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Reading trauma in postmodern and postcolonial literature: Charlotte Delbo, Toni Morrison, and the literary imagination of the aftermath

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READING TRAUMA IN POSTMODERN AND POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE:
CHARLOTTE DELBO, TONI MORRISON,
AND THE LITERARY IMAGINATION OF THE AFTERMATH

A Dissertation

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Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
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in

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by

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Abstract

Some personal or collective histories can never be completely integrated into the continuum of one's emotional life. Such stories produced in traumatic times or in disastrous events are likely to remain only partially understood or accepted. Examining the human consequence of traumatic events such as the enslavement of Africans in the United States or the attempted extermination of the Jewish people in Europe is one challenging focus of this work. It is comparatively productive, however, if these events are approached from the perspective of the trauma they have produced—an approach that suspends chronological and geographical barriers of time and space. The trilogy by postmodern French artist Charlotte Delbo, an Auschwitz survivor who narrated her story in testimonial form, offers that insight into trauma, as does the postcolonial work of Toni Morrison. The first volumes of both trilogies, *Aucun de nous ne reviendra* and *Beloved* expose the damage done to individuals and collectivities in terms of trauma by revealing the extent to which living at the edge of life and witnessing horrific acts of massive death and destruction shape and impact not only victims but the societies to which they return. Attempting to work through those strikingly traumatic experiences further highlights attitudes commonly found in narratives of survival. *Une connaissance inutile* and *Jazz*, the second volumes of the trilogies, enhance that kind of understanding, while both point at the necessary impossibility of forgetting the traumatic experiences that remain clearly undigested. Events such as senseless extermination of an entire people and the brutal exploitation of an entire race were not only not avoided, but systematically promoted by the communities in question. *Mesure de nos jours* and *Paradise*, the last volumes of the trilogies, clearly document the lack of attentiveness to the pleas of survivors and emancipated slaves by their respective communities

after liberation and emancipation. Even though support was not shown by these communities in the aftermath of the traumatic occurrences, this should not disengage us from our gravest responsibility: to bear witness to the sufferings of an excluded other whose processes of recovery and working through remain elusive.

Chapter 1. Introduction: Listening to Silence

If I am getting ready to speak at length about ghosts, inheritance, and generations, generations of ghosts, which is to say about certain *others* who are not present, nor presently living, either to us, in us, or outside us, it is in the name of *justice*. And this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations.

The future is its memory.

--Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

Memory (the deliberate act of remembering) is a form of willed creation. It is not an effort to find out the way it really was—that is research. The point is to dwell on the way it appeared and why it appeared in that particular way.

Memory is for me always fresh, in spite of the fact that the object being remembered is done and past.

--Toni Morrison, "Memory, Creation, and Writing"

"Our memory repeats to us what we haven't understood. Repetition is addressed to incomprehension."

--Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres*

The way contemporary culture engages in the present, along with the ways it projects its future, may illuminate the way it reshapes the image of its past. Such cultural engagements with the past, as the epigraphs by Derrida, Morrison, and Valéry suggest, necessarily involve works of remembrance, reflection, and inscription. Remembering, reflecting, and inscribing the past in consciousness and in the realms of present and future have been particularly resonant in some postcolonial and postmodern discourses. Indeed, while postcolonial and postmodern narratives have looked at some injustice of the past, they have engaged in discourses to awaken the desire for a future more just. So doing, postcolonial and postmodern texts have motivated and initiated necessary acts of cultural crossings between what history has decided to remember and what our collective memory is prepared to acknowledge. With these acts, possibilities for projecting a future more

promising, more “just,” and for living in the present “otherwise . . . and more justly,” in Jacques Derrida’s words, have not only illuminated interdependencies between past, present, and future (*Specters of Marx* xviii). These texts have also called attention to the importance of being attentive to the lessons that history can reveal to us.

While the works of Charlotte Delbo and Toni Morrison enable us to explore the tensions of an oppressive past in connection with the present and the future, they also invite us to participate, in Morrison’s terms, in a ceaseless work of active “reconstruction of a world.” Yet as two modes of bearing witness to histories of ethnic and racial oppression, both authors also insist on the necessity to live with the memory, not only of the living, but of the dead as well. Similarly, Derrida argues that one possibility for a just future lies in our ability to live to remember the victims of injustice—indeed to conjure the dead rather than to bury them. By refusing to bury the past entirely, both Delbo’s and Morrison’s art stresses the responsibility to remember, rather than fail to remember, the dead and the forgotten. As such, for Delbo and according to Morrison, if the living can be an object of literary reflection and celebration, and lead to “the revelation of a kind of truth,” so are the dead (“The site of Memory” 95). Especially if their human existence is being or has been disavowed. Turning to the past and to the histories that it holds can thus initiate necessary processes of remembrance of those whose relevance has been denied. It can also possibly bring us closer to that part of history that may not be easily accessible. This work of recollection of the past and of the dead will crucially inform, and possibly entrust, the living with some forms of knowledge. Eventually, being attuned to the lessons of both the past and present, dead and living may facilitate new forms of

wisdom. And for Derrida, “nothing is more necessary than this wisdom” in learning and in “learning to live” (*Specters of Marx* xx).

The “learning to live,” as Derrida insists, cannot simply entail “learning to live” in the present. It also necessitates learning to live “*beyond the living present in general*” (*Specters of Marx* xx). Likewise, these acts of learning to live solely “*from oneself and by oneself*” can, in Derrida’s contention, only fall short, because living would then be reduced to an “impossibility.” For him, not only from “death,” but also from “the other” can the teachings about living take place and be learnt. Derrida phrases this necessity of learning in the following terms: “But to learn to live, to learn it *from oneself and by oneself*, all alone, to teach *oneself* to live (‘I would like to learn to live finally’), is that not impossible for a living being?” Derrida keeps asking, “Is it not what logic itself forbids?” Derrida further posits that “To live, by definition, is not something one learns. Not from oneself, it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death. In any case from the other at the edge of life. At the internal border or the external border, it is heterodidactics between life and death” (xviii).

As he locates “the other” and “death” at the center of an argument about learning to live more wisely and more justly, Derrida also insists, as previously mentioned, on an obligation to live not solely in “the present,” but “beyond all living present.” For Derrida, it would require living with the bearings of the past and the presence of the future in mind. Facing the past, and tending to it as a presence in the present moment and in the future constitutes, for Derrida, our gravest “*responsibility*.” It would have us face the necessity of our being attentive to what he coins the “*non-contemporaneity of the living present*.” It signals a responsibility for us to attend to those of the past who are “no

longer” or about whom there is or has been little or denied awareness (xix). As Derrida argues, “the dead can often be more powerful than the living” (48). Yet being attentive to those of the future “who are not yet *present and living*” is equally significant. In other words, living, while recognizing and holding in respect those “who are no longer,” or “those others who are not yet *there*, presently living,” whether “they are already dead or not yet born,” can and should be actively performed.

For Derrida, this compelling act of learning—“living beyond the present” with respect and remembrance of the past, and with a sense of justice for the future—means to live with ghosts. As he claims, no justice is possible without bearing in mind “that which disjoins the living present.” For Derrida, what disrupts and unhinges that present is the “generations of ghosts, . . . certain *others* who are not present, nor presently living, either to us, in us, or outside us.” As such, for justice to be conceivable, it must be called for “before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead.” These ghosts, he reminds us, may originate from troubled times or from beyond the present. They include all of those who have been living in oppression or injustice, “be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any forms of totalitarianism.” Writing for a tomorrow of fairer sort, Derrida concludes by posing the following question: “Without this *non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present*, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who *are not there*, of those who are no longer or who are not yet *present and living*, what sense would there be to ask the question ‘where?’ ‘where tomorrow?’ ‘whither?’” (xix).

In chapter 1, I want to explore how some postcolonial and postmodern thinkers have called for a duty to remember these “ghosts,” the dead, the living and “the other at the edge of life” with a view to *justice* (xviii). Since, for Derrida, “learning to live” can happen only between life and death,” yet “neither in life nor in death *alone*,” but between the “two,” learning will obviously involve some elements of “the spectral” and of “spirits ” (xviii). This “spectral” space, as one that “*maintains itself* with some ghost,” can, for Derrida, be equated with a place, which is “neither substance, nor essence, nor existence, nor even something that “*is ever present as such*.” This space will serve our present inquiry by calling to attention the spectral or haunting property of some forms of memories that are to be retrieved from the past despite the pain they caused or the forms of denial they produced. It will also serve to inquire into how the reconstructed memories of the past that “others” have made consciously manifest through testimonials can affect our perception of that past (xviii). As such, I want to explore how and in what ways we may be compelled to address some of the traces of a ghastly past that various postcolonial and postmodern thinkers have intently urged us to remember through their narrative requests. Examining how and in what ways the “spectral” as a form of return of some repressed or denied histories can impinge on our understanding of the world is part of that concern. Another is to inquire into how our own perception of a past that has been experienced or imagined, but recollected and put in writing by others and artists can affect the construction of our own memories.

No living memory can make claims for the certainty or the endurance of the remembered object. Memory may not even warrant the permanence of the remembrance, nor even desire it. For Marianne Hirsch, modes of remembering may actually account for

“varying degrees” of approaching or “gaining distance from the past” (“Marked by Memory” 74). Besides, appending, altering, and removing memories from consciousness constitute active, reactive or creative acts of remembering or forgetting. These acts, along with the vitality or the numbing that they variously generate or discourage, make memory not fixed, but changing. Whether these transactions with lived experiences or recollections of events are deliberate or not, they can be made manifest in singular and personal ways, as well as in plural and collective ones. Besides, and more importantly, as Ernest Van Alphen notices these memories need to be “mediated” through discourse. Indeed, for Van Alphen, experiences are not “direct . . . subjectively lived accounts of reality,” as it is traditionally assumed. Rather, experience depends on “discourse to come about,” and as such, experience is necessarily and “fundamentally discursive.” Thus for Van Alphen, forms of experience do not just depend “on the event or history that is being experienced, but also on the discourse in which the event is expressed/thought/conceptualized” (“Symptoms of Discursivity” 24).

Memory and discourse, it seems, are always processes in the making. As such, they keep being reinvented. French poet and nineteenth century experimental artist Arthur Rimbaud serves as an illustration of this point. Rimbaud’s poetry is indeed exemplary of the mediation between experience, memory, and discourse that I want to emphasize here. His poetry verges towards what Derrida coins a “*politics* of memory, of inheritance,” and imparts knowledge to other “generations” (*Specters of Marx* xix). Besides, Rimbaud’s vision of poetry as “a means for discovering the unknown,” along with his “desire to liberate his ego and his art from all restrictions,” in the words of Enid Rhodes Peschel, both allow for a possible expansion of the imagination. This extension

of the imagination was certainly more than desirable in the case of Rimbaud since he set out to explore and uncover some unfamiliar ground. As “a poet-alchemist, a visionary maker of images who, by deranging his senses, sought to uncover the unconscious sources of the poetic imagination,” Rimbaud indeed serves our purpose well. Namely, he enables us to pose the question of how lived experiences, recollection, and transcription of experiences can shape, mediate, and permeate each other in narrative processes.

Rimbaud was an artist who creatively engaged in re-inscribing reality through acts of sensuous perceptions and illuminations. Becoming more and more audacious in his experimenting “the real and the unreal in visionary and hallucinatory projections,” he set out to explore in innovative ways modes of connecting reality with memory and imagination with language (*Arthur Rimbaud: A Season in Hell* 20). He went into some of his own personal experiences that he reminisced and translated into literary form through his artistic practice. Named as “a Surrealist in the practice of life and elsewhere” by André Breton, Rimbaud did not merely probe reality in order to shape it into various aesthetic forms. He also committed his art to examining the conflicting emotions that he personally experienced when he subjected himself to new experiences, whether they were actually felt, imagined, or the objects of his “reverie” or “revolt” (21). Rimbaud did thus not only engage in various forms of artistic expression. He also supplemented his poetic language with constantly renewed forms of experiences that he reminisced and inscribed in the spaces of his art.

Rimbaud’s experimenting with life and art had him challenge some of the traditionally accepted boundaries around him. As he set out to explore the borders where

life and art meet, he also expanded the realms of their possible interactions. He did so by setting in new contexts and new experiences an imagination pushed to the extreme.

Rimbaud's work points at how literary productions can mutually inform experience and vice versa. Discussing the possibilities of rhetorical modes of expression in relation to objects of experience is our point here. It correlates well with Delbo's and Morrison's art. Indeed, both Delbo and Morrison, along with Rimbaud, demonstrate an urgent concern for the possibilities of expressing in literary language experiences and occurrences that have bordered and are bordering on events of the extreme. Rimbaud's work serves well to open an examination of forms of knowledge and of experiences that can be considered out of the ordinary or culturally difficult to admit. His work also enables a discussion of how some forms of horrific knowledge can be mediated through poetry. As Pierre Brunel observes in *Arthur Rimbaud: Une saison en enfer*, Rimbaud's "Délires II.--Alchimie du verbe" is actually the poetic journey of the poet into the "horror of horrors," into the social "death of an 'I,'" which deals with "une histoire atroce" that attaches itself to "une histoire de la poésie" through "un parcours poétique qui n'a duré que le temps d'une saison" (17).

