peoples.

In "On Being a Fat Black Girl" (2001), Margaret K. Bass introduces her experience as a fat black girl in a racist, fat-hating culture. In this essay, she recalls being mocked, violated and hurt as a nine-year-old girl by her classmates; she was gnawed by a sense of foreignness "every time [she was] invited to 'do lunch' and [she found] that no one ever [ate] but [her]" when living and working at a mostly white university (2001: 223, 225). Finally, she admits to having been defeated, humiliated, put in her place, "marvel[ling] at how closely related this language is to the language of racism" (2001: 229). It becomes evident that being black and fat, Bass is doubly removed from the West's conception of normalcy. In a somewhat similar vein, in the short story "Everyday Use," Alice Walker associates the "Mama" Mrs. Johnson's fatness with racial subordination and exploitation:

> In real life I am a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands. In the winter I wear flannel nightgowns to bed and overalls during the day. I can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man. My *fat* keeps me hot in zero weather. I can work outside all day, breaking ice to get water for washing. (1994: 24, italics mine)

Yet her fat turns her into a spectacle when her daughter Dee arrives home with her new boyfriend: Mama fails to pull herself together to stand up to greet them:

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[89] In this thesis, community is studied as taking on the attributes of the maternal figure/body in chapter 7.

"'Don't get up,' says Dee. Since I am stout it takes something of a push. You can see me trying to move a second or two before I make it" (1994: 28). By linking fatness with Mama's degraded social position, Walker delves into the nature of black exploitation in a culture enjoined by white aesthetics and supremacy; black people's reduction to expendable bodies facilitates their domination and exploitation by white people.

Morrison struggles for an articulation of the black female body which is different from the traditional stereotypical representations of black females in her work. In *Tar Baby*, she foregrounds the African spiritual figure as a proud and vital African woman in yellow:

> The vision itself was a woman much too tall. Under her long canary yellow dress Jadine knew there was *too much hip*, *too much bust*. The agency would laugh her out of the lobby, so why was she and everybody else in the store transfixed? The height? The skin like tar against the canary yellow dress? The woman walked down the aisle as though her many-colored sandals were pressing gold tracks on the floor. Two upside-down *V*'s were scored into each of her cheeks, her hair was wrapped in a gelée as yellow as her dress. The people in the aisles watched her without embarrassment, with full glances instead of sly ones. [. . .] She looked up then and they saw something in her eyes so powerful it had burnt away the eyelashes. (1982b: 45, original italics)

Morrison portrays the woman as someone visually familiar and attractive, yet strange and other to Jadine. With her large hips and prominent breasts, the African woman occupies a space closer to the centre than Jadine, though fatness and blackness usually combine to signify black women's cultural inferiority in America. Already Europeanized, Jadine is torn between mixed feelings of mesmerisation and awe. As a stranger, the African woman surprisingly awakens Jadine to a natural part of herself that she has deserted and despises. Transfixed by the presence of the woman, Jadine struggles in desperation to abject her in order to align herself with the white supremacist viewer. However, riveted by the "eyes too beautiful for eyelashes," she "followed her all the way to the edge of the world where the plate glass stopped" (1982b: 46). Jadine's sense of wholeness disperses when the woman turns her head sharply around, turning the former into a sight:

> And there, just there – a moment before the cataclysm when all loveliness and life and breath in the world was about to disappear – the woman turned her head sharply around to the left and looked right at Jadine. [. . .] with a small parting of her lips, shot an arrow of saliva between her teeth down to the pavement and the hearts below. (1982b: 46)

In this passage, the author illustrates the critical role of look and capacity to make itself visible to the identity formation of black people. With powerful eyes gazing back at the viewer, the woman defies the category of subhuman beyond the pale of white comprehension; she refuses to let the black rivalry provoked by white racism devalue her. In this connection, Schreiber states, "In Morrison's text, the erotic other jeopardizes the dominant structure by gazing back" (2001: 120). In view of Jadine's metamorphosis from gazing subject to the object of the black gaze, the eroticized African woman gains agency through gazing back to undermine the dominant culture. hooks proposes that "even in the worse circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency" (1992: 116). In this light, the agency the African woman achieved empowers her, calling into question the white supremacist ways of looking represented by Jadine. By the end of the novel, Jadine laments her degradation under the woman's powerful gaze: "And an African woman, with a single glance from eyes that had burned away their own lashes, could discredit your elements" (Morrison 1982b: 288). Socially accepted in America, racism fails to touch the black woman's self-image; by contrast, Europeanized through internalizing white aesthetic norms, Jadine is depersonalized by the proud, powerful woman's oppositional gaze. Analogously, in "Everyday Use," Alice Walker portrays Dee as an ambitious, brave black girl who "was determined to stare down any disaster in her efforts" (1994: 26). Indeed, both Morrison and Walker realize the formative role of the white gaze to black subjectivity, therefore exhorting black people to look back in order to circumvent the dissembling, controlling supremacist gaze.

Jadine's undeniable desire for the black body suggests the African woman as an uncanny, ancestral figure who evokes the African spiritual being populating the primal place uncontaminated by European white hermeneutics. Exuding pride, self-love and confidence, she articulates race-ingrained dignity and beauty that transcend culture. On the other hand, unequipped with the ability to coexist with the African within, Jadine is a foreigner to herself. Though enthralled by the abundance of life emanating from the woman, she fails to humanize her. Similarly, her admiration for the woman coincides with her attraction to Son, which, lingering on his physical beauty, functions to fetishize and sexualize him. Failing to incorporate her spiritual self, Jadine is destined to wander in the borderland of American culture. And her appearance as a foreigner to her people is witnessed by the swamp women looking down from the rafters of the trees. When exploring the peristyle's mossy center lawn, Jadine sinks into a tar pit, nearly devoured by the untamed woods of the Isle des Chevalier. Struggling to get free, she finally clings to a nearby tree while watched by the women hanging from the trees:

> They were delighted when first they saw her, thinking a runaway child had been restored to them. But upon looking closer they saw differently. This girl was fighting to get away from them. The women hanging from the trees were quiet now, but arrogant – mindful as they were of their value, their exceptional femaleness; knowing as they did that the first world of the world had been built with their sacred properties; that they alone could hold together the stones of pyramids and the rushes of Moses's crib; knowing their steady consistency, their pace of glaciers, their permanent embrace, they wondered at the girl's desperate struggle down below to be free, to be something other than they were. (Morrison 1982b: 183)

With their direct unmediated gaze of recognition, the swamp women are portrayed by Morrison and identified later by Jadine as diaspora mothers: "No matter what you did, the diaspora mothers with pumping breasts would impugn your character" (1982b: 288). The swamp women as well as the woman in yellow represent the female African masses, attuned to their culture and associated with the source of life. For this reason, they are empowered to look or look back, a step which is integral to the formation of their cultural identity.

In *Song of Solomon*, Pilate distinguishes herself as the diaspora mother with her lack of a navel, which engages untiring, creative readings from the people around her. Susan Willis suggests:

> it would be wrong simply to see Pilate's lack as just one more example of the mutilated, deformed, and stigmatized characters who tend to crop up in Morrison's writing. And it would be equally wrong to dismiss these forms of physical difference as nothing more than the author's obsession with freaks of nature. Rather [. . .] Pilate's lack is to be read in social terms. It [. . .] functions as a metaphor which allows the reader to perceive a unique personal relationship to society as a whole. (1982: 39)

With a lack regarded as a form of freakishness, Pilate is deprived of sexual life; yet her "lack becomes the basis for her liberation from narrowly defined human relationships based on sexuality and the expansion of her social world to one based on human sensitivity" (1982: 39). She incarnates the Lacanian libido which emerges as "the part of a living being that is lost when that being is produced through the straits of sex" (Lacan 2006: 718). As with Sula, Pilate eventually survives physical death. As Morrison explains in a conversation, "Pilate is larger than life and never really dies in that sense. She was not born, anyway – she gave birth to herself. So the question of her birth and death is irrelevant" (McKay 1994: 146). Clearly, Pilate was not born into the symbolic world, therefore having escaped the ripping effect of the white symbolic.

Pilate's lack acts as the real which has transcended the dismembering effect of the white-dominated, often predatory America culture, thereby setting people closest to her in motion. She registers as the foreigner who has transgressed the boundary between self and other. Julia Kristeva reads the foreigner as "appertaining to everything, to the entire tradition, and that weightlessness in the infinity of cultures and legacies gives him the extravagant ease to innovate" (1991: 32). Pilate's status as a foreigner spares her the horror of looking at herself through racial eyes. In other terms, her refusal to serve as the phallus of men endows her with a distinct freedom: she is spared the self-annihilating look of male viewers. Correspondingly, Willis remarks that

> there is just no need for Pilate to affirm herself through race [. . .] For Pilate, blackness is already unequivocal. And pastlessness does not endanger identity, or separate her from society, as it does for Shadrack. Rather, it liberates the self into society. (1982: 39)

Consequently, blackness serves to signify Pilate's inalienable identity. Denise Heinze observes: "Pilate, perhaps like Africa, is black, unfettered, expansive, and free" (1993: 137), which in turn contributes to her role as a culture-inheritor. Arguably, the lack inscribes Pilate as a maternal body: everyone must creatively read the text of her smooth stomach. Accordingly, Pilate figures as the maternal body that roots her black offspring.

In *Love*, as if to match the overwhelming silence embodied by Cosey, the elderly woman L, opens the story with her foreboding monologue interspersed with "the nostalgic and bitter thoughts of the other main characters" (Pinckney 2003). Disembodied and reduced to a background murmur or music, she contrasts the silence symbolizing Cosey. As if to balance the structure of the novel, L catalyzes the connection of the Cosey women, helping them to survive the darkness cast by the patriarch throughout the novel. Both in life and death, she presents herself everywhere, visible or invisible, to shield her girls from harm and injury; hovering over the Cosey world, she provides a critical and judging voice over all the events, suffusing the dialogue in this novel with an atmosphere of being witnessed, of eavesdropping: "*But it's forty years on, now; the Coseys have disappeared from public view and I'm afraid for them almost every day*" (Morrison 2004: 8, original italics). It is evident that Morrison suggests that L is the presocial, primordial mother whose protective look escorts her women children on their way to center and self.