Rimbaud anticipated that occurrences of love or beauty, but also of death or emptiness, could be in urgent need of new forms of recollection and expression. These occasions of social death demanded artistic reinvention. The poet's "expérience surhumaine" in *Une saison en enfer* while he was in search of new sensations, even hallucinations, is a case in point that illuminates his experiment with new forms of poetic language (82). Experiencing the extreme, probing its limits, and inscribing these in poetic language is the legacy of Rimbaud that I wish to retain here. It will facilitate

exploring some of the possibilities of transposing surreal, quasi inexpressible, experiences into acts of artistic creation. As noted by critic Paule Lapeyre, this is what Rimbaud set out to do when he expressed the loss of an “I” in the prison of the soul. In Lapeyre’s words, quoted by Brunel in his critical edition, *Une saison en enfer* is indeed a harrowing cry of anguish and loss. More precisely, it is “le cri d’horreur poussé par une âme dont le poème retrace la chute à l’intérieur de l’être.” Brunel goes further by claiming that the surreal death experienced by the poet is even more resounding because it is actually not triggered by the physical extinction of the body, but by the imprisoning of the “I.” For Brunel, “ce n’est plus alors le corps qui est un tombeau, c’est le moi. C’est lui qui est un enfer” (42). In other words, exploring various histories of an “I” that survived the deadly menace of a profoundly shattering reality, whether colonial, concentrationary, or social can be done through art. Through art also, can those who survived a fragmenting or partial deadening of the self, offer their testimony. Through their artistic poetry and prose, Rimbaud, Delbo, and Morrison illuminate those processes of the deadening of the soul. More importantly, they also enlighten with their work what it takes to reconnect to life and living. And they have done so with force and grace.

In a first step to search the “new” in order to reach “the unknown,” Rimbaud explored, among others, the memory of a sensuous world. In his “Délires II.--Alchimie du verbe,” he recalls assigning colors to vowels. Likewise, he ascribed forms and movements to consonants. For and through poetic verses, he actually recreated senses and meanings. The artistic translation of his experimentation and his construed reminiscences read as follows. “J’inventai la couleur des voyelles! A noir, E blanc, I rouge, O bleu, U vert.—Je réglai la forme et le mouvement de chaque consonne et, avec

des rythmes instinctifs, je me flattai d’inventer un verbe poétique accessible, un jour ou l’autre, à tous les sens.” As he kept exploring prosaic-poetic writing, he recollected, “Je réservais la traduction. Ce fut d’abord une étude. J’écrivais des silences, des nuits, je notais l’inexprimable. Je fixais des vertiges (“Alchimie du verbe” *Oeuvres* 223). In a state of near madness, worn by his excessive life experiences, Rimbaud was eventually torn between a desire to speak and an impossibility of speaking (“Mauvais Sang” *Oeuvres* 209). Close to a poetic death rendered by his “*Je ne sais plus parler*,” Rimbaud threatened to muffle his imagination, deaden his memories, and silence his poetic art (“Matin” *Oeuvres* 234). Towards the end of his life and in an act of humility, he confessed, “J’ai essayé d’inventer de nouvelles fleurs, de nouveaux astres, de nouvelles chairs, de nouvelles langues. J’ai cru acquérir des pouvoirs surnaturels. Eh bien! Je dois enterrer mon imagination et mes souvenirs.” Returned to a reality that he dutifully felt compelled to acknowledge and account for, Rimbaud accepted, however, the weight of reality’s deadening burden. In the face of life, “la vie” came to be seen by the poet as a despairing farce. Lamenting life’s senseless component, he related it to “la farce à mener par tous” (“Adieu” *Oeuvres* 235). Yet, compelled by a sense of duty to keep exploring life’s hold, he wrote, “Moi! Moi qui me suis dit mage ou ange, dispensé de toute morale, je suis rendu au sol, avec un devoir à chercher, et la réalité rugueuse à étreindre” (“Mauvais Sang,” and “Adieu,” *Oeuvres* 214, 235).

This discussion of Rimbaud may seem removed from the object of my inquiry. It is only so in appearance. Indeed, Rimbaud’s struggle to return to reality after an almost complete silencing of his poetics is crucial to an exploration of a literature of loss, quasi-death, and survival—which involves a poetics of “descent into hell” or from “beyond the

grave.” This poetics from “beyond the grave” was obviously explored by Rimbaud himself in *Une saison en enfer*, but also by other French surrealist poets such as Gérard de Nerval, with *Aurélia*, and Auguste de Chateaubriand, with *Mémoire d’outre-tombe*, among others. The point that I want to make here is actually a reminder of Derrida’s insistence on the necessity to attend to “the other” at “the edge” of life, if we want to access meaningful ways to learn about life. We remember that for Derrida, life must be learned through the “heterodidactics” between life and death (*Specters of Marx* xviii).

My discussion of Rimbaud initiates two questions that I want to address. They can be posed as follows. First, what can possibly be left or alive of the imagination and in the memories of individuals who have experienced--directly or not--extreme forms of trauma? Second, how can survivors of extreme experiences phrase, put into words, and share with a community of readers what is left of their capacities to imagine and remember? Or more precisely, how can surviving artists recollect and transcribe that of which, in Primo Levi’s words, “it is better that there remains no memory” (*Survival in Auschwitz* 16). In other words, how did survivors of traumatic experiences keep an imagination active and alive? How did they transpose their painful memories in artistic forms? For Primo Levi, attempts at working through some atrocious experiences, especially those he suffered at Auschwitz, tie also, as for Rimbaud, Morrison, and Delbo, into processes of creative acts of writing. In *The Periodic Table*, Primo Levi claims a sense of exaltation in recreating through language some of his experiences and emotions, however dreadful. He writes, “It was exalting to search and find, or create, the right word . . . to dredge up events from my memory and describe them with the greatest rigor and

the least clutter. Paradoxically, my baggage of atrocious memories became a wealth, a seed; it seemed to me that by writing, I was growing like a plant” (153).

Examining the difficulties inherent in transmitting traumatic knowledge to future generations is a complex and sensitive project to undertake. Such a project deals with events that may be very painful, are certainly disturbing, and situated at the limits of the conceivable or imaginable. Besides, the ethical implications brought about by narrated testimonials of experiences dealing with atrocity or atrocious lived circumstances raise major questions. One, for instance, relates to our acceptance of the term “being human” and to the meaning that we may have attached to the word. While we may have taken for granted our human character, we certainly have to ponder what it means to be human in the face of circumstances that challenge our expectations of what constitute human acts. The significance of the term “being human,” surrounded by fellow humans, in collective spaces and times that inscribe themselves in what we can normally expect in a “civilized culture” thus, and in the scope of this project, demand re-examination and re-appraisal. If, in the words of David Patterson, “that which is human is that which speaks, the process of dehumanization, on the other hand, is a process of rendering silent.” If, as Patterson argues, “The Holocaust novel addresses this division [of the word divorced from the thing, of the human severed from the voice, of the self against itself], it struggles to work out some kind of reconnection between the terms” (*The Shriek of Silence* 12). Also, one may want to ask, is it still relevant, or even possible, to initiate dialogues within frames of reference that make use of commonly accepted terms such as humanity, culture, progress, art and beauty? If so, how have the underlying relations between

significance and reference in these concepts shifted in a new context of traumatic aftermath? These are the questions to which I would like to attend for now.

“There is always a decision for or against silence,” says Geoffrey Hartman in the “Introduction” to his work in Holocaust studies *The Longest Shadow* (3). His point exposes choices about deciding for or against the making known of an experienced reality. With the posing of this choice comes a corollary decision. Hartman refers to that decision, that difficulty of making an informed determination to remain silent or quiet about an experience, a “dilemma” that we need to confront. This dilemma is especially brutal when it involves choosing what to disclose or not to disclose in textual accounts that deal with disaster. It may even be more harrowing if it centers around disclosing an experience that has been threatening to one’s life, shattering to one’s ego, and endangering to one’s sense of social being—for example, in the literature of testimonials that explore events of disastrous consequences, such as are produced in an aftermath of bondage or deportation.

For Hartman, not remaining silent may have us face the possibility that our trust in humanity has been shattered. It may have us confront the realization that our faith in mankind has been irremediably lost. This is especially true for those who have been closely connected to the events of traumatic magnitude such as slavery in the US or the Shoah in Europe. In discussing the attempted annihilation of European Jewry by the Nazis, Hartman claims that “to integrate the Holocaust into our image of human nature is to despair of humanity, as well as of language.” Remaining silent about the genocide may safeguard a continued belief in humanity. But such a semblance of optimism in the humanly possible, he contends, would be self-defeating. As Hartman has it, “Yet to

conclude that [the Holocaust] cannot be integrated is also to despair—if it means abandoning the hope that a remedy may be available through collective action based on self-understanding and tradition.” The underlying question becomes thus, “As new details or new perspectives emerge, can we draw any practical consequences from what we have learned?” (4).

Hartman’s arguing the dilemma--and the price--of breaking silences had already been prefigured by Primo Levi after his harrowing experience at Auschwitz. By reflecting on a “human condition,” whose idea he explored and exposed in *Survival in Auschwitz*, Levi illuminates Hartman’s conflict (17). Hartman’s point, we recall, is about breaking silence around a senseless evil that may be at the core of humanity. Levi’s reflection revolves more around examining the possibility of integrating a reality at the confines of the inhuman(e) and the barbaric. Even though, in his work of testimonial, Levi, like Hartman, explores the possible loss of faith in our image of humanity, he also appeals to forms of fraternity that can partially restore that image. Along with emphasizing an underlying presence of evil in humanity, Primo Levi indeed also inquires into what comes into play in reshaping a sense of humanity in more positive terms. For Primo Levi, this reshaping can come through a sense of responsibility towards a less fortunate “other.”

Primo Levi first observed an outrageous reality at Auschwitz that baffled him to his utter amazement. In approaching this reality, he contended that new perceptions of reality, especially those that verge on the atrocious and horrific, may arise when reality brutally collides with our habitual expectations. Part of what Pierre Bourdieu calls the “habitus,” these structured and structuring “*dispositions*” would predict, to a larger

extent, the ways in which we operate, represent, or respond to our reality (*le sens pratique* 88). In the case of Levi, these were seriously thrown off balance. For Levi, upsetting new responses had thus to come into play. This actually is meant to happen if or when our “natural trust” in humanity is fractured. As such, a new, “profound amazement” at the uncertainty of our conceptual frames of reference, in the words of Primo Levi, can occur. This new uncertainty, however sudden, can be very “destabilizing” for a human being. Likewise, the collision between reality and what we may expect of reality may not induce total despair about human nature. It may, however, profoundly shatter its foundations.

Levi’s discussion first grounds itself in human choices that have led to barbaric actions, such as those he witnessed during his internment. In a universe of senseless and atrocious human violence and crimes against humanity, Levi raises questions about the human mind and its motives for destruction. Along with addressing upsetting questions such as “how one can hit a man without anger?,” Levi searched, and found the basis of human resistance (16). Also we need to consider what can possibly be experienced and survived by an “other” at the edge of life, in response to a threat at the limit of the humanly imaginable, but also with responsibility to fellow “others” defeated by death.

By refusing his consent to the annihilating Nazi machine, Levi attempted to remain human in an inhuman world. He underscored, as such, the possibility of inscribing culture in the realms of the extreme. As he reflected on the actual presence of the civilized in the domain of barbarity, he emphasized that point in his writings. Significantly, his work shows that both culture and barbarism actually interact with each other in various complex situations. His discussion of the boundaries between atrocity

and humanity, fashioned within the scope of his direct and lived experience, is particularly resonant with the literary genre of the extreme that we are exploring here. This is especially so, because we want to inquire not so much into the exact point where culture ends and where barbarism begins, an impossible, probably dogmatic task in itself, but because we wish to explore the particular instances in which culture and barbarism are in each other's proximity. We also wish to explore how they inform each other. The questions raised by Levi's argument are thus to the point and crucial in suggesting that evil and humanity may not be two separate and distinct categories exclusive of each other. But they are, or can be, actually interactive with and constantly present to each other. In this regard, attending to one question suggested by Levi's work is particularly revealing. Dealing with the possible co-occurrences and instances in which culture met with barbarism, the problem resulting from their encounter can be posed as follows. In what borderlands of the hardly conceivable, yet possible, did barbarity and culture meet? How did they coexist with one another in the making of a contemporary reality marked by evil?

Exploring what Levi calls the "gray zone," along with the sinister news of "ce que l'homme, à Auschwitz, a pu faire d'un autre," will serve our point here. Levi's "gray zone" reflects on culture and barbarism from a perspective illuminating the ways humans work within an "out-of-the ordinary" or "out-of-the expected" cultural framework (*Si c'est un homme* 82). This culture beyond normality can be best revealed here through instances of human destruction that Levi personally witnessed. These events, after he directly confronted and recollected them, matched no prior knowledge. He recounts the music and the playing of songs dear to German ears that were played at "the Lager"

during his ten months in the German death camp. Levi recalls “Une douzaine de motifs seulement . . . des marches et des chansons populaires chères aux coeurs allemands.” He further ponders on the marching songs, and reflects, “elles sont la voix du Lager, l’expression sensible de sa folie géométrique, de la détermination avec laquelle des hommes entreprirent de nous anéantir, de nous détruire en tant qu’hommes (73-74). In these blurred spaces, in which scraps of culture--the playing of music--and blatant barbarism--the orchestrated will to exterminate—merge, so does senselessness. A senselessness described by Aharon Appelfeld, who was a child during the Holocaust, as “another expression of horror,” that reveals “the depths of human degradation” (*Beyond Despair* 27). As both signs of culture and barbarism merged in a kind of foggy zone in which humanity is imminently threatened, Levi remembers the following. He writes, “Quand cette musique éclate, nous savons que nos camarades, dehors dans le brouillard, se mettent en marche comme des automates; leurs âmes sont mortes et c’est la musique qui les pousse en avant comme le vent les feuilles sèches, et leur tient lieu de volonté. Car ils n’ont plus de volonté.” Pondering on the anonymity and immensity of the damage done to men turned into non-men, Levi reminisces, “Ils sont dix mille hommes, et ils ne forment plus qu’une même machine grise; ils sont exactement déterminés; ils ne pensent pas, ils ne veulent pas, ils marchent” (*Si c’est un homme* 75).

Probing the gray spaces that transform culture and humanity into barbarity and anonymity, Levi eventually insisted on possibilities for retaining spaces for the human. These possibilities, he suggests, arose not outside, but within the borderlands of atrocity that he witnessed. Opposing the orchestrated acts of annihilation and anonymity that he saw, Levi also witnessed acts of survival. These acts of survival were not so much acts

of willful living as they were of willful remembrance on his part. Offering resistance to de-humanization through deliberate acts of reflection and testimonial is thus the human stance that Levi posed. He did so very early and throughout his internment in Auschwitz.

When they were threatened to the core of their being, Levi's fellow men became "non-men," or non-human. This was so because at some point, they surrendered their capacity to think. Reflecting on their non-human condition, Levi foresaw that so many of these men were lost. They were lost because they had lost the *memory* of, or the possibility, of human action. Likewise, many had lost the comforting prospect of divine intervention as well. As such, the non-men that Levi described with so much accuracy were actually made to join and reinforce the Nazi machinery of inhumane destruction. Made aware of the dehumanizing process inflicted on all at the camp, Levi noticed the ones least able to face the ruthless process of Nazi selection. He saw them as the "drowned," not the "saved." As such, Levi concluded that de-humanization produced a loss of faith in human possibilities. This loss of faith in the human was furthered by the destruction of hope in the divine. For the "drowned," both losses irremediably brought about severe forms of hopelessness and despair. As Levi pondered and declared, "Ce sont eux, les *Muselmänner*, les damnés, . . . des non-hommes en qui l'étincelle divine s'est éteinte, et qui marchent et peinent en silence, trop vides déjà pour souffrir vraiment."

In his vision of what constituted radical evil in his eyes, namely the de-humanization of man and the detachment from his habitus, Levi was haunted by a vision that roots itself, not in Dante's inferno, but in Auschwitz's hell. Attentive to this haunting and daunting vision of hell, Levi, however, reclaimed some form of humanity

for those men. He did so through committing to memory the ones in danger of being forgotten, the immensely lonely, the defeated. As he reflected, “Ils peuplent ma mémoire de leur présence sans visage.” Indeed, as he pondered on the barbarism that he was forced to witness, he willfully transcribed his vision into an act of recollection, remembrance, and reflection, for future generations to ponder. Still in *Si c’est un homme*, he proposed, as a result of his witnessing dehumanization and evil, that “Si je pouvais résumer tout le mal de notre temps en une seule image, je choisirais cette vision qui m’est familière: un homme décharné, le front courbé et les épaules voûtées, dont le visage et les yeux ne reflètent nulle trace de pensée” (138).

As Levi’s text indicates, presenting evil in its starkest aspect or in its most dehumanizing form may be discomforting and upsetting. This de-humanizing evil of the Holocaust did, however, unquestionably happen, as did slavery. Keeping silent about it would only strengthen the positions of those who would wish to deny or evade that horrific knowledge. As Geoffrey Hartman summarizes in *The Longest Shadow*, “Now that the public silence has been broken, it will be broken.” He further states that “no shame attaches to those who evoke that darkest time to give it meaning,” no shame should attach to those who “dispute the meanings given” (44). Addressing the works of survivors, such as Primo Levi’s, but also of Elie Wiesel’s, Jorge Semprun’s, and many others, Hartman commends these authors for breaking silences. Also, along with his acknowledgement of their works of testimonial, Hartman pleads for the lifting of the stigma or shame that attaches to those who disclose shameful events. At this point, the discussion by Theodor Adorno of a culture that can be associated with shame because it

failed disastrously offers some insight into the problematic of disclosure or silence, of remembering or forgetting.

Like Primo Levi, the German philosopher of Jewish descent Theodor Adorno survived the Nazi extermination. Unlike Levi, however, he did not spend the war years in concentrationary internment. With his famous statement that it is no longer possible to write poetry after Auschwitz, or more precisely that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,” Adorno expressed his disappointment in and bitterness about a culture that located itself at the confines of barbarism (*Prisms* 34). His dictum was meant to reach, however, beyond his disappointment in a totalitarian culture. It targeted also totalitarian forms of art and aesthetics. It is precisely totalitarian aesthetics, whose lack of autonomy he denounced with express bitterness that I want to address now.

The uncompromising attack on art that Adorno launched after the Holocaust was clearly aimed at culture before the Holocaust also. Indeed, Adorno’s remark revealed that German society had been corrupt long before the Nazis made that truth brutally clear. When he formulated his dictum about the impossibility of art or poetry after Auschwitz, he harshly criticized various forms of aesthetic representation. His statement even questioned the cultural possibilities for adequately being able to reflect on a reality in an autonomous manner. Whether his pronouncement signalled a quasi-defeat of imaginative writing in the face of the barbaric character of a culture, such as the one displayed by the Nazis, is an interesting point. If so, could also the charge by Adorno be that public recognition of the Holocaust may increase “the exploiting, profaning, or trivializing” of suffering, and be grounds for imposing silence about what happened

between 1933 and 1945 in Western Europe? (*The Longest Shadow* 44). Would art then be worthless in the face of life?

If, in Adorno's words, "culture has failed miserably," its failure is not solely attributable to the idea that Auschwitz was a "social disaster" that "defied human imagination" (*Negative Dialectics* 361). Culture was flawed also because it could not initiate an examination of itself, nor generate or sustain a critique of the ideologies that it diffused. As Adorno stressed in the 60s, "All post Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage. In restoring itself after the things that happened without resistance in its own countryside, culture has turned entirely into the ideology it had been potentially" (367).

Adorno's argument further opens the divide between culture and barbarism. As he conceded, "cultural criticism found itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism" (*Prisms* 34). Seeking an impossible resolution, because his negative dialectics demanded a clear definition of the terms culture and barbarism, an impossibility in itself, Adorno's argument seemed locked in a self-defeating impasse. Besides, along with the negative critical framing of the terms that brought about the deadlock in the first place, Adorno offered little hope for our present time's capabilities of disengaging from, or at least facing cultural decay and guilt. Little ground, it seems, was offered in *Negative Dialectics* for contemplating the possibilities of a future—a future culturally acceptable or at least possibly viable. As Adorno posited, "whoever pleads for the maintenance of this radically culpable and shabby culture becomes its accomplice." But yet, "the man who says no to culture is directly furthering the barbarism which our culture showed itself to be" (*Negative Dialectic* 367). How can we

then, following this logic, pose the previously asked question by Derrida of “where?” “where tomorrow?” “whither?” (*Specters of Marx* xix).

In “‘The Grave in the Air’: Unbound Metaphors in Post-Holocaust Poetry,” Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi questions the negative dialectical impasse in which Adorno locked himself. Claiming that his dictum was “appropriated unreflectively since his death in 1969 by the very ‘culture industry’ he so vigorously attacked in his lifetime,” Ezrahi contends, however, that Adorno returned to his statement time and again to refine and restate it. Yet, for Ezrahi, Adorno’s dialectics could not allow to pose the problem in a different manner. One problem that arose, for Ezrahi, was the impossibility to pose how “distinctions” be “drawn between ‘barbarity,’ which is by definition outside the civilized discourse, and liminality, which is not?” (260). Her question, out of scope for our discussion at this time, re-engages, however, the following point. It suggests, as previously mentioned, that barbarity and civilized culture should not be posed in mutually exclusive terms. They rather tend to remain in a space critically blurred that resists easy articulation.

It is this critical stance that Ross Chambers adopts in his *Untimely Interventions*. He starts the discussion by reminding us that human evolution may have produced a species, termed “hybrid,” that is neither “simply animal in nature, nor yet cultured,” in the meaning of “civilized or humane.” Culture, it would seem, regularly fails us as we plunge into “animalistic behavior and instincts which kick our human ideals to the side.” For Chambers, thus, the evidence is that “the brutalities, atrocities, and acts of violence,” of which humans are so obviously capable, are themselves “the products, not of an animal nature, but of culture.” In the terms “products of culture” that he uses here, he

clearly refers to culture as “the general mediator of relations,” that which is at the core of civilization itself (xviii). His argument suggests, then, that barbarism is not located outside of culture, or alien to it, but rather is constitutive of it. As such, the menacing presence and frequent reoccurrence of barbarism inherently attaches to the very condition of culture. In a line of thought similar to Primo Levi’s and Adorno’s, Chambers phrases the problem as such. He writes, “the occasions on which . . . ‘culture’ lets us down are the occasions on which human culture reveals something crucial about itself.” Namely that it has “an essential fault-line running through it, or a ‘dark side’ that is not accidental but rather constitutive, definitional.” As such, the “violence” that “culture pretends to hold at bay” is actually “something that it does produce, qua culture, with frightening regularity” (xviii).

What is to be done, then? Should the witness of inhumane deeds keep silent for fear of shattering our trust in humanity? Should we despair of humanity and take for granted its possibilities for evil? Should we shy away from aesthetic or philosophical culture because of its failure in producing unambivalent social good?

The literary and critical reflections contributed by Primo Levi and Adorno, but also by Ezrahi and Chambers, uncover various venues for the further exploration of these questions. Going beyond Adorno’s dialectic, Chambers suggests that some forms of literature have actually as their point, and even as their “burden,” the view that atrocity or disaster can happen here or there. These literary pieces are thus meant to reveal that these human catastrophes can erupt at any moment, in any location, and as we know incredibly well, they have in the past and still do. With his *Untimely Interventions*, Chambers himself sets out to remind us of what “we need to know and acknowledge.” In

the face of instances of barbaric atrocities, we need to be reminded “*again and again and again*,” of their potential outbursts, if only to be “awakened” sufficiently to the signs they may produce before they strike there (xx).

The necessity of reading those signs may, actually and after all, have been indirectly introduced and suggested by Adorno himself. The approach by which we are encouraged to remain alert to the possibility of cultural violence may indeed be assumed in Adorno’s revised position on art. Although the point is made not explicitly, but implicitly, Adorno’s “after Auschwitz” provides, or at least suggests, a theoretical impetus for searching for new forms of cognition and representation of culture. Also, if authentic forms of knowledge are constantly in the making and are indeed necessary, they are all the more so in circumstances of the extreme. They become urgent when the potential strikes that culture unleashes are deadly. As has been presumed by Adorno, initiated by Primo Levi, and explicitly formulated by Chambers, new forms of representation become thus all the more crucial when reality or culture brutally collide with the habitual expectation we have of that reality or of that culture. This, as previously mentioned, is particularly true when the reality we are facing grounds itself in barbaric or evil experiences.

As Michael Rothberg comments in *Traumatic Realism*, “Adorno’s writings . . . suggest the need for new forms of representation capable of registering the traumatic shock of modern genocide.” As such, Rothberg not only calls for new forms of representation to reveal destructive violence in our modern age. He also summons these forms of representation at a collective level. Likewise, he addresses the necessity to find “new forms of publicity” that will “translate knowledge of extremity for a mass

audience” (58). Ezrahi makes a similar point also in her attempt to move beyond Adorno’s critique. Her critical intuition is to articulate new insights for art. She thus not only attempts to move the discussion of the duty of art beyond the shattered loss of its autonomy. She asks for appraising some new forms of artistic representation as art’s object and purpose.

Art, since it reduced itself to a reflection, not a critique, of totalitarian ideology and Nazism, became in a certain way, according to Adorno’s dialectical rationale, disconcertingly barbaric. But also, Adorno’s objection to the critical value of art, which I want to question here, supposes another contention. Adorno indeed argued that art after Auschwitz would operate, because of its aesthetic qualities, as a sort of “anesthetic” to barbarism. In other words, for Adorno, the focus on form would actually preempt an assimilation of the content. If we attribute the statement to Adorno, quoted in Ezrahi, that the “more poetically crafted a text, the more inherently estranged from the reality it is meant to represent,” then his statement about art may point not only at a radical separation between art and experience in some cases. It also means that some style that art employs might be inappropriate. As he stresses the unsuitable character of art’s style specifically in regard to a literature of atrocity, he claims, “Through the aesthetic principle of stylization . . . an unimaginable fate still seems as if it had some meaning; it becomes transfigured, with something of the horror removed” (“The Grave in the Air” 267).