In her fictional world, Morrison dedicates herself to restoring the black body from the dissembling white gaze in an effort to expose and explore the ravages of slavery. Marginalized and devalued by the gaze, black people struggle to locate them-

selves in it, which speaks to their traumatic reenactment of the past. Consequently, the object gaze debilitates them, suggesting the aftershock of systemic violence. Significantly, Morrison emphasizes the power in looking, exhorting black people to gaze back, to abject the dehumanizing white gaze, to enter into a centred self. Furthermore, she highlights the self-affirming role of the protective maternal/ancestral gaze, thus orientating her narrative towards healing. In chapter 7, I will elaborate on the transgressive yet constructive role of the body to illuminate the process of healing of black people from the trauma of slavery.

7 LOCATING HEALING IN THE BODY

> The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections.
>
> – Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, 1992.

> The body becomes a place – if not *the* place – to root oneself.
>
> – Karin Luisa Badt, "The Roots of the Body in Toni Morrison: A *Mater* of 'Ancient Properties,'" 1995.

> In forgetting, there is a future and in what is yet to come, there is forgetting.
>
> – Petar Ramadanovic, *Forgetting Futures: On Memory, Trauma, and Identity*

This chapter explores the black female body as the locus of healing the scars of slavery for American people of African origin who have succumbed to the after-effects of chattel enslavement. In her fiction, Morrison makes efforts to restore and invigorate the traumatized black body which documents the inhumanity of slavery; in so doing, she challenges the often racist white culture which, as the previous chapter demonstrated, upholds the effacement or degradation of black bodies. Elizabeth Grosz points out that the coding of femininity with corporeality is employed to justify women's secondary social position and, accordingly, patriarchal oppression. She further contends that

> female sexuality and women's powers of reproduction are the defining (cultural) characteristics of women, and, at the same time, these very functions render women vulnerable, in need of protection or special treatment, as variously prescribed by patriarchy. (1994: 13–14)

In a similar manner, in a culture dominated by racist colonization, the black body is rendered biological, natural and noncultural, utilized to define the white dominators as civilized and cultural. According to bell hooks, black people are deemed more naturally, inherently in touch with their bodies, "less alienated than other groups in this society," which facilitates "the national perception of African Americans as venal and inhumane beings" (qtd. in Henderson 2002: 4; Henderson 2002: 5). Consequently, black bodies in general and black female bodies in particular are devalued and commodified as exploitable and expendable bodies. Likewise, in "Summoning Somebody," Vanessa D. Dickerson compellingly contends:

> Historically relegated to the auction block instead of the pedestal, the black female body has been constructed as the ugly end of a wearisome Western dialectic: not sacred but profane, not angelic but demonic, not fair lady but ugly darky. (2001: 195–196)

The reduction of the black female body, however, corresponds to its phallic function for black males as well as white people – people inhabiting a higher social position in patriarchal, racist America.

Black women's reproductive function leads them more closely than black men to the body, making them more available or accessible for exploitation, which serves to sustain the legacy of slavery. In *Maternal Body and Voice*, Paula Gallant Eckard remarks that "generally speaking, maternal subjectivity – the presentation of pregnancy, childbirth, and the experience of motherhood from the mother's perspective – has not been well represented in written culture" (2002: 1). In Morrison's fictional world, the body which remembers experience is often scarred and female, significantly highlighting a pre-linguistic, literal language which resists the symbolic economy enjoined by the paternal Word. Significantly, Morrison revises or rewrites the paternal symbolic as what Jean Wyatt describes as a "maternal symbolic," which "discuss[es] not only an alternative language incorporating maternal and material values but also a system that, like Lacan's symbolic, locates people in relation to other subjects" (1993: 475). It is apparent that Wyatt reads the body as a sociocultural entity, participating in the function of the signifying chain.

Morrison's fiction appears as a refiguring of the black body so that it moves from the periphery to the center. Understanding the body as the "very 'stuff' of subjectivity," Grosz contends "the body is not simply a sign to be read, a symptom to be deciphered, but also a force to be reckoned with" (1994: ix, 120). It is clear that the body functions as the Lacanian signifier which inscribes the influence of external excitations, designating the subject as a symbolic being, and situating him/her in relation to other people as signifiers in the symbolic. In this context, the black female body which stages the psychic dismemberment and disorientation of black people is also the body which tracks and roots them in the past. Correspondingly, Badt observes that "the body's meaning as a site of history – the only possible site of history for blacks in diaspora – is strikingly apparent in *Beloved*" (1995: 569). The body exhibits its polyvalence by appearing as special places and spaces which black people learn to inhabit in order to transform themselves. In Morrison's work, black people falling prey to the atrocities of slavery turn to the maternal body to reconnect themselves to their cultural past, to root the black self. For example, Paul D's tracing figures on Sethe's back opens a new

chapter in their life. Thus, the return to the racialized mother promises or signifies healing for people who have fallen victim to the cultural trauma of slavery.

7.1 Scarring the Black Body

In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz reminds us that dichotomous thinking tends to polarize body and mind, rendering the former as inferior and subordinated to the latter: "the primary term defines itself by expelling its other and in this process establishes its own boundaries and borders to create an identity for itself" (1994: 3). Grosz addresses the phallogocentric gesture of mastery which regards female bodies as texts on which writings of male desire are inscribed. The binarization of the sexes anticipates the coupling of the mind with maleness and the body with femaleness.

In abjecting the body *qua* the Other, the mind is embodied and privileged. The body thus becomes what the mind must expel in order to retain its integrity. Given Kristeva's designation of the abject as what objectifies the subject, the structure of it is not confinable within language, the encounter with which is therefore dehumanizing and traumatic. On one level, the body is understood as inert, imperfect, frail, a medium to be coerced or acted on by either the mind or outside stimulations. On the other, however, it is represented, even constructed, as unruly, unreliable, intrusive and disruptive, and the taming of the body in the service of the mind seems to be a psychological exigency. Eventually, coexisting with the mind is an eviscerated body which contrasts with the mind's ability to think and act.

The body engraved with past memories is a living dead. Grosz examines the idea that the body is composed of "a series of surfaces, energies, and forces, a mode of linkage, a discontinuous series of processes, organs, flows, and matter," instead of a material whole (1994: 120). Significantly, in so doing, she dismembers "a fully functional organic body" and disrupts the "perceived hierarchy" of it (Quashie 2004: 101). On the other hand, however, she gives life back to each part of the body, insisting that these corporeal surfaces are in fact bodies themselves, which "always extend the frameworks which attempt to contain them, to seep beyond their domains of control" (Grosz 1994: xi). Accordingly, the body remembers and talks in a special way. In *Black Women, Identity, and Cultural Theory*, Kevin Everod Quashie introduces his concept of the "memory body," to elaborate the corporeality of memory: "As a corporeality, memory not only figures as a psychic component of identity but also is a literal other, an entity whose character and fleshly constitution informs subjectivity" (2004: 101, 99). In so doing, Quashie

dissolves the border between body and body memory (somatic symptom); more importantly, the body which remembers achieves a measure of autonomy – beyond the control of the mind.

Lacan's illumination of the origin of the ego is also useful to explore the relation between body and mind. Plagued with desire due to cultural and symbolic intervention, "the subject originally locates and recognizes desire through the intermediary, not only of his own image, but of the body of his fellow being" (1988a: 147). Lacan explains, "It is in so far as he recognises his desire in the body of the other that the exchange takes place. It is in so far as his desire has gone over to the other side that he assimilates himself to the body of the other and recognises himself as body" (1988a: 147). Accordingly, the subject comes into being as a result of his/her desire for the body on which experiences of outside objects are deposited. In parallel, in Elizabeth Grosz's discourse, the ego registers the decisive effects of external excitations through the body: "the ego [. . .] is something like an internal screen onto which the illuminated and projected images of the body's outer surface are directed" (1994: 37). For this reason, the ego figures as a borderland, bridging the psychic inside and the social outside.

The body participates in the formation of the ego. Grosz remarks, "The body is not opposed to culture, a resistant throw-back to a natural past; it is itself a cultural, *the* cultural, product" (1994: 23, original italics). Similarly, Karin Luisa Badt claims that "the body is the matrix for psychological, philosophical, and political self-placement" (1995: 569). Existing as a cultural product, it is the small-o other, that is, the *objet a* that the Lacanian subject strives to incorporate into him/herself throughout his life; on another level, inscribed with dominant cultural norms, it is the Other that suggests the castration and violence done to subjugated people. This is most powerfully seen in the myth of Narcissus (see 5.4), the boy who falls in love with his mirror image, bears witness to the importance of the body to psychic formation. Juliet Mitchell observes that "for Narcissus there was no way out of this circular fate – he couldn't possess himself, and so, driven by his frustration to the point of desire, he finally died" (1974: 30). Put slightly differently, Narcissus dies from his failure to incorporate into himself his mirror image – he couldn't possess his own body.

Grosz points out that the mind/body opposition has diffused into other oppositional pairs such as "reason and passion, sense and sensibility, outside and inside, self and other, depth and surface" (1994: 3). In order to identify themselves as superior and powerful, white people designate their black Other as exploitable bodies, thus incorporating the whites/blacks dyad within the mind/body, temporality/spatiality, culture/nature, male/female binaries in Western social thought.

Correspondingly, Carol E. Henderson argues that, within a political and legal climate solidifying white male privilege,

> the African American body has been viewed more or less as a conglomeration of social meanings, meanings that, in the end, *mark* this body as Other or "bodiless" according to specific cultural and national mandates that objectify the African American body so much that black identity is formed in relation to the split between mind and body. (2002: 4, original italics)

One result is that the body/mind binary functions implicitly to define black people as passive and nonhistorical, thereby depriving them of visibility, voice and choice. Henderson makes essentially the same point, remarking that "much of the methodological figurings of the systems of oppression consistently silence the voice of the subjugated using the body as their vehicle" (2002: 6). The silencing strategy employed by the white symbolic is first and foremost testified by the bit which bridles Paul D and the bit that implants a permanent smile on the face of Sethe's mother: "She'd had the bit so many times she smiled. When she wasn't smiling she smiled, and I never saw her own smile" (Morrison 1997: 203). Eventually, black bodies in general and black female bodies are devalued and degraded. As Vanessa Dickerson contends, "used to extend the life, health, and desirability of others, the black female body is more than a prosthesis." More exactly, it is the abject phallus: "for white men a site of political empowerment; for black males a source of being, love, and shame; for white women a source of, among other things, freedom and aestheticization – the body of the black female matters deeply" (2001: 195).

Significantly, Grosz calls for the destroying of the association of corporeality "with one sex (or race), which then takes on the burden of the other's corporeality for it" (1994: 22). Her gesture clearly challenges the repression and subjugation of black people and women in the American history of colonization. In consequence, she advocates the establishing of "a plural, multiple field of possible body 'types,' no one of which functions as the delegate or representative of the others." She further delegates this field as "a discontinuous, nonhomogenous, nonsingular space, a space [. . .] that is established and regulated according to various perspectives and interests" (1994: 22–23). Briefly, what she promotes is the dismantling of the domination of one type of body functioning as the model of all other types of body because the obsession with one body type (in the West, the white, youthful, beautiful body) inevitably brings about neurotic obsession with dominant aesthetic norms.

In Morrison's fiction, the bodies that demand to be engaged align themselves firstly with bodies in pain, or in Karin Luisa Badt's words, bodies "disoriented –

shellshocked, drowned, burned, or mutilated" (1995: 567). It is arguable that Morrison draws on the attributes of the corporeal surfaces to trigger the reenactment of past slavery in the United States. In *Scarring the Black Body*, Carol E. Henderson emphasizes that "the very way we assess and contextualize social, political, and ethnic representations within the national public sphere revolves around the rhetorical fluidity of the American body politic" (2002: 3–4). In Morrison's novels, mutilated or disfigured bodies function firstly to register slavery-induced traumatic memory; secondly, however, they testify to the patriarchal oppression of women.

This is dramatically shown in *Beloved*, where the baby ghost is reincarnated as the full-grown eponymous character and is the central figure in a house in ferment. Treating Beloved as the enactment of the past in the present, Doreatha Drummond Mbalia writes, "not until the cause of the separation is clarified, is out in the open, struggled with and struggled against, can African people come together again" (2004: 92). Accordingly, encapsulating the cause, Beloved gives body to the cultural trauma rooted in the legacy of slavery; she "materialize[s] into a visible, tangible entity of which the community is aware, instead of an amorphous apparition, an oppression of which the community is unconscious" (2004: 92). Mbalia emphasizes the corporeality of slavery trauma and the body's healing function. In Morrison's fiction, the body serves as the place of rememory which disrupts the constraining effect of the isolation and solitude imposed on black people.

Bodies in pain in Morrison's books are epitomized by Beloved, whose body fails to negotiate the weight of her head when she enters into the picture: "All day and all night she sat there, her head resting on the trunk in a position abandoned enough to crack the brim in her straw hat. Everything hurt" (1997: 50). Throughout this novel, she is afflicted by a body that literally falls apart, which highlights the violence done to black bodies: "Beloved, inserting a thumb in her mouth along with the forefinger, pulled out a back tooth. [. . .] Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe, Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once" (1997: 133). Arguably, she serves as the memory body of the traumatic slave past. In Laura Di Prete's words, she figures as "a 'foreign body' that tirelessly haunts the shattered lives of those who have experienced the trauma of [her] loss" (2006: 53). Arising from the water signifying the Middle Passage, she emphasizes the exigency of rememorying and working through the loss of the Sixty-Million in general and Sethe's loss of her daughter in particular.

In *Love*, L emphasizes the harm done to black females by the persecuting capitalist patriarchy which stems from the slavery-induced cultural trauma: "*Some tale*

about dragon daddies and false-hearted men, or mean mamas and friends who did them wrong. Each story has a monster in it who made them tough instead of brave" (2004: 5, original italics). For example, one of Junior's feet is mutilated and deformed like a hoof, bearing witness to the damage done to the innocence of children as well as the maltreatment inflicted on the body and mind of black females by the system.

Heed's deformed hands too symbolize the exploitation of black females by dominant capitalist patriarchy. Ensnared and entrapped in the darkness embodied by Cosey at the premature age of eleven, Heed figures in this novel as the fugitive immured within the dismal mansion. Her fluctuations of status, her wrestling with her life-long friend and enemy Christine, and even her death form the basis of Morrison's examination of the ravages done to Cosey's kinswomen by the patriarch. By consigning herself to marriage, Heed falls prey to Cosey's desire: "he hoped to end [his widowerhood] by marrying a girl he could educate to his taste" (2004: 129). This is indicative of Heed's phallic function for him: "Knowing she had no schooling, no abilities, no proper raising, he chose her anyway while everybody else thought she could be run over" (2004: 81). Yet while her marriage to Cosey procures economic and socio-political gain, she is in effect disempowered and debilitated, as disclosed by her useless, twisted hands. Despite her hostess position in the mansion after Cosey's decease, she is buried alive by the devouring darkness permeating the mansion. After escaping her dysfunctional ghetto family, she ends up an invalid dependent on the daily services of Christine. Her unabated desire for power is suggestive of her feverish desire to escape from an underestimated life, from the mansion, and from her body.

At some points, Morrison emphasizes the polarity between body and mind. For example, elaborating on the doubling of Sula and Nel, Mbalia comments:

> Perhaps what is most insightful is the particular halves that each represents: Sula, the mind; Nel, the body. Nel's mind dies when Sula leaves Medallion, but her body continues to perform the routine, necessary chores traditionally associated with women. In contrast, Sula's mind continues to function after her body ceases to do so. (2004: 44)

Yet Morrison's tendency to relate Nel to the body corresponds to her efforts to disclose the overwhelming racial, patriarchal straitjackets forced on black females. In a similar manner, Grosz rightly points out that "patriarchal oppression [. . .] justifies itself, at least in part, by connecting women much more closely than men to the body and, through this identification, restricting women's social and economic roles to (pseudo) biological terms" (1994: 14). On the other hand, Sula is very conscious of her body, employing it to experiment with life in order to locate

herself in the symbolic. Accordingly, Morrison invents Sula to present possible ways for subjected black people to struggle against the soul-death of slavery. Significantly, Sula returns and haunts Nel even after her death, reflecting Nel's effort to master what was never fully grasped in the first place. To clarify, Nel is rememorying Sula's embrace of the bodily, visceral existence as the essence of the black experience in America. Though greatly antagonized by Sula's seduction of her husband, Nel finally takes over her mind, surviving not only her double Sula but also the shattering experience of slavery. Foregrounding a dialogue between life and death, Nel's rememory of Sula empowers and transforms her; probing female friendship, this novel presents the female doubles' participation in each other's rememory as the way to a complete, spiritual self. Viewed as a whole, in Morrison's fiction, the body in pain speaks to the violence perpetuated on black people by the slave trauma which transforms speaking human beings into exploitable, expendable bodies. On the other hand, it reflects Morrison's objection to the historical reduction of African Americans to commodified bodies, and her prizing of the body as the site of healing for them.

7.2 African Ancestral Presence as Memory Body

> Human life has [a] rhythm of nature which nothing can destroy. On the level of the individual, this rhythm includes birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death, entry into the community of the departed and finally entry into the company of the spirits.
>
> – John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1990.

In the above passage, Mbiti suggests that in African belief systems human life forms a circle, from birth to after physical death, defying destruction and stagnation. The community of the departed can be subdivided into the living-dead and the spirits. The living-dead is conceptualized by the critic as "a person who is physically dead but alive in the memory of those who knew him in his life as well as being alive in the world of the spirits" (1990: 25, original italics). The living-dead is in effect buried alive.[90] Yet if the living-dead escapes the memory of the living, they enter into the community of the spirits who might become clan or nation guardians in African culture (1990: 26). In Morrison's works, the spirits function as an ancestral presence which protects African American people under the lingering aftermath of genocidal slavery. By way of encoding an African

[90] See my discussion of live burial in 5.4.

worldview, which sees a continuum, rather than a strict boundary between the living and the dead, past and present, and the moral categories of good and evil, Morrison lays claim to a restoration of the history and spirituality of the African American cultural experience.

In *Beloved*, Sixo distinguishes himself as an African ancestor with his affinity for nature: with "flame-red tongue" and "indigo face," he "went among trees at night. For dancing, he said, to keep his bloodlines open, he said. Privately, alone, he did it" (1997: 21, 25). Sixo uses his body as a locus of spiritual exchange with his ancestor, acting as a memory body of the African cultural past. Barbara Christian points out that "for West Africans [. . .] nature is seen as a part of the human and the divine and is considered sacred in much the same way that churches in the Christian religion are considered sacred" (1997a: 368). The central role of nature arises from its function as a bond with their ancestor spirits, which offer a sense of continuity, connectedness, and collectivism for the African.

As a folk figure, Sixo struggles constantly against the stultifying white symbolic. His very name challenges the signifying system: appearing as a number, Sixo firstly signifies the Sixty Million and more, implying Sixo's sub-humanity under the bondage of slavery: secondly, it suggests sixty (six followed by a zero), which has Thirty-Mile woman as his perfect half. Sixo finds, courts, and impregnates this woman on a distant plantation, and by projecting his spiritual self on to this woman, he obtains a death-defying freedom: he laughs and triumphs in the face of impending death, yelling, "Seven-O! Seven-O!" – a song that sounds like gibberish to schoolteacher and can only be deciphered by Paul D: Thirty-Mile Woman has gotten away with Sixo's blossoming seed (Morrison 1997: 228). Rejecting his master's language, Sixo has already moved beyond the ruling symbolic; projecting himself on his beloved woman and passing on his life through her, he is the indestructible, larger-than-life real.

In "Hiding Fire and Brimstone in Lacy Groves" (2005), Lorie Watkins Fulton points out that the conflicted tree images participate in the construction and interpretation of black manhood in *Beloved*. After their reunion in 124 Bluestone, Paul D told Sethe that Halle was depersonalized by the scene of her violation by the white boys, petrified like a log in the loft (see 5.4). Though Sethe is greatly traumatized by her invisible presence of her husband at the scene of her violation, Paul D aligns himself with Halle, defending the latter's lack of action and contending that "'a man ain't a goddamn ax. Chopping, hacking, busting every goddamn minute of the day. *Things get to him*. Things he can't chop down because they are *inside*'" (1997: 69, italics mine). Safely entrenched inside the black male body, the things have in effect encroached on his sense of manhood. In this sense,

the things that get to Halle recall the Kristevan abject which points to the place where meaning falls apart. It is arguable that trees are treated by Morrison as the memory body of the past, the site of history.