The process by which art is claimed by Adorno to lose critical autonomy and authenticity on the one hand, and aesthetic or ethical relevance on the other, is an important one. Art is either too involved in reality or too removed from it. Yet Adorno’s

restrictions may serve as a new background to further explore the possible relevance of art in regard to a literature of atrocity. Examining how aesthetic productions that are motivated by critical and social responsibility prove actually not only possible but desirable is thus our next point. As Derrida and Chambers suggest, remaining attentive to the signs of culture and its potential for violence and atrocity may invest art with renewed critical prospects.

As we turn to these prospects, it is necessary to be reminded of the interdependencies between life and art. The necessary interconnections between art, reality, and modes of representing that reality are particularly well argued, in yet another context, by Patrick McGee as he discusses Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*. In relation to the works of African-American artist Ishmael Reed, McGee makes a point about the interrelations between art and ideology. His point is of particular relevance, and I will follow it here. It indicates where art may be meant to open up, not limit, new creative cultural possibilities.

In assessing the artist's place in the artistic process, McGee points at the complex interrelations that come into play in aesthetic production. In *ISHMAEL REED and the Ends of Race*, McGee argues that "specific forms of knowledge and life experience . . . have a bearing on the process of aesthetic production." The set of abilities and pre-dispositions that make up what Adorno calls "the *métier*" of the artist are, in a certain way, "the imprint of society on the artist." This imprint of society on the artist constitutes also the "actual productive forces that make art possible in the first place." Viewed in this light, art, which may have seemed to foreclose spaces for autonomy of expression or independence of thought, may actually open those spaces, not limit them. Especially if

the artist, who engages in artistic production, specifically and purposefully means to bring into her work “specific forms of knowledge and life experience.” She also continuously shapes and transforms “the imprint of society” through her subjective art. It seems, then, that the artist may purposefully choose not to disengage herself from her milieu. On the contrary, the artist may rather decide to engage more in its reality. In doing so, she may situate herself in a position to better apprehend it and critically reflect on it, in relation to herself, and the community (63).

Toni Morrison has discussed this attentive engagement of the artist with her milieu at great length. She has done so particularly in reference to and within the African-American community. One of her points organizes itself around the “conflict” between public and private life. Conflicting only in appearance, these positions of the individual at both a singular level and within community are crucial for Morrison. She makes that point in “Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation.” While she discusses the role of the artist in her critical work, she asserts the following: “There must have been a time when an artist could be genuinely representative *of* the tribe and *in* it.” She further explains that that time was also “when an artist could have a tribal or racial sensibility and an individual expression of it.” Along with that sensibility and expression of individual consciousness, “there were spaces and places in which a single person could enter and behave . . . in the context of the community.” In Morrison’s contention, personal statements, made or “performed” in “Black” church services or through music, in the presence of a supportive or protecting community, once fulfilled that singular and collective function of art (339). At the same time, along with functioning as art, these

statements and performances also enabled an individual voice to fulfill the social duty of the artist.

For Morrison, novels can also perform this crucial function. As she claims, “it seems to me that the novel is needed by African-Americans now in a way that it was not needed before.” She regards the contemporary novel as “a way to accomplish certain very strong functions,” one of which is “to get new information” out there. Her sense of the novel is that, it “has always functioned for the class or the group that wrote it.” Her claim is particularly valid in light of the emergence of the novel at a time when other art forms were in decline. Indeed, at some point, art in the guise of “story-telling, songs and dances, and ceremony, and gossips, and celebrations,” for the lower classes, or “patronized art” for the aristocracy fell short. Art could no longer “fulfill embracing, instructive or separating functions for the individual or the group.” In Morrison’s contention, it was a time when “new art forms had to be produced” (340).

This specific “new art form” that has become a predominant social and aesthetic vehicle, Morrison claims, is not only the novel, but the autobiographical novel. This form of art is particularly relevant for her, not only because it is in keeping with the exigencies of its times, but also because the autobiographical novel is a privileged instance that fulfills a crucial social function. As “it seeks to reflect, present or inscribe the moral dilemmas of the single individual in the face of the tribe,” a novel of autobiographical inclination can serve to tie “singular life experiences into communal forms of knowledge.” For her, it provides the artist an instance in which (s)he can “be representative.” As such, the artist can say, “my single solitary and individual life is like the lives of the tribe; it differs in these specific ways, but it is a balanced life because it is

both solitary and representative” (339). Even though the slave narratives and autobiographical works that Morrison discusses may actually be less open-ended and more constrained in form than most contemporary pieces, including Morrison’s own work, they were vital in prefiguring the roles of art and of the artist that Morrison endorses. Besides, Morrison is that type of an artist who produces art, who is inextricably embedded in her milieu, and who feels urged to critically reflect on it. Her critical and literary insight on art and life may thus be more than a disillusioned and discredited receptacle of culture. It may be a powerful vehicle for shaping subjective stories and mapping collective realities, past and present.

Contemporary author and incisive literary critic, Morrison is attentive to the social responsibility that her art is meant to embrace. As she claims, a novel should be not only “beautiful, and powerful,” but it should also “*work*” (341). Indeed, it “should have something in it that enlightens; something in it that opens the door and points the way. Something in it that suggests what the conflicts are, what the problems are.” But, she adds, “it need not solve those problems because it is not a case study, it is not a recipe” (342). For Morrison, art should thus not be prescriptive, but illuminating. Also, in order to be inviting to the community that it addresses, it should involve specific artistic elements to which the community can relate. As such, she makes it a point to incorporate in her fiction what she labels “Black art.” By “Black art,” she means, for instance, a form of literature that involves the combination of both “print and oral” elements of literature (341). These are meaningful to the extent “that the stories can be read in silence, of course.” But, for Morrison, one should also “be able to hear them as well” (339-41).

These two elements are crucial because they enable a form of literature that has great testimonial value.

Our approach to a literature of disaster, produced in an aftermath of slavery or the Holocaust, and in light of the critical bearings of McGee, Chambers and Morrison on the duty of art poses another question. It relates to the particular modes of representation that a culture can safeguard--or discourage--when it makes statements about its reality. In search of modes of representation in the context of traumatic histories, as experienced in slavery or the Holocaust, the necessity to find a suitable and eloquent mode of transmission may be harrowing. Its challenge is encapsulated in the following statement by Ezrahi. It is closely related to what she coins “the widespread if unarticulated sense of the *propriety* of the symbolic language that faces Auschwitz” (“The Grave in the Air” 260).

The aptness of language to deal with Holocaust experiences has been discussed extensively. Two accounts by two different camp survivors are particularly revealing here. One is by Jorge Semprun. The other is by Aharon Appelfeld, a child survivor of the Holocaust who turned poet, critic, and writer. The comment by Imre Kertész, also Holocaust survivor and writer, can serve as an introductory remark. The excerpts proposed are grounded in a specific reflection on language. All explore the possibilities but also difficulties and conflicts that artists face in order to make language signify pertinently in the context of a literature of atrocity.

Some narratives, written in troubled historic times, risk coming under suspicion. In Jared Stark’s contention, narratives that take the form of memoirs are those more specifically under attack. The skepticism towards them, according to Stark, grounds

itself in the following objection. These narratives may appear unable to tackle the whole picture. In his words, they may lack “the spontaneity of oral testimony,” on the one hand. On the other hand, they may lack “the verifiability demanded of historic evidence.” As a result, some survivor memoirs have addressed these suspicions by adopting various literary stances. Some authors, Stark contends, have responded to these charges of deficiency by “showing or suggesting that there may be no language or form capable of representing the full truth of the Holocaust” (“Broken Records” 199). This point is challenged by Hungarian writer and Holocaust survivor (and recent Nobel winner) Imre Kertész. Indeed, in Imre Kertész’s contention, if there were a language in which the Holocaust could “find a home,” wouldn’t “this language have to be so terrifying, so lugubrious, that it would destroy those who speak it?” (“The Freedom of Self-Definition” 39).

Jorge Semprun has addressed the question of a necessary lack of equivalence between art and experience in a literature of atrocity by discussing the appropriateness of language, along with the meaningfulness of writing, in regards to his devastating experience in Buchenwald. After his encounter with death, or rather with what he labels his “crossing through” death in Buchenwald, Semprun searched for ways to reattach to life (*Literature or Life* 15). Writing offered an exceptional means to do so. As such, literature became for Semprun a powerful vehicle to come back to the community of the living. It also activated contradictory emotions in Semprun, as he struggled to return to a more ordinary life after Buchenwald. Indeed, Semprun’s acts of writing, while they brought him back into life, also forced him to confront the difficult question of tackling reality through a literature that brought him back to death.

The following passage by Semprun is remarkable in the harrowing dilemma his writing poses. With it, Semprun struggles with the problematic of engaging into acts of reminiscing and writing about an experience that was horrific and that asked to be simultaneously forgotten. Semprun's predicament had him thus face a powerful force of language that could be a means to life. But it also had him concurrently account for language as a vehicle that signified death. Semprun's reflection reads as follows. "Il avait raison, [César] Vallejo. Je ne possède rien d'autre que ma mort, mon expérience de la mort, pour dire ma vie, l'exprimer, la porter en avant." As he reflects on the urgency of writing to find a new meaning for life, he contends, "Il faut que je fabrique de la vie avec toute cette mort. Et la meilleure façon d'y parvenir, c'est l'écriture." The healing quality of Semprun's commitment to writing what he experienced is, however, clouded by the burden of death. He declares, "Or, [l'écriture] me ramène à la mort, m'y enferme, m'y asphyxie." As he ponders on how life and death inextricably permeate each other, even in life after Buchenwald, likewise, Semprun keeps reflecting extensively on the following contradictory, yet unsolvable reality of narrating his story. Writing and reminiscing about his experiences may indeed keep him living, but they also bring him back to the realm of death and the dying. Choosing to write and be close to death, or remaining silent in an attempt to forget deadly encounters brought Semprun to his harrowing impasse. It is encapsulated in the following quote. He declares, "Voilà où j'en suis: je ne puis vivre qu'en assumant cette mort par l'écriture, mais l'écriture m'interdit littéralement de vivre" (*L'écriture ou la vie* 215).

Semprun's reflections on writing as an act of survival after a life-in-death closely relates to the testimony by Aharon Appelfeld. Like Semprun, Appelfeld first reflects on

the inextricability of life and death as he actually experienced them, and on the way they shaped his writing at first. In *Beyond Despair*, Appelfeld writes, “Over the years we learned to live with death as with a familiar acquaintance (11). Also, for Appelfeld, “the sights” of the Holocaust were so terrible and enormous, that they seemed unable to be put into words. As we read Appelfeld’s words, “the sights were dreadful and immense, and words are frail and impotent.” Also, Appelfeld was forced to admit that his “interior was locked away” (x). As such, his “deepest and most delicate feelings were hesitant to stand naked” (xi). For years, he felt that “Life after the Holocaust seemed an untimely resurrection, a new nightmare. No one knew whether this was rescue or punishment.” The memory of his experience, and reflecting about it became his most dreaded and dreadful “enemies”(x). Also he contends, “Memory seemed to be the most necessary content of my experience. To be faithful to what had happened was an imperative from which one was not to deviate. But what was I to do? For memory itself proved to be the enemy of my writing.” In “a feeling of despair,” Appelfeld claims that, “It took me years to understand that the inner enemy [my memory] was impeding my writing.” He claims that “compulsive memory took over my writing.” In Appelfeld’s terms, compulsive memory imprisoned him because it allowed for no possible deviation from a recollection of experience that he wanted “exact.” This oppressive memory “denied him access to any other creative element” (xi). A turning point came, for Appelfeld, when he realized the following. After contending that, “There can be no literature without memory,” he came to a new understanding of both. He came to perceive how memory can be used differently and more pertinently, besides as for keeping record of mere facts (xii). He posits this idea in the following statement. He claims that “memory is not only fact and

vision and the course plotted for them, but also a warm emotion” (xii). “Memory,” as “doubtless the essence of creation,” thus turned for Appelfeld from “compulsive” to “creative” (x). As such, for Appelfeld, the power of the creative imagination lies “not in intensity and exaggeration” but “in giving a new order to facts.” As such, it does not reside in “inventing new facts,” but in “their correct order” (xiii). As he concludes, “Life in the Holocaust does not demand the invention of new facts and sights. That life was so ‘rich’ one could choke on it. The literary problem is not to pile fact upon fact, but rather to choose the most necessary ones, the ones that touch the heart of the experience and not its edges” (xiii).