In Morrison's work, certain spaces or places are personalized. In "Rootedness," Morrison elaborates on the "spaces and places" in which a single person could "enter and behave as an individual within the context of the community" (2008: 56). In this way, place is embodied and endowed with life. Eudora Welty defines place as follows: "Place in fiction is the named, identified, concrete, exact and exacting, and therefore credible, gathering spot of all that has been felt, is about to be experienced, in the novel's progress" (qtd. in Paquet-Deyris 2001: 229). From this perspective, the community gives body to this physical and spiritual place; it is life-giving as it offers a womblike space which helps the black people inside it to dispel the pain of individuation and degradation under the colonizing culture. Morrison further explicates: "A small remnant of that you can see sometimes in Black churches where people shout. It is a very personal grief and a personal statement done among people you trust." Black people's capacity to commiserate with each other derives from the collective memory of the horror stemming from slavery. Therefore, Black churches provide a maternal ambience, protecting the people from systemic violence: "while the shouter is performing some rite that is extremely subjective, the other people are performing as a community in protecting that person" (2008: 56–57). Rooting black people in the past, the black community has in effect taken on the role of the maternal body in Morrison's fiction.

Throughout her opus, Morrison tends to present the dialogue between self and other as a constructive and forceful means of healing. In *Love*, Morrison employs the Cosey Hotel to meditate on place not only as a means of containing the fear of borderlessness and madness, but also as a means of ensnaring desires. With the success of the Cosey Hotel and Resort, the owner permanently establishes his status as a charismatic spiritual leader of the black people, the women in particular, in the Florida coast area:

> Cosey's Resort was more than a playground; it was a school and a haven where people debated death in the cities, murder in Mississippi, and what they planned to do about it other than grieve and stare at their children. Then the music started, convincing them they could manage it all and last. (2004: 38)

As a place where black people loaded with the same unbearable past and problems confide in and empathize with each other, the Cosey Hotel and Resort is conducive to their positive psychic development. Accordingly, it appears as a

place where collective identity emerges; it functions to transform the traumatic past into a promising future.

In Morrison's fictional world, a small place of protection like a tree-house represents the female black body for black people suffering from either slavery or its lingering effect. In *Healing Crisis and Trauma with Body, Mind, and Spirit*, Barbara Rubin Wainrib suggests that "one of the most important things we can do with traumatized people is to teach them how to create their own 'safe place' before they start to approach" (2006: 105). This safe place provides a pre-oedipal, womblike safety for the victim. For example, in *Beloved*, Paul D freezes his heart in a tobacco tin when repeatedly traumatized by the inhuman, shattering experience he spends on a chain gang. Correspondingly, Badt contends that "Morrison makes clear throughout her corpus that the traumatic loss of boundaries, the return to the maternal, is necessary in order to restore 'authentic' identity" (1995: 568). Yet the return to the maternal is not necessarily traumatic. As discussed earlier, Black churches function to root black people in a protective, ego-confirming past, solidifying them into a diasporic We in the racist, colonizing culture of America.

Morrison displays a tendency to depict trees in corporeal terms as protective spaces for her characters. Trees are either a body in full – the maternal body serving to root their traumatized black children – or are central attributes of bodies, tracks to the maternal body. Buried alive by her mother's claustrophobic love inside the house of 124, Denver creates her own place in a pleasant room of a protective bower, a place totally invisible to anyone except herself:

> It began as a little girl's houseplay, but as her desires changed, so did the play. Quiet, primate and completely secret [. . .] First a playroom (where the silence was softer), then a refuge (from her brothers' fright), soon the place became the point. In that bower, closed off from the hurt of the hurt world, Denver's imagination produced its own hunger and its own food, which she badly needed because loneliness wore her out. [. . .] Veiled and protected by the live green walls, she felt ripe and clear, and salvation was as easy as a wish. (Morrison 1997: 28–29)

Arguably, the secret house of the bower which has to be crawled into is womblike, figuring as the maternal body. The tree room is the place where Denver communes with the protective Suggs, carrying on her message of loving one's own body: "I should always listen to my body and love it" (1997: 209). In Denver's place of rescue, Suggs frees her from the nightmare which is symptomatic of Sethe's smothering maternal love. Accordingly, Denver's rememory of Suggs speaks to Morrison's emphasis on body as the site of healing – to get in touch with and rooted in the body. Overflowing with life and Suggs' spirit, the house

proves to be nurturing, rejuvenating, intended by the author for Denver's embarking on a self-restitution quest. Fulton interprets Denver's rememory as her unconscious connecting of "her sexuality to her place of refuge" (2005: 193). Rather, Morrison is suggesting the corporeality of memory, emphasizing the tree room as a maternal memory body in which Denver's divided body comes back to life. Consequently, Suggs takes on the role of a protective maternal figure, orienting Denver on her journey to self-connection and self-enlightenment.

Contrasting with the encircled space of the bower supplying Denver with ocean-like safety, 124 Bluestone figures as a place of no time in which Beloved, the wicked memory body, frees herself, lending presence and form to the presymbolic real. Julia Kristeva taps into the nature of time by distinguishing between the Father-prescribed-time and that which exists outside time:

> There is no time without speech. Therefore, there is no time without the father. [. . .] It is understandable, then, that what the father doesn't say about the unconscious, what sign and time repress in the drives, appears as their *truth* (if there is no 'absolute', what is truth, if not the unspoken of the spoken?) and that this truth can be imagined only as a *woman*. (1986: 153, original italics)

For Kristeva, woman exists outside time and the Paternal word. Her insight parallels Lacan's assertion that woman fails to register as a category in the symbolic world. Accordingly, woman sustains herself as the locus of the timeless unconscious, which in turn functions to reveal the lack of the symbolic. The house functions as a maternal body, a utopian world of pre-oedipal plenitude, where Sethe locks up herself and her daughters. On another level, Laura Di Prete asserts that "124 Bluestone Road offers itself as the space where these [traumatic repressed] memories forcefully and repeatedly reemerge, as the ghost makes itself visible or audible through various manifestations" (2006: 54). In short, 124 Bluestone figures as the abject maternal body where the paternal symbolic collapses and the maternal symbolic triumphs.

In the abject house of 124, time is spatialized. This moment is indicated when Sethe and her daughters swirl over the ice, "holding hands, bracing each other [. . .] Making a circle or a line, the three of them could not stay upright for one whole minute" (Morrison 1997: 174). Morrison suggests their transgressing of the symbolic order with the ominous refrain: "Nobody saw them falling" (1997: 174). The line is repeated four times in the two-page description. Indeed, nobody sees Sethe and Denver fall under the spell of Beloved. Yet the experience does rejuvenate Sethe's body and rekindle her love of life: "all three – Sethe, Beloved and Denver [. . .] – laughed till they coughed. Sethe rose to her hands and knees,

laughter still shaking her chest, making her eyes wet. She stayed that way for a while, on all fours" (1997: 175). It seems probable that turning into uncontrollable tears, Sethe's laughter is an act of abjection – abjecting the otherness of death stemming from the legacy of the chattel system. Eventually, Sethe's disorientation upon Beloved's return withers her to a wraith, which culminates when Beloved, the vampiric victim, stretches her invisible fingers around her mother's windpipe.

In Morrison's work, the hand also signifies love. This is shown in *Jazz*, where Golden Gray compares the loss of paternal love to the absence of a limb: "This part of me that does not know me, has never touched me or lingered at my side. This gone-away hand that never helped me over the stile, or guided me past the dragons, pulled me up from the ditch into which I stumbled" (1993: 158–159). This hand which shrinks speaks to the dysfunctional black parenting resulting from the after-effects of chattel bondage. In this connection, despite the fact that the apparent parent is the father, Karin Luisa Badt calls attention to the way "the omnipresent discourse of the maternal – from figurations of wombs to amniotic 'sea-water' – works to delineate the male parent as a puppet presence" (1995: 570). In this context, hand is employed by Morrison to represent maternity. The "gone-away hand" responds to the hand which Joe compulsively, repeatedly seeks after in this novel. Speaking to a woman he believes to be his mother, Joe murmurs, "Just a sign [. . .] just show me your hand [. . .] and I'll know don't you know I have to know?" (Morrison 1993: 37). At another time, he whispers, "Is it you? Just say it. Say anything," and he continues, "Give me a sign, then. You don't have to say nothing. Let me see your hand. Just stick it out someplace and I'll go; I promise. A sign" (1993: 178). The hand which signifies his mother's presence functions as the track to the maternal body.

Joe throws himself into his affair with Dorcas. Yet when she becomes increasingly abrasive and persecuting, Joe shoots the girl, at the same time destroying his own future. By killing her, Joe internalizes her as a persecuting ego ideal inside his own ego; deranged by his loss of Dorcas and buried alive by remorse and self-pity, he succumbs to melancholia. Yet he at last pulls himself together from Dorcas' death after being informed by her friend Felice that he was "the last thing on her mind" (1993: 213). In this way, the criticizing ego ideal turns into a loving ideal ego which reconnects Joe to himself. Correspondingly, Badt reads Dorcas as the human expression of the desired body of the novel: "The other characters – Joe, Violet, Aunt Alice – are drawn to her because of the appeal of her carnality. Even her corpse brings out the urge to be touched" (1995: 570). Inciting desire and fear, Dorcas is represented by the author as the maternal *objet a*. Thus Joe's

claim of oneness with her is readable as his compensatory restoration of an idealized merger with his mother.

Badt points out the affinity between Dorcas, jazz and the City, interpreting them as the maternal body that tracks: "For ultimately what are tracks – the jazz record, the acne on Dorcas's face, the City streets – if not the tracks that lead to the mother?" (1995: 570). Throughout the novel, Joe is repeatedly drawn by the melody of jazz and by the City:

> he is bound to the track. It pulls him like a needle through the groove of a Bluebird record. Round and round about the town. That's the way the City spins you. Makes you do what it wants [. . .] All the while letting you think you are free; that you can jump into thickets because you like it . [. . .] You can't get off the track a City lays for you. (1993: 120)

Providing its inhabitants with a womb-like ambience, the City recalls the earlier discussed Black churchs where black people successfully merge the private and the public. Anne-Marie Paquet-Deyris depicts the City as "a vast receptacle of actual, historical, vocal, and memorial traces" (2001: 219). There, the victimized black people are able to shake off the pain of individuation and marginalization, reconnecting themselves to a cultural past abounding in nurturing and rejuvenating power.

In *Beloved*, Amy's hands function as the track to the maternal body: "In the silence of an Amy struck dumb for a change, Sethe felt the fingers of those *good hands* lightly touch her back. She could hear her breathing but still the whitegirl said nothing" (1997: 79, italics mine). The silence, however, gives voice to the violence the slaveowners have inflicted on Sethe's body. On the other hand, the actions of Amy's hands materialize love, symbolizing her sympathy, support, care and praise which have transcended language. It is arguable that the "good hands" recall and contrast with the hands that held Sethe down to steal her breast milk. To adapt Badt's comment on Paul D's tracing of Sethe's scar, May's hand "inspires the trajectory of the novel's movement from dead flesh that has forgotten to sensual (maternal) flesh that re-members. The 'scar,' history, becomes a living part of the present" (1995: 569). Foregrounding Sethe's mutilated back, Morrison seeks not only to call attention to the social abuses of African American people in the legacy of slavery but also to rescue the African American body from its inanimate position as the abject phallus for white people.

With her affinity to water and music, L embodies an ancestral, maternal presence. Her affinity to water is first and foremost suggested by her uncanny birth: "*I was born in rough weather.* [. . .] *You could say going from womb water straight into*

rain marked me" (2004: 71, original italics). Delivered from water to water, L is actually not born, having escaped the splitting symbolic order, which empowers her to transcend the demarcating line between life and death. As a privileged discourse of the maternal often evoked by feminist critical thinkers, water performs maternity in this novel. Thus, Radhika Mohanram foregrounds "the waters of the ocean being linked to the intrauterine fluids within the pregnant mother," "feminized" ocean in Mohanram's words. She further contends that "as the material from which life originates, both the mother and the ocean remain constant before the cultural construction of meaning superimposed upon their materiality and substantiality. (2007: 92–93). Yet, in *Love*, the ocean is represented as male: as L claims, "*The ocean is my man now. He knows when to rear and hump his back, when to be quiet and simply watch a woman*" (2004: 117, original italics). Accordingly, the ocean and L double for each other. Clearly, Morrison resists feminizing the ocean, suggesting that she wants to avoid the culture-as- male/nature-as-female opposition.

As a spiritual, life-giving figure, L is also doubled by Police-heads. Hanging heavily over the ocean, Police-heads give body to the Freudian death drive when "blast[ing] up out of the waves to punish wayward women or swallow the misbehaving young" (2004: 7). Engulfing lives and hopes, Police-heads recall Cosey, representing poisonous white norms that have insinuated themselves into black psyches. Correlatively, Susan Neal Mayberry interprets the dark images of Police-heads as representative of "white male law, which takes its pleasure in raining on black male parades or takes advantage of black female sexuality" (2007: 266). In this light, death-signifying Police-heads suggest the aftershock of slavery, which, with its absent presence, was still victimizing black people in the 1990s. Though nobody "*flat out saw any Police-heads* [. . .] *but I knew they were around and knew what they looked like, too, because I'd already seen them in 1942 when some hardheaded children swam past the safety rope and drowned*" (Morrison 2004: 6, original italics). What drives the "hardheaded children" to death is maternal *jouissance* – merger with the maternal body. Morrison's attempt to align L with Police-heads through the swallowing ocean highlights the damage done to black motherhood by chattel slavery. As with the ocean, L fuses life with death. And it is natural that for Cosey, L is the harbinger of death, while for his women, she is a protective and life-saving figure. The varying expressions of the maternal memory body emphasize the ravages of chattel enslavement as well as the importance of being rooted in the cultural past for recovery from its after-effects.

7.3 Rememorying and Restoring the Black Body

In some African countries, newly circumcised boys, or neophytes, are classified as transitional-beings during the rite of passage. According to Victor Turner, secluded from the "realm of culturally defined and ordered states and statuses," they exist between boyhood and manhood (1967: 98). During this period, they are structurally invisible and ritually polluting, divested of their "previous habits of thought, feeling, and action"; on the other hand, they are "forced and encouraged to think about their society, their cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them." Accordingly, liminality is described as a "stage of reflection," during which the component elements of their former state are deconstructed and resolved into new composites (Turner 1967: 93–110). In essence, it proves to be "that which is neither this nor that, and yet is both" (1967: 99). Probing into the positive aspects of liminality, Turner claims, "Undoing, dissolution, decomposition are accompanied by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns" (1967: 99). Featuring boundless freedom, the ritual of circumcision that marks the African boys as transitional beings recalls the Kristevan foreigner who has fled from its origin and root. Analogously, transitional beings are deprived of everything: "They have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows. Their condition is indeed the very prototype of sacred poverty" (1967: 98–99, original italics). Divested of social bonds and identities, the neophytes are extremely malleable. And this state of unstructuredness gives them "additional powers to cope with their new station in life" (Turner 1967: 101). It is arguable that the ritual of male circumcision splits the neophytes from maternal ties, endowing them with a special empowering solitude, preparing them well for social positions; it functions to empower the neophytes as cultural and social human beings.

Studying postings calling for the capture of fugitive slaves, especially the ways slaveholders list the markings and features of the runway slaves, Carol E. Henderson points out that they enable a textual reading of the bodily scars of slaves, that is, "the ways the body was used to both absorb and textualize the racial imaginings of that era" (2002: 25). The visible scars of bondage listed by the postings testify to the maltreatment and exploitation of African slaves; resisting reconciliation with history, the bodily memory of scars lays claim to the real of history. On the other hand, the slaveowners' inclination to mark and brutalize the black body indicates their consciousness of the culturalness of the body.

Henderson goes on to point out that "contrary to the ways slaveowners represented the bodies of Africans in their postings, Africans viewed their tribal markings

as an extension of their *native* selves, a fleshly embodiment of tribal customs and histories" (2002: 29, original italics). He further observes that "in some cases, the process of scarification marked a coming of age, a part of the ceremony in which a young man or woman ascended into the ranks of adulthood." For example, within the African context, particularly among the Igbo people, a special ritualistic scar was conferred on the forehead of distinguished people such as judges and senators. This scar "indicated the highest distinction among governmental personages, and it separated royalty from the commoners." Evidently, marking royalty off from commoners, the scar served as the phallic signifier of potency and power. Eventually, Henderson comments that "the scar functions as a literal history of one's life, a visible symbol of one's national heritage" (2002: 30).

The scar is virtually the life message that is engraved and inscribed on the body. Elizabeth Grosz proposes that in many recent texts, the body has served as corporeal surfaces "on which messages, a text, are inscribed"; it is "the blank page on which engraving, graffiti, tattooing, or inscription can take place" (1994: 117). It is arguable then that, as the locus where the physical, social and psychological meet, the body is transformed from a biological makeup to a cultural product endowed with unlimited possibility. Of no less interest, for Grosz, the body strives for both "integration and cohesion, organic and psychic wholeness" and "fragmentations, fracturing, dislocations that orient bodies and body parts towards other bodies and body parts" (1994: 13). Grosz's gesture, however, manifests her challenge to the body as static, submissive and passive. In this light, the inscribed body attains a certain extent of autonomy and is charged with the libido. Correspondingly, Badt observes that the maternal body which tracks or has tracks functions to root Morrison's traumatized characters. Accordingly, she claims, "the desired 'body,' the body which tracks, is synonymous with the maternal body" (1995: 570). In Morrison's novels, scars inscribed on female bodies function as the libido which incites desire for the maternal body.

Lacan reads tattooing and scarification as libido, which is useful to explain the unlimited possibilities contained in the scar. Designating libido as an organ in understanding the nature of the drive, he suggests, "One of the most ancient forms in which this unreal organ is incarnated in the body, is tattooing, scarification" (Lacan 1977: 205–206). In this view, the scar is decipherable as the libido, which has the function of "situating the subject in [the Other], marking his place in the field of the group's relations, between each individual and all the others. And, at the same time, it obviously has an *erotic* function" (1977: 206, italics mine). It is apparent that the Lacanian libido is tightly entangled with desire, dealing with the subject's desire for the other. Correlatively, Freud conceived of the libido originally as the equivalent of Eros (1949: 6). It is arguable then that libido suggests

that tattooing/scarification functions to incite desire, thereby situating subjects in relation to each other. The body's role as formative to identity is attributable to the libido's ability to organize the psychic life in the symbolic.

In Morrison's novels, the various inscriptions on the body rewrite it as a locus charged with libidinal energy. The body which engages other people's interpretations or incites their desire is the locus where past memories are retrieved, revised and repossessed. In *Sula*, the eponymous character's birthmark opens her identity to diversified deciphering: "spread[ing] from the middle of the lid toward the eyebrow," it signifies diversely for people in varying conditions: for Hannah, it is "shaped [. . .] like a stemmed rose," which of course symbolizes romantic love in European culture (1982a: 52); for Shadrack, it is shaped like a "tadpole," which aligns Sula with him as foreigners to the Bottom community: "That was how he knew she was a friend – she had the mark of the fish he loved" (1982a: 156). Jude reads it as a "copperhead," a "rattlesnake over her eye" (1982a: 103, 104). This relates Sula to the serpent which inveigles Eve out of the Garden of Eden. John S. Mbiti suggests that, in Africa, "a considerable number of societies associate snakes with the living-dead or other human spirits, and such snakes are given food and drink when they visit people's homes" (1990: 51). From this perspective, Sula is reminiscent of the revenant Beloved who, upon her return, flings her mother into the traumatic past. It emerges as natural that Sula's birthmark is described as "Hannah's ashes" (Morrison 1982a: 114) when the town dwellers are plagued by a series of mishaps. In conclusion, Sula's body serves as a writing place upon which different people project varying fears and desires. Her tattoo distinguishes her from other Bottom-dwellers as the Other, as it endows her with the capacity to desire, to incite people closest to her to desire, to rupture the silence imposed on their bodies by the hegemonic voice.

Cynthia Dobbs points out the importance of engaging with Beloved's body:

> as a body who stalls, even reverses, history, Beloved must be destroyed. But as a body who marks an unacknowledged past – both her own murder and the collective horrors of the Middle Passage – Beloved must first be remembered, "accounted for," before she is finally introjected into the "chewing laughter" of the community. (1998: 569)

In breaking the smothering silence overshadowing 124, Beloved is a messenger from the past, a signifying medium and a conduit for the transmission of information among the 124-inhabitants. Her role, however, coincides with the body, which serves as a vehicle of expression for the subject: according to Grosz, the body "provides a point of mediation between what is perceived as purely internal and accessible only to the subject and what is external and publicly observable"

(1994: 20). It follows logically that Beloved's return revives Sethe's interest in her own body,[91] empowering her to express past traumas in order to face it. On the other hand, through colonizing and cannibalizing Sethe, Beloved gains weight and becomes plumper every day. By so doing, she throws light on the potential of the body to transform the subject.