Not only did Appelfeld and Semprun reflect on writing as a means, however problematic, to reattach to life. They also claimed that literature and language were powerful vehicles to assess and express experience, including experiences of the extreme. Not doubting the capacities of language to be able to express everything, to “contain” everything, Semprun insists on the power of words (*Literature or Life* 13). He contends, “On peut toujours tout dire, en somme.” Insisting on the tremendous capacities of language, he repeats his statement and elaborates on it. He claims, “On peut toujours tout dire, le langage contient tout. On peut dire l’amour le plus fou, la plus terrible cruauté. On peut nommer le mal, son goût de pavot, ses bonheurs délétères. On peut dire Dieu et ce n’est pas peu dire.” He continues to enumerate only a few among all the emotions, feelings, thoughts, or objects that are expressible in and through language. He declares, “On peut dire la rose et la rosée, l’espace d’un matin. On peut dire la tendresse, l’océan tutélaire de la bonté. On peut dire l’avenir, les poètes s’y aventurent les yeux fermés, la bouche fertile” (*L’écriture ou la vie* 26). Not once does Semprun doubt language as a

medium for knowing or expressing the reality of a world that, however complex, is familiar. Doubts, on the other hand, assail him, when it comes “to tell the story” (*Literature or life* 13). He asserts, “Pourtant, un doute me vient sur la possibilité de raconter. Non pas que l’expérience vécue soit indicible. Elle a été invivable, ce qui est tout autre chose.” Questioning the “content” of that experience, rather than the “form” of the narrative that relates to that lived reality, he continues with, “Autre chose qui ne concerne pas la forme d’un récit possible, mais sa substance. Non pas son articulation, mais sa densité” (*L’écriture ou la vie* 25). As he reflects on the urgency of the work of art to appropriately reveal a reality that was unbearable, he pursues with the following. “Ne parviendront à cette substance, à cette densité transparente que ceux qui sauront faire de leur témoignage un objet artistique, un espace de création. Ou de récréation. Seul l’artifice d’un récit maîtrisé parviendra à transmettre partiellement la vérité du témoignage.” He concludes by stating that, “Mais ceci n’a rien d’exceptionnel: il en arrive ainsi de toutes les grandes expériences historiques” (26).

In addressing our responsibility towards an event such as Auschwitz, Jean-François Lyotard, has also raised questions about “the *propriety* of the symbolic language” that surrounds Auschwitz. More precisely, he has questioned “the *propriety*,” not of “language” as such, but of discourse around Auschwitz. His point of inquiry actually revolves around the validity of “the genre of discourse that links onto ‘Auschwitz’” (*The Differend* 88). Lyotard’s early questioning of the limits of traditionally well-separated discursive genres has done a lot in initiating rhetorical inquiries for theorists. In our case, his position enables us to address forms of discourses that appear, to a greater or lesser extent, appropriate, or not, to articulate experiences of

the extreme. In other words, are there types of discourse that fall short of the task of articulating a reality that was horrific? If so, how are they lacking?

An inquiry into the genres of discourse allows for exploring what Lyotard's friend and critic David Carroll calls, in his "Memorial for the Différend," the "obligation" of a postmodern politics to "respond to injustice." It also enables us to inquire into some possible forms of discursive "responses to injustice."

Lyotard claims that various approaches or responses to the problems of injustice are necessarily difficult or even "contradictory." It is so because of the way or manner in which some of the problems have been posed. Lyotard argues that "contradictory effects" are indeed faced by "all forms of political action in their attempted forms of justice." More importantly, he points at inherent contradictions and exclusions that some forms of discourse may perform. Not only does he make these discursive contradictions and exclusions appear clearly but he also questions the limited character of the means that some of these discourses employ. As a result, Lyotard calls for discourses to reach outside and beyond their more traditional or restrictive boundaries.

In the case of Auschwitz, Lyotard addresses a form of flagrant and devastating political injustice that he links to a "fundamental problem of historical knowledge." More specifically, he draws attention to "Auschwitz" by posing a question about the historical knowledge or historical "truth" that surrounds "Auschwitz." His point is to question the validity of responses regarding the truth of a situation if it is framed exclusively according to the strict, univocal rules of one discourse. Here, it is the historical discourse and its modes of inquiry into truth that he doubts. He phrases the problematic in the following terms: "according to strict historical rules," how is it that we can actually

“know if a situation ever really existed or if events occurred if there were no surviving witnesses to the events?” He further asks, “what can or will be inferred from Auschwitz” if “the limited number of witnesses to the situation and events do not or cannot report them adequately or completely?” Also, he asks, what happens if these witnesses “contradict one another?” And then, what can we make of the situation if these “witnesses describe only limited aspects of the situation and not the situation as a whole?” How is it possible, Lyotard thus asks, ever to “determine conclusively,” or “according to strict historical rules” that “what these witnesses do speak about in the case of Auschwitz” is in fact “a representative part of the general situation?” How is it possible to know that it is not an “aberration from a general situation,” or even a “part of the general situation?” And if “the situation is such that an overwhelming number of potential witnesses have already died,” then “how can a survivor speak of and to that loss, since he or she did not die and cannot speak for or as those who did?” (20).

In Lyotard’s thinking, questions of historical credibility directly relate to the possible forms of representation that events can take or that witnesses can make. As they open Lyotard’s discussion of the *differend* of Auschwitz, these questions of historical attempt at truth based solely on one mode of inquiry serve a crucial purpose. They have Lyotard denounce the reductive character of grounding discourse in one specific, exclusive, limiting form of political action or discourse. This condemning of historical supremacy in representing events had already been prefigured by Lyotard’s withdrawal from engaged political practice altogether. Indeed, the confrontation with what he coins the “irresolvable dilemma or double bind” that attaches to a discourse that claims universal truth eventually had him disassociate himself from his early Marxist position.

It eventually had him leave the more “radical dissident” form of Marxism and the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie* as well. From then on, Lyotard’s discontent with the limitations imposed by one form of discourse kept growing.

For Lyotard, restricting oneself to one form of discourse is indeed bound to lead to political or discursive assumptions that accept one meaning only. For Lyotard, this one meaning or this one mode of representation cannot suffice. One mode is not acceptable, because for Lyotard, one meaning may equal a “non-meaning” (14). Besides, modes of thinking or discourses that accept one definition only are not in a position to sustain or even frame contradictions (15). More precisely, they cannot allow for contradictions at all. This is so because they have no place for dissenting voices within their own discourse. They inherently exclude those voices. On the other hand, if those opposing views are expressed outside of that particular discourse, they are intrinsically outside of that discourse. This gives rise to “the double bind” or “irresolvable dilemma” that Lyotard denounces (14). By not allowing for contradictions, a univocal discourse thus reduces itself to a blatant contradiction. To make this point clear, he turns to the instance of a fictitious communist militant who is a dissident communist. Calling this dissident communist the “Ivanian witness,” Lyotard argues the following. For the “Ivanian witness,” Lyotard claims, it is impossible “to express contest and dissidence within the idiom being contested.” It is so because “the very language of the dissident communist is ruled out from the start.” As such, the dissident’s right or authority to phrase reality in a way that is “different from the way the Party and the State phrase reality” is denied to him. As a result, in Lyotard’s contention, the dissenting communist can only be treated as either “insane, or as an enemy of the people, or both.” Opting for

an alternate choice, the dissident communist can decide to confess and admit his crime. But then, in Lyotard's contention, he runs the risk of being excluded, and he ceases to be regarded as a communist. In that case, he is "damned" (15). Both choices, because they are grounded in either inclusive or exclusive terms, are unacceptable. The Ivorian witness can only face the Lyotardian "double bind." In framing the dilemma in terms of discourse, we can conclude with the following. If the dissenting communist does not confess to his crime, he "implicitly recognizes that the communist authorities are the only ones competent" to implement the communist character of the society he wants to contest. Yet, he cannot phrase dissent explicitly and discursively without being excluded by the communist authorities. In either case, "his testimony is silenced before it can be made" (14).

According to Lyotard's critique, "phrasing a right to dissidence" and yet "remaining a Marxist" would thus seem an appropriate course to adopt. It would at least constitute a "first phase of dissent." But it is, in actuality, insufficient. It is insufficient because "it still accepts the language of Marxism as universal." The next phase for Lyotard is thus to phrase the relativity of Marxist discourse itself. That phase requires to phrase a "differend." That "differend," in Lyotard's words, becomes thus a "contentiousness," a place for arguments, that Marxism itself cannot "negate, overcome, or either incorporate into itself or exclude from itself" (15).

Lyotard is thus noteworthy, and actually celebrated, for having questioned some of the formal limitations imposed by dominant ways of thinking. As evidenced by his criticism of the discursive practices at work in "meta-narratives" or "grand narratives," one of his major contributions has also been to question the legitimating acts they pose

(Browning, *Lyotard* 32). By interrogating how narratives impose a certain vision of a future through the legitimating discourses they set out to produce, Lyotard's work illuminates our project. It does so thanks to its proposed displacement of boundaries. Indeed, in dealing with postcolonial and postmodern texts, thinking within compartmentalized, rigidly defined categories and disciplines may be too reductive or restrictive. Not only because this confinement may have impeded the reading of some forms of literature. But also because it has not allowed us to address a reality--turned barbaric--in its full complexity. In arguing for the necessity of displacing, exploding, and expanding the boundaries separating categories of discourses, Lyotard has thus enabled new insights. With them, new spaces have been opened as well. I propose they serve as borderlands in which to inscribe and probe experiences at the "limit," such as the "para-experience" that was "named Auschwitz" (*Differend* 89).

Lyotard's postmodern work on "grand narratives" can open up the perceptions we have attached to slavery or the Holocaust (*Lyotard* 32). Discourses on extreme violence, we know, can alter our understanding of it. This widening of perceptions can be prompted, I propose, not so much by offering counter-narratives, however. This critical stance would not suffice. In the case of the Holocaust and slavery, it would simply mean a negative reversal of discursive power. This reversal would serve solely to locate the discourse of the persecuted as counter-narrative. A counter-narrative of that type would simply serve to disprove the dominant story. Yet, the dominant story of the persecutors involved in the trade of human slaves or in the Nazi extermination of European Jewry should not be denied, disproved, or silenced. On the contrary, it should be inscribed in memory and publicly known. In Lyotard's words, "We definitely have to explore clouds

of thoughts. No indifference is possible or, better yet, indifference as such is a mode of answering the appeal” (*Peregrinations* 12). Rather than proposing counter-narratives that would merely disprove dominant stories, Lyotard’s critique allows for something else: critical stances of broader insights. His critique actually enables the inscription of a variety of discourses from non-dominant forces that do not silence a dominant story.

Some discourses may thus open up our capacity for the perception of realities that, because they were extreme, may have been left in the background. But also, by having these dormant forces surface, by allowing them to come to the foreground, a plurality of new insights may emerge and be registered. One privileged medium for these voices to be heard, as I will propose later, is through a literature of testimonial, such as that of Delbo and Morrison. If we follow this line of thinking, our perception of history can thus be expanded and supplemented with testimonies of survivors. New perceptions of slavery and the Holocaust may then emerge. My point is thus that even though evidence of these forces of the past may not have been ultimately preserved in dominant, collective memory, they can still, however, be located and accessed. In our case, this evidence is to be found in accounts of individual experiences and in the personal recollections of these experiences. Also, attention to these emerging non-dominant forces may enable inquiring into new sets of critical problems. One, for example, grounds itself in a certain meaningfulness that, for instance, revolves around the types of silence that can be encountered in personal accounts of extreme circumstances.

Lyotard has approached the problem of silence in *The Differend* and elsewhere. He claims that the relevance and problem of possible silence may have us rethink our ways of approaching discourses of political injustice. As such, he asks for a re-

examination of silence, whether personally or culturally self-imposed, that gravitates around events of extreme violence especially in postcolonial and postmodern discourses. He first asserts that the irresolvable character of events of undecided social or cultural character inscribed in these discourses should be no ground for silence or indifference towards them. Also, being unreceptive to events of unjust character, on the pretense that it is impossible to ever get to a full cognition of them, is not acceptable. Likewise, not being receptive to them because they “foreclose comparisons,” or because we cannot “speculate” about them, as in the case of Auschwitz, falls short. For Lyotard, “Auschwitz” does not open onto possible speculation because its outcome is past and done with. It does not, or should not, however, and in his words, “preclude the need to talk about it” (89). For him, discussing or disputing what is “*indiscutable*” or “indisputable” is and remains a necessary political and discursive stance. Indeed, for him, what is not open to a “different” result or historical outcome should not “deter us of the certain, necessary moral obligation to respond to instances of injustice or exploitation, past or present.” In his contention, even though one cannot speak of an “experience” with a changed or changeable “result” as in “the case of Auschwitz,” we are still faced with a responsibility towards Auschwitz (88).

Our liability towards Auschwitz concerns thus learning to be receptive and open to silences. Whether these refer to what David Carroll calls a “historical sense of silence,” or concern “the different types of silence” of various testimonies by witnesses after Auschwitz matters little. More pressing and relevant to the discussion is the possibilities for interpretative work that must be done around silence and around its possible meanings.

As a matter of fact, Lyotard was not solely interested in specific types of knowledge around Auschwitz. Whether that knowledge was grounded in historical, ethical, or political discourses is not the point here. Indeed, Lyotard was most interested also in what is not or has not been verbalized about Auschwitz. He was particularly engaged and attentive to its silencing, the silence(s) made around it. As David Carroll explains, “Lyotard is interested not just in what is said in such testimonies but also in what is not said.” With these testimonies, Lyotard is also attentive to “what cannot be said, even when everything is said.” Carroll further explicates that Lyotard is likewise interested in “what remains silent in testimony, not through simple forgetting, distortion, or traumatic repression.” This attentiveness to silence by Lyotard derives from the fact that “there is always something else, something more (and perhaps something less) that needs to be said.”