Analyzing the crucial importance of the maternal body to the identity formation of American people of African origin in Morrison's fiction, Badt argues that "desire [. . .]is cast as a birthright of the African-American people; realizing it is to realize one's roots in the African-American community" (1995: 573). For Morrison, desire is tightly entangled with rememory as the site of history. Correlatively, Christian Steineck points out that "memories are more often than not evoked by sensual, corporeal experiences" (2006: 41). For instance, in *Beloved*, Sethe starts rememorying the past when

> the itching was all the way to her knees. Then something, the plash of water, the sight of her shoes and stockings awry on the path where she had flung them; [. . .] and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes. (Morrison 1997: 6)

The itching, the plash of water and the sight of her shoes emerge as signifiers which exhibit the corporeal nature of the traumatic memory. This, however, speaks to the bodily nature of memory. Or, in Valerie Smith's words, "the sensations of the present trigger visions of the past," which reflects the author's "focus on bodies" as the locus of exploring the inescapability of slavery and healing its scar in this novel (1993: 347).

Rememory signifies the eruption of the real into the symbolic in the novel. Acting as the cause of desire, the eruption then reflects the trauma-plagued Sethe's refusal to cede herself to the depersonalizing past. Naturally, her rememory of Sweet Home proves permeated with life and beauty, evidencing her efforts to shatter the suspension "between the nastiness of life and the meanness of the dead": "although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty" (1997: 3–4, 6). In this way, traumatic memory is aestheticized, eroticized, spatialized and imbued with meaning.

Sethe's scar documents her dehumanizing experience as the expandable body at the hands of her slaveowners and simultaneously symbolizes the unbridgeable

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[91] Beloved's return restores the past, impelling Sethe to read the scar engraved on her back.

gap between her and her lover Paul D after they have survived their respective traumatic pasts. After their reunion, Sethe and Paul D make love immediately. Yet regrettably, the sex proves perfunctory, as both are still preoccupied with the issue of self-regulation:

> It was over before they could get their clothes off. Half-dressed and short of breath, they lay side by side resentful of one another and the skylight above them. [. . .] Sethe lay on her back, her head turned from him. [. . .] the wrought-iron maze he had explored in the kitchen like a gold miner pawing through pay dirt was in fact a revolting clump of *scars*. Not a tree, as she said. (1997: 20–21, italics mine)

The buckled skin proves to be a memory body of what the horror of chattel enslavement has done to the broken black body; it is a surface inscribed with the horrendous crime of slavery, a memory body and a living dead. Incapable of transgressing the literal/bodily weight of his past, Paul D is unable to read the scars traversing her back as a tree, thus ignoring Sethe's emotional needs and disempowering her again. Correspondingly, Deborah Ayer Sitter comments, "When Paul D and Sethe fail to satisfy each other in the cramped upstairs bedroom [. . .] the nubile maiden Paul D has dreamed of for twenty-five years turns into a hag before his eyes" (1992: 21). Consequently, Paul D's failure to walk out of his past nightmares results in Sethe's transformation from an object to an abject.

The scar evokes Sethe's most harrowing detail of her loss of an integrated self: "I am full God damn it of two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the other holding me down, their book-reading teacher watching and writing it up" (1997: 70). Trying to extricate herself from her body, her senseless back, Sethe reads the scar through the eyes of others (Amy Denver's eyes): "I got a tree on my back [. . .] I've never seen it and never will. But that's what she said it looked like. A chokecherry tree. Trunk, branches, and even leaves" (1997: 15–16). Glenn R. Schiraldi tells us that "*abused persons may be disconnected from their bodies because they contain pain*" (2000: 258, original italics). Evidently, Sethe treats her back as the Kristevan abject. In so doing, she detaches herself from the way her back registers the violence perpetuated on her by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

The tree is portrayed by the author as the locus of redemption and restoration as well. A compassionate and nurturing white girl, Amy Denver, finds the dying Sethe and delivers her second daughter. "Com[ing] to us largely as an image of wild, tangled hair and large hands that massage Sethe's dead feet back to life," (Powell 1995: 107), Amy sublimates the scar on Sethe's back, deciphering it as a piece of artwork: "'It's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. [. . .] Your back got a

whole tree on it. In bloom" (Morrison 1997: 79). By so doing, Denver breathes life back into Sethe's back and body. In "An Aesthetic of Blackness," hooks notes that

> white supremacist ideology insisted that black people, being more animal than human, lacked the capacity to feel and therefore could not engage the finer sensibilities that were the breeding ground for art. Responding to this propaganda, nineteenth-century black folks emphasized the importance of art and cultural production, seeing it as the most effective challenge to such assertions. (1990: 105)

In this view, Amy's interpretation of the scar suggests her transgression of racial lines, helping Sethe to rediscover and reinscribe herself as a speaking being in language. Through the scar, Morrison establishes, in Henderson's words, "a link between those scarred physically by the system of slavery and those scars systematically inflicted upon the African American psyche through the social landscape of the body" (2002: 13). With Amy as a spiritual mentor, Sethe survives the excruciating journey from captivity to freedom; thus the tree bears witness to her metamorphosis from a brutalized body to a mother who "had milk enough for all [her children]" the day she arrived at 124 (Morrison 1997: 100). Marking her as castrated by the white Other, Sethe's tree scar simultaneously situates her in relation to the other, which is exemplified by her desire for Beloved. In a similar vein, Henderson points out that "communally, Sethe is known for the marks she bears on her body, as she is also simultaneously recognized as a bodily inscriptor herself" (2002: 101). Symbolizing her degraded status as the expendable body in slavery, the tree scar functions in effect as a tattoo of libido whose artificial interventions on Sethe's body empowers her, signifying her maternal strength and fortitude.

In *Beloved*, Morrison designates and describes the local community led by the unchurched preacher Baby Suggs as a place where self-love and communal love merge together:

> "Here," she said, "in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. *You* got to love it, *you*! And no, they ain't in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. [. . .] This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. (1997: 88, original italics)

Suggs' exhortation foregrounds firstly the horror and terror of slavery bent on marking and mutilating black bodies; and secondly, the exigency of reclaiming the individual parts of the body in order to reconstruct black subjectivity. Laura Di Prete argues that "physical violence turns the black body into a 'foreign body.' This alienation is not exclusively external, but rather dangerously grows from within, as black victims not only dissociate [sic] from pain, but also internalize shame" (2006: 78). The body is what Stamp Paid describes as the jungle white people planted in black people:[92] it is reminiscent of Sethe's back, which is treated as an abject that encapsulates her past traumas. Yet, to borrow Grosz's expression, Suggs is fully aware that "bodies are not inert. [. . .] They act and react. They generate what is new, surprising, unpredictable" (1994: xi). Suggs' discourse, which instructs people to both weep and laugh, can also be read as a ritual of abjection. Effectively, her followers cleanse themselves of a life of silence, squalor, shame, and sorrow, thus re-connecting themselves to community and centre. Similarly, Di Prete claims:

> "The prize," if one learns to recover the body that has been mutilated, disfigured and violated, is one's "heart," which has to be loved more than anything else. In other words, by means of the re-appropriation of the body in its physicality, one can achieve a sense of re-birth and individuation. (2006: 78)

Suggs' ritual of healing starts with "laughing children, dancing men, crying women" (1997: 88). Dobbs points out that the "prologue privileges communal feeling, sound, and movement over the words of any individual" (1998: 565), which implies that the ritual is based on the rememory of the cultural past. Probing into the nature of memory, Kevin Everod Quashie argues, "Memory is inherently a repetition, always in movement, always shifting; it operates via placement and position whereby one memory body gains meaning through its relationship to another memory body" (2004: 126). From this perspective, the collective rememorying of a traumatic past set the black bodies in motion. When Suggs puts an end to her sermon by "danc[ing] with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music" (1997: 89), she is rememorying her original, unsullied body. Accompanied by the music, the dance traverses time and space, serving to restore her as well as all the others' lost merger with the protective maternal body. Accordingly, in ceding themselves to music and dance, black people are valorized in the present. Eventually, Suggs' healing ritual functions successfully through its capacity to fuse feeling into action.

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[92] See section 5.1.

An unchurched minister, Suggs makes efforts to dissolve the boundary between self and other, spreading love to the very people divided from themselves by the chattel system, which in return endows her with a centred and glorious self. She has eight children, all of whom fail to escape the torment of slavery. As a mother-deprived daughter with a "desolated centre" (1997: 140), she internalizes her people as her selfobject and then extends her definition of self-love to everyone. In *Bordering on the Body*, Laura Doyle reminds us that the racialized mother figure simultaneously "carries out the dominant culture's subordination and use of that knowledge and history" and "harbors a knowledge and a history rooted in the senses of a racially and sexually specific body" (1994: 4). Emerging as a sympathetic and loving person, Suggs represents this racialized mother; instructing her people to love every part of their bodies, she has incorporated her people into her own body.

Achieved in community, Suggs' healing ritual is inseparable from the relation between self and other. In "Self and Community," Jennifer FitzGerald defines Suggs' ritual as a "discourse of communal self-love," suggesting that she "insists on a collective act of self-appreciation, in which all those damaged by dehumanization and hate can learn to love – or 'mother' – themselves, in a manner that fosters tenderness for their joint humanity" (1993: 681). However, Suggs's ritual is conducted outdoors in the Clearing,[93] emphasizing the importance accorded to community by African belief systems. Moreover, people with a shared past and pain are more inclined to commiserate and empathize with each other. In the Clearing, they present the body's pain as resulting from a cultural trauma which unifies and solidifies all African American people into a powerful, active force that could effectively alter the stereotyped way they are perceived and treated.

Suggs' ritual of healing suggests her capacity to transcend the deprivation and degradation imposed on her, thereby providing what she lacks (love) to her people; in Petar Ramadanovic's words, it is based on "a healthy forgetting, a necessary and curative forgetting [. . .] it makes possible for us to work, to tell stories, to present ourselves to ourselves" (2001: 7). In this connection, Suggs exhorts her people to forget the depersonalizing past and to envision a future. What differentiates Suggs from Eva and Sethe dwells in the fact that she has moved beyond the oneness which both Eva and Sethe seek with their children. In other words, fully aware of the sacrificial effect of the slave culture, she extends her love to other black people, thereby transgressing the borders between self and other, becoming a Ramadanovican diasporic "we."

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[93] The Clearing, part of nature, bonds them with their ancestor's spirit.

For Sethe as well as her children, Suggs as the maternal figure provides a place of respite from the outside injury and serves as the stabilizing centre. As a healer, she provides Sethe with a home which is warm, calm and free of predators. Anissa Janine Wardi points out that she "reminds [the members of the community] to use their hands for intimacy, support, care, and praise" (2005: 202). The hand's power to heal makes it into the track to the maternal body. As a healer of her people, Suggs "bathed Sethe in sections, starting with her face," and then moving to her hands, arms, legs, stomach, her violated vagina, and feet; while "waiting for another pan of heated water, she sat next to her and *stitched* gray cotton" (Morrison 1997: 93, italics mine). By cleansing Sethe's sordid/defiled body in sections, she offers her a sense of safety which is the first step towards achieving recovery. Judith Lewis Herman points out that "the restoration of a sense of personal worth requires the same kind of respect for autonomy that fostered the original development of self-esteem in the first years of life" (1992: 63). In this light, preoccupied with stitching her injured parts together and healing her, Suggs serves as Sethe's idealized parent selfobject.

Another figure who inspires healing in this novel is Paul D. Though still mired in his own traumatic past when reunited with Sethe, he is determined to exorcise the haunting ghost and live his present life with Sethe. Unlike his fellow slave Halle, who collapses when faced with the debilitating scene of his wife's degradation, Paul D survives the overwhelming past and embarks on a new future. Moreover, he appears as an empathetic figure: "Not even trying, he had become the kind of man who could walk into a house and make the women cry. [. . .] There was something blessed in his manner" (Morrison 1997: 17).

Linden Peach associates Paul D's empathic nature with the feminine (2000: 120), and Doreatha Drummond Mbalia reads him as "the only major male protagonist in the Morrisonian canon thus far who has a positive relationship with a female" (1990: 94). Indeed, Paul D is portrayed by Morrison as carrying on Suggs' healing work after her death. Throughout this novel, he aligns himself with Suggs: he comes to 124 Bluestone partly for Suggs and partly to claim his beloved Sethe (1997: 7); when moved by Beloved's spell, he spends several nights in a rocker; at last, "irritable and longing for rest, he opened the door to Baby Suggs' room and dropped off to sleep on the bed the old lady died in" (1997: 115). Paul D's affinity for the dead Suggs can be seen as suggesting his mobility between two worlds, and prefiguring the final episode of his return to claim Sethe from death. It is of crucial import that, before meeting Sethe, he should have been haunted in the house by "something larger than the people who lived here" (1997: 270). Seeing Sethe surrendering herself to Beloved on her deathbed, he finally "knows what he is reminded of and he shouts at her, "Don't you die on me! This is Baby

Suggs' bed!" (1997: 271). It becomes clear then that the "something larger" than the house-dwellers is Suggs' spirit of connection and healing. After internalizing her preaching, Paul D successfully helps Sethe to pinpoint her best object as herself, which is integral to the psychic wholeness of both. It signifies his ability to accept Sethe as his selfobject, and accordingly, his own recovery from the collective trauma.

Morrison also elaborates the dialogue between self and other in Paul D, who divorces himself from Sethe when forced to live with her foreignness (since he has been forced to confront his own, inextricably entangled with Sethe's abject past). Purged of fear and feelings of shame, he finally reconciles himself to his own foreignness, thereby reading Sethe with his inner self. He recalls Sixo's comments on Thirty-Mile Woman: "She is a friend of my mind. She gather [sic] me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It's good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind" (1997: 272–273). His recollection of Sixo's words implies his identification with Sixo as well as his ability to accept Sethe's past; his determination to "put his story next to hers" signifies a kind of reconciliation between him and Sethe, between the past and the present. In addition, "only this woman Sethe could have left him his manhood like that" (1997: 273). In contrast to castrating schoolteacher, Sethe endows Paul D with a detached sense of self and is "a friend of [his] mind" (1997: 273). Accepting Sethe as part of his psychic self instead of a foreigner, Paul D finally makes peace with his own fate of being a foreigner in and after slavery. His metamorphosis from being one to living with one empowers him to walk out of his fortified castle to rescue Sethe from the tyranny of Beloved. Accordingly, his role as a healer rests with his ability to weave together different voices – those of the unchurched priest Suggs, Christ-like figure Stamp Paid and the death-defying Sixo.

In the novel, Beloved provokes the traumatized characters to engage with the body in order to restore a centred self. After her return to the symbolic world, she gives body to the libido with her disrupting of the border between the real and the symbolic. Exhibiting an overpowering force traversing time and space, she represents both what slavery has inflicted on black people and what it incites – trauma and desire. To stress the corporeality of the libido, Lacan designates it as synonymous with the lamella, that is, "something extra-flat, which moves like the amoeba. [. . .] [It] is related to what the sexed being loses in sexuality." He further writes, "This lamella [. . .] is the libido" *qua* "irrepressible life, life that has need of no organ, simplified, indestructible life" (1977: 197–198). Lacan's explication of the immortality of the libido can be employed to decipher Beloved's power to annihilate the boundary between life and death, and self and other: "it survives

any division, any scissiparous intervention. And it can run around" (1977: 197). Lacan illustrates the entrance of the lamella into the subject of the unconscious as follows: "the lamella has a rim, it inserts itself into the erogenous zone, in so far as these orifices [. . .] are linked to the opening/closing of the gap of the unconscious" (1977: 200). Beloved's seduction of Paul D illuminates this process:

> "What you want in here? What you want?" He should have been able to hear her breathing.
> "I want you to touch me on the inside part and call me my name."
> Paul D never worried about his little tobacco tin anymore. It was rusted shut. [. . .]
> Beloved dropped her skirts as she spoke and looked at him with *empty* eyes. She took a step he could not hear and stood close behind him. [. . .]
> "You have to touch me. On the inside part. And you have to call me my name." [. . .]
> "Call me my name."
> "No."
> "Please call it. I'll go if you call it."
> "Beloved." He said it, but she did not go. She moved closer with a footfall he didn't hear and he didn't hear the whisper that the flakes of rust made either as they fell away from the seams of his tobacco tin. So when the lid gave he didn't know it. What he knew was that when he reached the inside part he was saying, "Red heart. Red heart," over and over again. Softly and then so loud it woke Denver, then Paul D himself. "Red heart. Red heart. Red heart." (Morrison 1997: 116–117, italics mine)

Beloved's seduction of Paul D can be deciphered from her role as a victim of child abuse in the cellar of a slave ship. In this scene, however, Beloved reverses her role from seduced to seducer, from a crouching position to an overbearing posture, and from a nameless victim to a notable victimizer through seducing, colonializing and displacing Paul D. Similarly, Laura Di Prete observes that "Beloved sexually assaults him, in what seems in many ways a rape" (2006: 73). Beloved's hysterical, mimicking effort is evidence of her attempts to overcome the gnawing sense of solitude, which in turn frees Paul D from the claustrophobic confinement of the tobacco tin to rememory his past. Beloved's desiring, objectifying gaze functions to penetrate into Paul D's tobacco tin. Despite experience of abjection, he adopts an increasingly collaborative role in the episode. Shocked and distressed, he is "thankful [. . .] for having been escorted to some ocean-deep place he once belonged to [in the trance episode]" (1997: 264). This is the primal place of the fusion with the maternal body before desire and individuation. Correspondingly, Badt observes that Morrison's "novels break down proper body boundaries, thrusting the characters into a primordial chaos in which the experience of identity founders" (1995: 567–568). Marginalized people who are confined in small spaces or have lost control of their bodies are more prone to be en-

ergized by past memories. As Philip Page remarks, "Only when Paul D relinquishes himself to the power of memory, giving himself physically to Beloved, can he release those memories, accept himself for what he is and what he has done" (1992: 37). Consequently, Paul D's union with Beloved escorts him to his inner, unsullied psychic self.

The psychotraumatic hypnotic scene of the sexual encounter eerily evokes Paul D's dehumanizing experience of what is called "tak[ing] to calves" at Sweet Home (Morrison 1997: 10) as well. During this episode, he tragically reenacts his traumatic experience due to the lack of the presence of someone to awaken him to the danger presented by Beloved or to help him cover up his former shame. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman highlights the importance of the existence of a protective society at the moment of traumatic reenactments. According to her, "To hold traumatic reality in consciousness requires a social context that affirms and protects the victim and that joins victim and witness in a common alliance" (1992: 9). It comes as natural that Paul D fails to purge the evil of the precipitating trauma, signified by his incapacity to pick open the tobacco tin which encloses his heart. Therefore, his endeavour to shatter the shackles of slavery turns out to be an unsuccessful self-defence.

In *Love*, Morrison foregrounds hatred nurtured by love when Heed and Christine clash in a violent duel which turns into a reconciliation at the end of the novel. Experimenting with the borders of the psyche, there is no space for a slip or mistake; because of this, the women face every fickle situation from the perspective of life-or-death on their way to a self-centred self:

> Opening pangs of guilt, rage, fatigue, despair are replaced by a hatred so pure, so solemn, it feels beautiful, almost holy.
>
> Junior's head tracks left to right, like a tennis fan's. She senses rather than sees where Heed, blind to everything but the motionless figure before her, is heading – one football at a time. [. . .] She does not watch or call out. Instead, she turns to smile at Christine, whose blood roar is louder than the cracking, so the falling is like a silent movie and the soft twisted hands with no hope of hanging onto rotted wood dissolve [. . .] and the feeling of abandonment loosens a loneliness so intolerable that Christine drops to her knees peering down at the *body* arching below. [. . .] On her knees again, she turns, then gathers Heed in her arms. In light sifting from above each searches the *face* of the other. The holy feeling is still alive, as is its purity, but it is altered now, overwhelmed by *desire*. Old, decrepit, yet sharp. (2004: 207–208, italics mine)

As a foreigner, Junior incites the two women into fusion, revealing to them the hidden source of their loneliness and foreignness: the old women come to realize

that they should have been living their lives hand in hand instead of looking for Big Daddy everywhere (2004: 219). The life-and-death struggle proves to be an efficient way of overcoming solitude, signifying their reclamation of each other as the ideal ego, which is suggested by their desire for each other. Significantly, Heed and Christine finally merge with each other after the paroxysm of violence: when Christine invites Heed to hold her hand, she rememories the maternal body and incorporates Heed's body, thereby surviving the victimizing past and lives on. Consequently, their postmortem embrace appears as a seamless coalescence of the double into a new self: "Both look asleep but only one is breathing. One is lying on her back, left arm akimbo; the other has wrapped the right arm of the dead one around her own neck and *is snoring into the other's shoulder*" (2004: 225–226, italics mine). Through sacrificing Heed, an act of abjection, Christine internalizes her as a selfobject and thus becomes valorized and integrated in the symbolic. Consequently, Christine's long-lost selfobject is restored to her after she takes on Heed's life in the world of language. Heed dies at the end, but offering her own definition of love, since nothing can be worse for her than the idea of losing a part of herself. Symbolizing patriarchal success, the Resort finally becomes a site of female communication resulting from the abjection of paternalism and patriarchy.