Lyotard’s point, we remember, is that knowledge purely grounded in a historical context, no matter how complex or complete, is not sufficient. In Carroll’s wording, historical knowledge “does not and cannot suffice,” because “there is something else at stake,” besides historical knowledge, that needs to be acknowledged by the historian. This acknowledgement, Carroll argues, needs to be done “in the name of both history and justice” (“Memorial for the Différend” 21). In treating silences as signs, not facts of history, Lyotard thus asks for a new or renewed type of attention around accounts of historical disaster.

In *Peregrinations*, Lyotard stresses the importance of being receptive or sensitive to “events.” It includes those that do not conform to political expectations or strategies. Through a “form of political modesty,” however, and in Lyotard’s words, we should be

able to approach events that have a character of non-solvability or non-resolvability, such as Auschwitz. This openness or sensitivity can indeed unlock spaces of critical thinking in which events can be scrutinized anew, and confronted from different angles and sources. Even though resolutions of problems must always be resisted, and always opposed, dialogues about these problems must, however, continuously be pursued. These dialogues, then, should remain open-ended. Posing problems in terms of *différends*, and opening our sensitivities to events may thus renew attention to some urgent critical questions. Many of these are confronted by Delbo and Morrison.

While the problematic past of some historical narratives, such as slavery or extermination, is not open to speculation, it cannot open around a *differend*. Does this mean then, that some narratives are destined to remain unattended to or un-discussed? The answer is no. No, events should not remain undisclosed, unattended to or un-discussed. Neither should their discourses, in Lyotard's words, be of arrogance, authority, universality, or prescription. Rather, they should be encouraging us to be "receptive," and supplement our understanding of painful realities (13). The discourses of Delbo and Morrison, as we will see in the following chapters, will not proceed to "authorize, prescribe, or command" one outcome over the others. Rather, they will illuminate themselves in the ways in which they request our utmost attention to their object. As such, the intent of these narratives by Delbo and Morrison is not so much an attempt to determine once and for all the outcome of discourses of past exclusion or annihilation. Nor is their object to close discussions around them. Rather, their textualities will be shown to illuminate and supplement a critical reflection on the aberrations of histories of political exploitation and social injustice. As such, they will be

explored through a literature of testimonials and personal reflections that ground themselves in individual, yet also, collective approaches of reality.

One of our responsibilities, then, will have to do with dealing with the shocks, “dreadful and immense,” to recount the words of Appelfeld, that slavery and the Holocaust may have us register (*Beyond Despair* x). Facing events of such magnitude, as encompassed in slavery and the Holocaust, will then call for a close examination of the reception that their occasion produced. As Geoffrey Hartman claims in “The Book of Destruction,” as he refers to the Holocaust, “We want to say, ‘It is inconceivable.’” Yet, as he continues with his claim, “yet we know it was conceived and acted upon systematically.” In his words, and in order to maintain a sense of safety, “We continue to harbor, therefore, a sense of improbability.” This sense of “improbability” arises in us, however, “not because there is any doubt whatsoever about the Shoah as a fact.” Doubt surges in us, almost as a spontaneous form of response or reflex, rather “because what was lived through, or what we have learned about, cannot be a part of us: the mind rejects it, casts it out—or it casts out the mind.” As he continues, “We are forced to admit that something in human behavior is alien to us.” Similar to the argument previously made by Chambers, this admission to an essential “fault” in our human behavior is that “yet it could be species-related” (322).

The discussion of the narratives by Delbo and Morrison will bring to light that “fault” (xviii). Besides, by being stories grounded in loss of innocence and in the painful acquisition of a certain knowledge, they enable the following. By bearing witness to experiences that Chambers inscribes in “cultural obscenity,” they will facilitate exploring primary experiences of trauma. While in Chambers’s words, this type of witnessing is

particularly emphasized in “the case of Holocaust writing,” I will posit that it may be found in a literature that deals with slavery also (*Untimely Interventions* 68).

Besides, and it is the second point that I wish to make here, Delbo’s and Morrison’s textualities permit an exploration of how we can be made attentive to the sense of political or ethical “*responsibility*” that Lyotard or Derrida call for. Exploring a form of literature that is based on testimonials, in which every voice, every silence, and every mediating space in-between is meaningful, is one way. But also, by being stories that resist a universal approach or reading, and that focus on some muted voices around histories of individual or historical trauma, they may have us move closer to that *responsibility*.

Chapter 2. The Haunting of the Past

In *Testimony*, Shoshana Felman claims that literature and art can be a “precocious mode” of “witnessing” and “accessing reality” (xx). She further contends that it is “especially” so, “when all other modes of knowledge are precluded” (xx). In this chapter, I propose to read Charlotte Delbo’s *Aucun de nous ne reviendra* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* as narrative acts of witnessing. I suggest that, through their testimonial function, their works enable access to particular forms of knowledge. As part of a literature of testament, their writings can initiate in us some understanding of how some literary works can be particularly adequate to reveal experiences of the extreme. This opens two questions. One concerns examining how traumatic experiences or events may affect individuals, and to what extent. The other relates to how some experienced trauma can be narratively performed and revealed through testimonial acts of (hi)story telling.

However partial and fragmented the knowledge to be uncovered is, it is meaningful. Because it is traumatic and because it was accounted for in singular ways, this type of knowledge seems, however, particularly complex and difficult to tackle. It is so because it is at the core of collective and cultural histories besides being grounded in stories of personal traumas. It may be useful to look more closely into the issues and difficulties that this type of traumatic knowledge propounds. Also, it is meaningful to explore how this personally or culturally devastating knowledge has not only been experienced by witnesses, but how it has been conveyed as well. In this regard, the following preliminary consideration will guide us in our exploration. It relates to the extent to which writers of traumatic events have had to stretch the capacities of their art and of their imagination in order to transmit the shocks of their experience. Looking at

some challenging obstacles that writers of trauma have had to face in their writing may thus be a good place to start.

In her essay about the memorialization of the victims of the Holocaust, Patricia Gartland discusses what can impede awareness, recollection and transmission of knowledge grounded in trauma. In “Three Holocaust Writers” Gartland contends that the “obstacles” that Holocaust writers have had to “overcome” are “many” and “huge.” In her contention, writing about the Holocaust has not only meant to “initially” face and confront “a felt inability to comprehend the event fully.” It has also entailed the difficulties of “finding a means to express” eloquently and effectively experiences of traumatic resonance, while using “the conventions of language.” As such, crafting the language artistically in order to successfully convey through “accessible, simple means” the traumatic object of experience so that it might lead to “cognitive understanding,” has been a major challenge. As she encapsulates the many daunting obstacles faced by Holocaust writers, Gartland claims the following:

Holocaust writers have had to overcome many obstacles. They had first to confront the profoundly unsettling reality of atrocity and deal with the personal trauma, the shock of recognition inherent in their confrontation with the utter depth of human behavior. They had to deal with the fact that the world either chose not to know or, for all practical purposes, did not care about the fate of the Jews. They have had to engage their readers in a process of discovery that can at best be described as terribly painful, and they have had to seek vehicles to transmit the tenor of their message that would neither reduce nor distort its immensity. These are huge tasks for people who had traveled on roads through hell. (46)

Delbo’s experience as a Nazi camp survivor eludes, to a certain extent, traditional expression in words or representation. As such, the nonrepresentational form of writing that she chooses to adopt as her artistic prose is a deliberate stylistic choice on her part. It has her testimonial piece pose as an eloquently and convincingly written piece of art that

has profound ethical implications. Overcoming the many obstacles faced by Holocaust writers as described by Gartland, Delbo's work is ground-breaking. By exploding some forms of conventional writing, she has indeed produced the meaningfulness that she sought her work to convey. The potency of her literary work written in the context of a postmodern era is not only beautifully crafted aesthetically. It is also profoundly significant ethically. Besides, the beauty and relevance of Delbo's art, despite aesthetic and contextual differences, can be read in conjunction with the postcolonial work of Toni Morrison. The following preliminary remarks on the apparent difficulty, yet paradoxical necessity, to address experiences perceived as not fully comprehensible are thus valid for both Delbo's and Morrison's art.

Delbo's search for expression to reveal the "inexplicable" can be easily related to Morrison's approach to the "unspeakable" ("Unspeakable Things Unspoken" 220). Finding the most convincing and eloquent ways to communicate the hardly "explicable" or the "speakable" was one of their major literary challenges. The craft and artistic virtuosity displayed by both artists to tackle that challenge is, however, precisely one of the underlying connections between them that requests attention. In this chapter, I will thus attempt to bring the following to light. Namely, that both narratives are constructed as attempts to reveal, rather than explain, and signify, rather than describe, experiences grounded in trauma. Whether the experiences transmitted were personally and immediately witnessed matters little. What does is that their point is to signify within a community of readers. As such, showing that both Delbo's and Morrison's art is potent because it makes an after-Auschwitz experience and a postcolonial aftermath vividly present for us is crucial. It is so to such an extent that their "presence," "nowness," or

“*maintenance*,” in the words of Derrida, is resonant today (“Signature, Event, Context” 328).

The experiences of trauma that Delbo and Morrison artistically render are also actually haunting. Written so as “not to lay the ghosts” of the concentrationary universe or of colonialism, *Aucun* and *Beloved* thus both aim, for Chambers, at becoming obsessive and haunting to their readers. As such, the “hauntedness” of these narratives can actually be said to perform their objects by becoming “haunting.” In this regard, both pieces have thus become, for Chambers, “modes of cultural infiltration” that have a profound ethical message to deliver.

Delbo’s art attempts to go beyond mere explanation. The subject-matter of *Aucun* is the unusual and the baffling. It actually “deals with that which cannot be totally elucidated or explained.” The aim of Delbo’s narrative is to demonstrate that inexplicability. In the words of Chambers, the narrative’s “*burden*” of Delbo’s work is thus “to manifest” the inextricable character of an experience that was highly traumatic (*Untimely Interventions* 230). This attempt to “demonstrate that inexplicability, i.e. to manifest it, in lieu of explaining it” is very closely related to, but goes beyond, the postmodern attitude of Jean-François Lyotard in the face of art. Specifically referring to art after Auschwitz, Lyotard contends that what art can actually “do” is specifically “to bear witness,” not to “the sublime,” but to the “aporia of art and to its pain.” As Lyotard further asserts, “art” does “not say the unsayable,” but it “says that it cannot say it” (*Heidegger and “the jews”* 47). Also, for Chambers, in order for the artist to “demonstrate” the “unsayable” or to “display” the “inexplicable,” the artist can engage in “abstaining from any attempt to explain it away” (*Untimely Interventions* 230). This is

exactly the rhetorical mode that Delbo embraces in *Aucun*, as does Morrison in *Beloved*. It makes their pieces narratively effective as well as ethically compelling.

Aucun, according to Chambers, is indeed grounded in a “declamatory mode.” For him, “declamation is understood neither to explain nor directly address those who would require an explanation.” Rather, *Aucun* functions as a literary “cry out” that presents the strange as a writerly performance. This performance becomes the object of Delbo’s art itself, whose aim becomes to be captured and called to attention. For Chambers, the rhetorical “significance” of Delbo’s art as she grounds it in “apodictic” or demonstrative, rather than in explanatory form, actually “lies in its being read” and interpreted (229). Interestingly enough, Morrison’s text, while grounded in the unspeakable, is meant to produce an identical effect. Likewise, Delbo’s writing manifests a profound concern with a state of “*hauntedness*.” That “*hauntedness*,” which “corresponds to an experience of trauma” that needs to be conveyed, can be, for Chambers, best revealed if it is “*recognized as haunting*” (190). At best, this haunting can function as an “endlessly plural specter that can’t be laid to rest, but whom, at least we can acknowledge and to whom we can respond,” in the form of our awareness, “anxiety and phantom pain” (207). Also, as that which “fails to end, but continues to repeat and to return, even when it is supposedly ‘over,’” this “*haunting*” is what makes Delbo’s work, but also Morrison’s, so distinct and crucial. Their texts become the potent “vehicles that relay hauntedness as a haunting” (190).

We may be reminded that not only have writers of Holocaust testimonials been pressured to fully comprehend and register what was experienced at the time of the traumatic experience. They also have had to face an initial improbability at being able to

disclose and express their experience to the fullest. Examining more precisely how Delbo's art successfully inscribes and artistically bears witness to her traumatic experience in Auschwitz is thus an underlying concern of this chapter. Another is the extent to which Morrison's narrative can so convincingly interpellate readers in order to involve them more deeply in traumatic experiences. These two concerns, however, apply to both texts.

One of the stylistic techniques of Delbo's art that make it unquestionably convincing is her use of fragmented writing as it responds to her inclination for effecting a disturbing outcome to our reading. Another stylistic device which has her art come out as traumatizing, and thus approaches the inexplicable, includes the simultaneous coexistence of apparently opposing frames of reference, such as those present in circumstances of extreme experiences, and those located in the more habitual spaces of reality. The presences of the obscene in the ordinary, of the familiar in the unthinkable, of death in life, and vice versa are some instances. They reveal at best how an object of traumatic knowledge can be, if not totally known, at least perceived and acknowledged. The shrieks of terror in the face of death that Delbo places in her text, for instance, eloquently speak for themselves, especially when they are followed by the freezing silence of death itself. The manner in which she makes those silences and that traumatic stillness meaningful is thus crucial in uncovering experiences of the out of the ordinary. Besides, the figural language and the vivid images that she plants in her text to help to reveal the traumatic nature of her experience are extremely effective in situating the trauma within more familiar modes of perceiving it. Furthermore, her turning some stylistic devices into extremely potent motifs in order to encourage readers to engage in

relatively intense interpretive involvement is crucial. The extent to which her art enables access to a more subjective, almost visceral--rather than cognitive-- albeit incomplete, understanding of the events she came to witness in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Raisko, and Ravensbrück, are major points to examine in this chapter.

In an interview with Nellie McKay, Toni Morrison has suggested more than once that when the reading of her books is done, “one is actually not through.” I propose that, indeed, “one is actually not through” after reading any literary work of traumatic significance like hers. It is so not only because “the themes” that are uncovered or unveiled in her literary pieces “are haunting.” It is also related to the manner in which her discourse is crafted. How it leads to a haunting effect on the reader is thus crucial in understanding the object of Morrison’s artistic practice (“An Interview with Toni Morrison” 403). Both Morrison’s, but also Delbo’s texts, are thus fertile grounds for exploring forms of art that relate to what Chambers terms a literature of the “aftermath.” With this type of literature, the narratives to which a haunted subject returns after a traumatic experience can thus have us perceive Delbo’s and Morrison’s texts as meant to signal not a “cessation of pain” but rather as a “return of that pain” (*Untimely Interventions* 212).

Since both authors’ art functions to reveal inner and outer, yet indelible, forms of trauma, it is interesting to open a place to engage them in dialogue. As such, the weighty memory of an injustice done to a whole race, a recurring and potent motif in Morrison’s text, can be placed next to the memory of an injustice done to a whole ethnic group, as witnessed by Delbo. Likewise, the memory of utmost violence done time and again to the black body and psyche, another of Morrison’s themes in *Beloved*, can be read in view

of the physically destructive acts that were committed in Europe between 1939 and 1945 as witnessed in *Aucun*. Also, an utmost difficulty of surviving the psychic and physical impact of violence done to a whole race or ethnic group can serve as a crucial cultural index of shame and certain inability to forget. Both narratives need thus to be probed also in light of the urgent and unresolved issues of a traumatic past that refuses to pass. More exactly, they are fertile grounds for approaching what Thomas Trezise calls, after the title of an article by Ernst Nolte, “A Past That Will Not Pass” (“The Question of Community” 868).

A similarity between Delbo’s and Morrison’s texts is located, as Jean-François Lyotard terms it, at the juncture where “the present is the past,” and “the past is always presence” (*Heidegger and “the jews”* 17). In this regard, one indicator of violent traumas comes through the haunting presence of immaterial and material ghosts that are present and specific to both authors’ works. Also, the certain meaningfulness that attaches to silence as artistic sign of cultural trauma is so eloquent in their oeuvres that it gives art, in their cases, a profound intensity. In the words of Lyotard, their prose can cause us to be “confronted with a silence that does not make itself heard as silence” (12). The specific stylistic devices just mentioned, which function as literary signs of racial and cultural traumatic pasts, can thus be read in tandem as some powerful articulations of unresolved violence that still prevail in postmodern and postcolonial discourses.

By proposing “speech acts” that, in Felman’s words enable the narratives to “perform their own meaning,” Delbo’s and Morrison’s testimonies reveal a specific type of knowledge that appeals to our senses, more than to our understanding (*Testimony* 5). This point is introduced by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Explained*.

Drawing on Lyotard's argument in *La Parole Singulière*, Laurent Jenny claims that some types of knowledge are indeed such that make us "feel" rather than "know" an object. This somatic rather than cognitive knowledge can "open a wound in our sensitivity." Because they are not grounded in a linear time frame, but are traumatic accounts, Delbo's and Morrison's testimonies open a "new sense of temporality" in us as well. As a result, the traumatic sense of time that they encapsulate serves to act like a "wound" that impinges on us with a haunting "insistence" (13).

Recalling what Jean-François Lyotard has said about some short pieces by Walter Benjamin is useful at this time. As he comments on Benjamin's *One Way Street* and *A Berlin Childhood*, and reminds us that Adorno would call these pieces "micrologies," Lyotard makes a crucial point. Namely, Lyotard contends that these short pieces do not set out to "describe" events but to "capture" them. Discussing the above-mentioned pieces in terms of what they perform, rather than what they state or claim, Lyotard insists on the following. He writes that Benjamin's "micrologies," in fact, "do not describe events from childhood." Rather, "they capture the childhood of the events and inscribe what is uncapturable about it." Delbo's and Morrison's testimonies do not actually "describe" traumatic events from violent times. Rather, they "capture" the violence and the trauma of the events. Meanwhile, they also "inscribe what is uncapturable about them" (*The Postmodern Explained* 90).

Lyotard has also proposed that some narratives, similar to the ones by Benjamin, have an initiatory value about them. Rather than purposely presenting objective description of events, Lyotard proposes, these accounts serve to instruct us. For Lyotard, the instruction resides, however, not so much in the events themselves. Rather, it is

located in the effect and manner in which they make themselves present when we appraise them. Still in *The Postmodern Explained*, Lyotard assesses event as a form of initiation:

And what makes an encounter with a word, odor, place, book, or face into an event is not its newness when compared to other 'events.' It is its very value as initiation. You only learn this later. It cuts open a wound in the sensibility. You know this because it has since reopened and will reopen again, marking out the rhythm of a secret and perhaps unnoticed temporality. This wound ushered you into an unknown world, but without ever making it known to you. Such initiation initiates nothing, it just begins. (91)

Delbo's and Morrison's texts "put into effect," in Felman's words, what "cannot be understood, transmitted, in the mission of transmission of the witness." Instead, they have initiatory value. Both set out to activate what needs to be sensitively perceived about events and histories of trauma. This is what makes them so innovative. Also, while Delbo's and Morrison's texts reveal the burden of the witnessing that they set out to perform, they also repeat over and again the "uniqueness" of the witnessing (*Testimony* 5). They do so by "initiating" in us a sense of *injustice* and suffering. They cut open "a wound in our sensibility" that can "usher us into an unknown world" (*The Postmodern Explained* 91). Rather than making statements about events, their prose comes to perform and capture the violent character of these events. As testimonial, their narratives usher us into a knowledge, which would otherwise remain less accessible. The events that they reveal would indeed remain too remote or cognitively difficult to approach. It would be so because their occurrence is past or distant, and beyond our present. Yet, by working in a traumatic timeframe and by opening a new sense of temporality in us, Delbo's and Morrison's texts function to initiate and recall the presence of the past among us. The events that their texts reveal are meant to reach out to us. They are also

meant to activate in us feelings of unease and shock. So, more than simply describing some singular instances of bondage and extermination, Delbo's and Morrison's narratives allow us to sensitively approach these events. Their narratives reveal and perform those violent events. Yet, and importantly so, they also activate in us feelings of pain that influence us from that point forward. As such, the violent impact of these events haunts us.

Felman has labeled the poetry of Paul Celan a "haunting melody." Drawing on Celan's urgency to awaken us to potential cultural threats is fruitful. In this instance, the urgency of Celan's poems is comparable and applicable to the texts of Delbo and Morrison. Felman writes that "Celan's verse" is not only a "compelling . . . melody," but it actually "returns" like a "haunting melody ... like a directed beacon, an insistent driving force in the quest toward something which is not entirely within reach." So insistent and compelling is his poetry that, as a result, it becomes "haunting." It is this similar haunting, that is revealed through the "*bearing*" and the "*burden*" of the testimonies by Delbo and Morrison that I will explore now (Testimony 3).

As testimonies grounded in trauma, Delbo's and Morrison's texts show how trauma interferes with, and actually shapes, forms of testimonial literature. Felman has discussed extensively, in collaboration with Dori Laub, that materiality and centrality of testimony outlined by a traumatic character. Felman presents her argument by first insisting that testimony is and has become a "privileged contemporary mode of transmission and communication" (6). Questioning the underlying motives behind the omnipresence of testimony in "*our recent cultural accounts of ourselves*," Felman makes the following point. Namely, that testimony is a mode of bearing witness that is

particularly in keeping with the needs of our reality. As she claims: “It has been suggested that testimony is the literary—or discursive—mode par excellence of our time.” Further, she acknowledges that our “era,” indeed, “can precisely be defined as the age of testimony.” She quotes Elie Wiesel: “If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle and the Renaissance the sonnet,” then “our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony” (5-6).

The meaningfulness of testimony in our modern era is in direct relation to the fabric of testimony itself. Testimonies draw their substance from the events witnessed. They are a privileged mode of revealing the character of such experiences. Testimonies, then, are to be discussed in their relation to the event. Yet, they should be placed in relation to the witness as well.

For Felman, a “testimony” must first of all be placed in “a relation to events.” Especially in relation to traumatic events, “testimony” seems to be composed of “bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance.” Further, she claims that “testimony,” as grounded in scraps of a memory that has been “overwhelmed,” is actually an “act.” That “act,” however, cannot be “constructed as knowledge” nor “assimilated into full cognition.” As such, “testimony” may reflect “events in excess of our frames of reference” (5).

A testimony, in other words, is a “discursive *practice*,” as opposed to a “pure *theory*.” Testimony directly pertains not only to the person testifying or to the event. It also involves the listener of the narrative as well. In other words, testimony involves not only the traumatic event. It also encompasses the witness to the event, as well as the listener to the witness who relates the event. There exist very close relations between

these three essential components. The pivotal role of the listener in relation to the event and to the narrator is further expounded by Felman, but also by Laub. Discussing the necessary interconnectedness between the three components involved in the process of testifying, Felman and Laub claim the following. Namely that “To testify—to *vow to tell*, to *promise* and *produce* one’s own speech as material evidence for truth” is thus to accomplish an obligation. This obligation to bear witness, so as to instate the potential reception of the testimony, necessarily requires one to bear witness not only to the “self,” Laub contends, but to the “other” as well (“An Event Without a Witness” 81). The testimony must thus be addressed to someone, whether to an emphatic listener, reader, or interviewer.

The centrality and omnipresence of testimony is obvious in Delbo’s and Morrison’s work. As Felman points out, “testimony is indeed *pervasive*,” and “implicated—sometimes unexpectedly—in almost every kind of writing” (7). Felman’s remark serves as a reminder that our concern here is testimonial accounts of written narratives. At this point, we need to understand how the gaps and silences in Delbo’s and Morrison’s literary narratives function as activators of traumatic witnessing and testimonials. It entails looking more closely into modes of bearing witness that have been performed through oral testimonies, or through oral transmission recollected in discursive practices that privilege a certain oral character of (hi)story telling. It is at stake not only in Delbo’s work, but it is present in Morrison’s as well. It particularly shows in Morrison’s inclination for orality as a “very special” and “very identifiable” component of “Black literature” as it is seen in her literary practice (“Rootedness” 343). Dori Laub and his crucial contributions as a psychiatrist, a listener, and an interviewer for the project

“Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies” at Yale University will open this exploration (“An Event Without a Witness” 85). Another inquiry facilitated by Laub will also have us look more closely into how the traumatic character of the experience may affect testimony.

For Laub, “massive trauma” precludes its registration. Trauma fails to actually register because “the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out.” As a result, these “observing and recording mechanisms malfunction.” As such, the bearer of trauma and witness to it has to testify “to an absence.” Indeed, she has to testify to an “event that has not yet come into existence” in spite of the “overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence.” Laub further claims that the “trauma—as a known event and not simply as an overwhelming shock—has not been truly witnessed yet.” Actually, it has not “been taken cognizance of.” The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to—and heard—is, therefore, “the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the ‘knowing’ of the event is given birth to.”

Laub keeps insisting on the inability for trauma, as “event” and as “shock,” to register completely (“Bearing Witness” 57). He also proposes that the “reality” of trauma resists inscription in the “real” as well. For Laub, indeed, in spite of the fact that the trauma relentlessly and “uncannily returns in actual life,” its “reality” continues “to elude the subject.” As such, the subject has to live in the “grip” of trauma. Another consequence is that the subject “unwittingly undergoes [the trauma’s] ceaseless repetitions and reenactments” (69). I will further contend, and in more detail later, that the “eerie character” that pervades the prose of Delbo and Morrison is a major

manifestation of that reality of trauma that refuses to settle in the “real.” It remains, instead, in a space, in a “borderland,” as Gloria Anzaldúa would contend, between the real and the not totally graspable (*Borderlands* 99). At the fringe of the illusive and hallucinatory, the scene featuring “the yellow sack of a woman” attacked by a Nazi dog in Delbo’s novel is only one of the numerous instances that performs trauma by upsetting the real. Likewise, the scene with Sethe’s mother, whose extra corporeal presence is later assumed by Beloved while both are featured during the crossing on the slave ship during the Middle Passage, is another example. I will come back to these forms of trauma that unhinge the “real” later.