Viewed as a whole, Morrison's novels deal with her unrelenting efforts to restore the black working body from the victimization of the white Other. Put another way, her project addresses the reclamation of the real of slavery no less than the restitution of the wholeness of the black body. In her novels, she draws on the attributes of corporeal surfaces to trigger the reenactment of both a life-giving cultural past and a slave past. As a result, desire for the maternal body sets all Morrison's characters actively defying live burial, orienting them towards the journey to self and wholeness. Through exploring the scar inflicted on black psyches and embodying the vacuum inherent in history, the author succeeds in revising the American history of slavery and disrupting the stereotyped image inflicted on black people by predatory white culture. Significantly, the cultural trauma of slavery unifies and coalesces all black people into a powerful, active force that could effectively alter the stereotyped way they are perceived and treated. Consequently, Morrison restores the truth of slavery and revises whitewashed versions of African American history so as to make black people whole.

8 CONCLUSION

This work has touched on the obsession with love in Morrison's writing in various ways, including the desire for the *objet a*. In an interview, Morrison has said, "Beauty, love . . . actually, I think, all the time that I write, I'm writing about love or its absence" (Bakerman 1994: 40). The unsatisfying nature of maternal love affects all other love relationships in her novels. Yet Morrison avoids romantic notions of love, presenting love in its many aspects: twisted, convoluted, sour, bitter, harsh, ravenous, painful, mutilating and deadly. *The Bluest Eye* deals with a self-love equivalent to self-hate resulting from white domination and dehumanization of black people; *Sula* probes the relationship between self-love and sisterly love, pinpointing female victimization as arising from the eroticization and degradation of black women in a culture dominated by racism and sexism; *Song of Solomon* suggests ancestral love as the way to a self-centred self; *Tar Baby* studies the mixed feelings of love and awe aroused by encountering the stranger who is virtually an integral part of the self, thereby stressing the displacement of black people from their land and culture; with a ghost tossed back and forth between love and hate, and inside and outside, *Beloved* foregrounds preoedipal mother/daughter love and father-absence, thereby criticizing the family-fracturing strategy of white supremacist terror and domination; *Jazz* carries on *Beloved*'s exploration of the damaging effects inflicted on black motherhood, fusing romantic love with desire for the mother; and *Paradise* elaborates religious love of an inaccessible God, amounting to an unconscious love for the alienating white Other. *Love* merges sisterly, preoedipal and romantic love, and love for the victimizing, debilitating patriarch, speaking in effect to the disconnectedness, uprootedness and self-alienation of black people in the colonizing, capitalist culture of America. Viewed as a whole, Morrison's oeuvre emphasizes the lack of love or self-love for a people predisposed towards eroticization and exploitation in the racist culture of America.

This study designates all these loves as stemming from dysfunctional black motherhood deriving in turn from the demons of the legacy of slavery. Morrison's novels highlight her characters' inability to feel self-love, which in turn renders them either neurotics or paranoiacs. She points out that the combining theme of the trilogy[94] addresses the different kinds of love, and more specifically, the dan-

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[94] Morrison three novels, *Beloved, Jazz,* and *Paradise* are grouped as a trilogy, each set in a different period of American history, concerning the author's exploration of love and its absence for black people in predatory, racist white culture.

gerous way black women displace "love of self for love of something else" (Reynolds 2003: 18). This kind of often-displaced love suggests the women's potential for wildness and is hence dangerous. The author uses this to suggest the de-centring and displacing of black people, and their soul-searing desire for an idealized merger with the maternal *objet a*. Yet black people's object-oriented love is entangled with a narcissistic self-love, insinuating their failure to establish a unitary self under the chattel system. Throughout her literary life, Morrison has written about "love and how to survive – not to make a living, but how to survive *whole* in a world where we are all of us, in some measure, *victims* of *something*" (Bakerman 1994: 40, original italics). Since slavery has annihilated black people's sense of self, Morrison's characters incline to define themselves in terms of "something else" – both external things and external relationships. Correlatively, Barbara Christian observes that Morrison's concept of love is "rooted in a tradition of a people who, from their beginnings in this country, had been denied the right to express love, and thus have invented their particular strategies to hold onto it" (1997b: 34). Accordingly, both Morrison's and her characters' obsession with love derives from deprivation of the love-object under chattel enslavement.

Morrison has a special talent for reading racial issues by way of exploring the psychical damage inflicted on black people by slavery as well as her employment of communal values restored by the rememory of African philosophy and tradition as an efficient way to enhance healing. For example, she uses doubling to merge self-love and object-love in an effort to highlight the violence done to black bodies and psyches by the legacy of slavery. Doubling deals with repeated experiences of the decisive trauma and a continual departure from its locus; the engagement of the doubles shows a potential elimination of the fissure between life and death, a tendency to both register and remove the depersonalizing past. This conflicting tendency interprets the return to the past as both traumatic and pleasure-producing. On the one hand, the return entails the uncanny rememorying of the dehumanizing, dissembling past. On the other, it suggests the acting out and working through of the depersonalizing past through reconnecting black people to their self-confirming, life-saving cultural heritage. Fully aware of the disruptive power inherent in the uncanny, Morrison's works address a special area of an aesthetic of ambiguity, providing the debilitated and eviscerated a potent mode of personal and cultural survival.

Morrison shares with Lacan a preoccupation with the function of the mirror, which addresses the oneness felt by the nascent ego enthralled by its mirror image (ideal ego) in the Lacanian imaginary order. The mirror image, however, suggests the critical importance of the maternal gaze to the identity formation of the nascent ego. The maternal gaze is replaced by a dissembling gaze of the Other upon

the ego's entering into language. In Morrison's texts, the gaze of the Other is represented by the white supremacist object gaze, which dehumanizes, devalues and eroticizes black people, perpetuating their stereotyped image. Most of Morrison's characters still struggle to elicit love from the gaze, reflecting their desire to invent themselves in relation to it. However, the intrinsic lack in the gaze renders their efforts inevitably futile and obsessive. On the other hand, Morrison provides a loving maternal gaze to counterpoint this dissembling white gaze, which endows them with the capacity to reestablish their shattered self through self-love inspired by and tightly entangled with a communal love.

Imposing invisibility on black people, the white object gaze is sometimes represented by the darkness permeating Morrison's work. In *Beloved*, darkness restores Beloved's overwhelming transatlantic experience in the cellar of a slave ship; in *Love*, darkness finds embodiment in the deceased Cosey, who continues to victimize his kinswomen, burying them alive in the dark mansion after his death; the women revolve around his will in a cloak of darkness. Even the Cosey Hotel and Resort turns out to be an overwhelming darkness after Cosey's death, providing no escape but entanglement for the women. Morrison's inclination to employ darkness to reveal slave trauma and to enhance healing is inseparable from darkness's versatility to both accommodate white evil and satisfy black people's need for protection in predatory white culture. Darkness is also linked with the maternal figure L, who speaks omnisciently from her grave, watching her women children in her spectral presence. Foregrounding a ghost whose voice acts as the protective backdrop of the story, Morrison beautifully merges darkness, death, lack and love together. It is then evident that darkness symbolizes both the real of slavery and the real past maternal plenitude. It comes as natural that Morrison designates the darkness *qua* the real as a disruptive force for disclosing white crime as well as resuscitating traumatized black people. Eventually, Morrison triumphs by weaving love into darkness, which in turn turns out to be a playground of imagination for her.

Self-love and the sense of wholeness are achieved through the embrace of the black body, which had been reduced to an abject phallus under chattel enslavement. Black people are inevitably dehumanized and marginalized due to the loss of self and identity upon insertion into their symbolic role in the colonizing culture of America; the traumatic depersonalization of the black self is often suggested by their sense of psychological and physical disarray, as slavery signifies castration, mutilation and emasculation for black people. This is true of the trauma survivors who nearly all suffer from somatic symptoms which bear witness to the harm done to black bodies; this is also evident where the traumatized characters are immured in the mirror stage, each desirous to be the dweller of an undam-

aged bodily 'I.' Naturally, Morrison defines healing in relation to bodily connectedness, "highlighting Africanist spirituality's embrace of bodily existence as a fundamental constituent of humanity – a constituent ontologically inseparable from the soul, spirit, or mind" (Valkeakari 2004: 209). In Morrison's work, bodily communication proves to be an efficient way to liberate the traumatized black people from the claustrophobic symptoms of their enmeshing past, leading eventually to communication and psychological wholeness. Despite her recognition of the lack embedded in the white Other, Morrison highlights the individuals' capacity to intersect dialogically on the frontiers between selves, the mutual construction of self and community, and the possibility of tribal and ancestral healing through the transformational healing of individuals.

Further studies might focus on the voice as the *objet a* in African American literature. In Lacan's theoretical system, it figures as one of the objects of desire, that is, what the desire-ridden symbolic subject strives to pin down and grab hold of. Yet marked with the lack inherent in the Other, voice both incites and frustrates the subject's desire. In African American literature, traumatized or victimized black people frequently resort to music to heal their slavery-inflicted scars. Music performers sometimes take on the role of the floating *objet a*, thus breaking away from symbolic capturing. For this reason, music is capable of transgressing the lack of the Other, thereby offering the traumatized black people a maternal function both in slavery and its aftermath. My future study will interest itself in exploring the formative role of this volatile voice to the formation of black subjectivity.

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