There is indeed another point by Laub that needs attention before we start the in-depth exploration of trauma in Delbo’s and Morrison’s first narratives of the trilogies. It concerns Laub’s argument that investigates further and deeper into the elusive character of trauma. This elusiveness is not far removed from what Immanuel Kant labels the “formlessness” of the object of knowledge in his discussion of the “sublime feeling.” It relates, in fact, to what Kant refers to as the “*boundlessness*” of the object (*Critique of Judgment* 44). It actually deals with the lack of reference to a previously known or perceived reality. For Kant, this elusiveness would be at the locus where “Imagination” and “Reason” face the inadequacy of expression (59). This inadequacy, as such, is what gives rise to a “feeling of the sublime” (47). For Laub, that elusiveness or formlessness of the object does not give rise to a feeling of the sublime, however. Rather, it accounts for a feeling that has a quality of “strangeness” or “otherness.” As Laub explicates in “Bearing Witness,”

The traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of ‘normal’ reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time. The trauma

is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after. This absence of categories that define it lends it a quality of 'otherness,' a salience, a timelessness and a ubiquity that puts it outside the range of associatively linked experiences, outside the range of comprehension, of recounting and of mastery. Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues in the present and is current in every respect. The survivor, indeed, is not truly in touch either with the core of his traumatic reality or with the fatedness of its reenactments, and thereby remains entrapped in both. (69)

Delbo's and Morrison's testimonial accounts are effective because their narratives delve into and perform the traumatic entrapment in which survivors of trauma are caught. Also, their prose, pervaded with a feeling of the "sublime" that Kant would call "*the terrifying sublime*," serves to "stir terror" the way "deep loneliness does" (*Of the Beautiful and Sublime* 48). As such, Delbo's and Morrison's prose situates the survivor or the artist in great "loneliness." By "performing" not only the "trapping" that necessarily comes with trauma, but also the great "solitude" encountered by the narrator of trauma, their prose is terrifying. It is, however, in the words of Dori Laub, by "reconstructing a history and essentiality of *re-externalizing the event*," that the process "of constructing a narrative" can take place. As Laub further contends, this re-externalization of the event can occur and take effect only when "one can articulate and *transmit* the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside." As such, telling entails "a reassertion of the hegemony of reality and a re-externalization of the evil that affected and contaminated the trauma victim." I propose to now look more closely into how Delbo and Morrison not only "*re-externalize the event*," but also "construct" their "narratives," and "reconstruct" their histories ("Bearing Witness" 69).

In his *Traumatic Realism*, Michael Rothberg describes Delbo's *None of Us* as an assemblage of "micronarratives." For him, these "micronarratives," in their isolation, serve to "reveal the spatial closure and repetitive temporality of Auschwitz" (175). In his contention, it is thus, "both with and against this knowledge of the untimeliness of testimony," that "Delbo has written *None of Us Will Return*" (159). Patricia Gartland describes Delbo's oeuvre more as an "impressionist collage of images and vignettes." Yet, these vignettes are also accompanied by "fairly realistically rendered episodes and short lyric description." As a result, Gartland claims, the overall effect is, at times, "like that of a prose poem" whose chant keeps pounding as an obsessive melody. Also, for Gartland, Delbo's technique is to "write mainly in the present tense." It is designed, in her contention, "to show how past experience merges with present memory" ("Three Holocaust Writers" 54). Both these statements by Rothberg and Gartland actually situate Delbo's prose in a larger literary context.

Aucun does not attempt to represent a reality, however truthful, of the Holocaust. Indeed, and in the words of Lea Fridman, "Delbo does not take her reader back to a historical account of an event." Rather, she takes her reader "in all of the fragmentation and instability" of the experience that she has outlived and vowed to tell. Also, Fridman contends, Delbo makes perceptible that experience of fragmentation "in its most intimate connection to the body, to the outer world, and to others." In this way, Delbo depicts a sense of "dissolution" and "collapse" in all its "lived and witnessed precision." Indeed, as Fridman further states, "if the unreal lies at the heart of the experience of extremity," it is that "unreal" that "achieves objective status" in Delbo's account. As Fridman concludes, "What is formidable in her writing is the precision and detail of that portrait"

(*Words and Witness* 110). Equally appalling is how the reality of her experience is so convincingly portrayed and forceful as to become haunting.

Delbo focuses on personal experiences, her own and her companions', rather than on historical events. This makes us perceive the depth of the suffering inflicted on the Auschwitz inmates. But this is not the only effect produced. Delbo's focus is also to make us "feel" the profoundness and destabilizing character of the trauma that the Holocaust experience brought about. One pressing instance revolves around her experiencing thirst at Auschwitz. The episode reveals in acute manner how traumatic the deprivation and scarcity of water was in the camp. It also exposes the depth of the pain it inflicted, as well as its obsessive character. The episode is constructed so that we are made to somewhat "sense" the traumatic impact of thirst in its full force. To do this as an author, and for the reader to perceive the effect, according to Chambers, "I need not have 'known' the Holocaust in the sense of having been there, or in the way that a historian might know it." Instead, "I need only to recognize its reality and *relate it to myself*, which presumably I do on the basis of personal experiences of pain that I remember." Chambers keeps explaining that "my response to something that is phrased for me to read but not said, is one of anagnorisis—recognition as remembering, remembering as the negation of my previously supposed ignorance." It is, for Chambers, "an acknowledgment that I did not need for this thing to be spelled out, although I did need to be re-minded of it, for it to become real to me, . . . and hauntingly so" (*Untimely Interventions* 206-07). In this instance, we are made to "feel" what it must have "felt like" to go thirsty for days on end. We are also made to observe the quasi maddening effect that intense thirst can have on the human body deprived of water. The effect

created by Delbo's prose is all the more dramatic and traumatic. Especially if we remember that, in the words of Laub, the traumatic experience has "no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after" ("Bearing Witness" 69). In her chapter entitled "La soif," Delbo makes us sense that thirst has "no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after" either.

Delbo first ponders on the unending and obsessive character that being "thirsty" can impose on the thirsty individual. To convey her resistance to water deprivation, Delbo upsets our regular time and sensation frames. As she transgresses time references, she succeeds in revealing unending sensations. Delbo emphasizes the endless and persistent character of her suffering as she claims, "Il y a la soif du matin et la soif du soir. Il y a la soif du jour et la soif de la nuit" (*Aucun* 114-15). Then she insists on the intensity and varied quality of the thirsty feeling. She reflects, "Mais la soif du marais est plus brûlante que celle du désert. La soif du marais dure des semaines. Les outres ne viennent jamais. La raison chancelle. La raison est terrassée par la soif." Making us feel the acuity and irremediability of the physical deprivation she was forced to suffer, Delbo writes, "La raison résiste à tout, elle cède à la soif. Dans le marais, pas de mirage, pas d'espoir d'oasis. De la boue, de la boue. De la boue et pas d'eau" (114). Delbo appeals not only to our senses, but to our emotions as well. She not only brings to light the sheer obscenity of the violence done to and felt by the body but also activates in us an emotional response that makes us grasp the senselessness and absurdity of the violence forced on the inmates. The maddening effect of the violation is all the more pressing, and her appeal all the more pounding as she writes,

Les joues collent aux dents, la langue est dure, raide, les mâchoires bloquées, et toujours cette impression d'être morte, d'être morte et de le savoir. Et

l'épouvante grandit dans les yeux. Je sens grandir l'épouvante dans mes yeux jusqu'à la démente. Tout sombre, tout échappe. La raison n'exerce plus de contrôle. La soif. Est-ce que je respire? J'ai soif. Faut-il sortir pour l'appel? Je me perds dans la foule, je ne sais où je vais. J'ai soif. Fait-il plus froid ou moins froid, je ne le sens pas. J'ai soif, soif à crier. Et le doigt que je passe sur mes gencives éprouve le sec de ma bouche. Ma volonté s'effondre. Reste une idée fixe: boire. (116)

Delbo's prose provides another striking example that focuses on the traumatic experience, rather than the traumatic event, to make us relate to her suffering more intuitively. It is an extremely potent instance also. It concerns the "living-through-death" experience of the infamous "roll call" that Auschwitz inmates were made to endure twice daily on the icy plain (*Aucun* 105). This instance reveals another particular aspect of trauma. Namely, it enacts, besides its "timelessness," the loss of clear or stable connections to the materially grounded environment in which the experience of trauma is taking place. In the following excerpt, it becomes particularly clear how incoming stimuli can be dulled in some ways and exacerbated in others. What is most striking, however, is the flagrant perturbation in the sense of perception that occurs under extreme circumstances. The partial loss of control on the surrounding environment and on the self by the perceiving subject seems, as such, to produce the deadening of that subject. The following excerpt enacts, along with a disruption of the sense of self, a profound distortion, even dissolution, of boundaries. Since trauma, in the words of Laub, takes place "outside the parameters of 'normal' reality," its experience as such seems to take place in a world that is "other" (69). The manifestation of "timelessness" and "otherness," enacted by the loss of time and space barriers is very salient in this passage. As Laub has acutely perceived as a child survivor, "traumatic knowledge dissolves all barriers." It "breaks all boundaries of time and place." It even invalidates the barriers of

“self and subjectivity” (“Bearing Witness” 58). In this particular traumatic experience of roll call, the physical disruption of self, place, and time that occurs is profoundly disturbing. The intense cold interferes with the way people “normally” experience space, cold, sound, and light. For Delbo, being cold becomes being part of a frozen piece of ice. Being immobile becomes being enclosed in an immobility and fixity of time. As Lea Fridman puts it, in this excerpt, Delbo “records the ways the body in extremity begins to experience itself in its parts.” As a result, “the way that the parts no longer seem to be part of a whole” enacts profound confusion. Also, the way that “vitality gives way to numbness,” and the manner in which the “mind itself seems to shut down” add to the temporal and traumatic confusion facing the survivor (*Words and Witness* 119). This fragmentation, experienced in another yet equally traumatic context by Baby Suggs in *Beloved*, epitomizes the context of sheer trauma in circumstances of extremity.

The fragmentation of the body and the disruption of time and place boundaries, are, in this instance, paradoxically accompanied by total integration into the deadly spell of the camp. If, indeed, for Lyotard, ““Auschwitz was called the extermination camp”” it was one also of total integration (*The Differend* 56). Delbo renders the simultaneous sense of profound disintegration of the self and integration into Auschwitz in its full horror. In the following excerpt, she does so in a very poetic, almost peaceful manner. As such, she gives trauma a palpable character that verges on the “eerie,” on the hallucinatory. The rupture from all sense of reality, and also the unusual reconfiguration of the real that she proposes as she makes us connect to a world that has become sheer perception is astounding:

Quinze mille femmes tapent du pied et cela ne fait aucun bruit. Le silence est solidifié en froid. La lumière est immobile. Nous sommes dans un milieu où le

temps est aboli. Nous ne savons pas si nous sommes, seulement la glace, la lumière, la neige aveuglante, et nous, dans cette glace, dans cette lumière, dans ce silence.

Nous restons immobiles. La matinée s'écoule—du temps en dehors du temps. Et la bordure du damier n'est plus aussi nette. Les rangs se désagrègent.

Quelques unes font

des pas, reviennent à leur place. La neige étincelle, immense, sur l'étendue où rien ne fait ombre . . .

Le temps s'écoule sans que la lumière change. Elle reste dure, glacée, solide, le ciel aussi bleu, aussi dur. La glace se resserre aux épaules. Elle s'alourdit, nous écrase. Non que nous ayons plus froid, nous devenons de plus en plus inertes, de plus en plus insensibles. Prises dans un bloc de cristal au-delà duquel, loin dans la mémoire, nous voyons les vivants. Viva dit: "Je n'aimerai plus les sports d'hiver." Bizarre que la neige puisse lui évoquer autre chose qu'un élément mortel, hostile, hors nature, inconnu jusqu'ici.

A nos pieds, une femme s'assoit dans la neige, maladroitement. On se retient de dire: "Pas dans la neige, tu vas prendre froid." C'est encore un réflexe de la mémoire et des notions anciennes. Elle s'assoit dans la neige et s'y creuse une place. Un souvenir de lecture enfantine, les animaux qui font leur couche pour mourir. La femme s'affaire avec des gestes menus et précis, s'allonge. La face dans la neige, elle geint doucement. Ses mains se desserrent. Elle se tait.

Nous avons regardé sans comprendre.

La lumière est toujours immobile, blessante, froide. C'est la lumière d'un astre mort. Et l'immensité glacée, à l'infini éblouissante, est d'une planète morte. Immobiles dans la glace où nous sommes prises, inertes, insensibles, nous avons perdu tous les sens de la vie. Aucune ne dit: "J'ai faim. J'ai soif. J'ai froid." Transportées d'un autre monde, nous sommes d'un coup soumises à la respiration d'une autre vie, à la mort vivante, dans la glace, dans la lumière, dans le silence. (53-54-55)

What makes Delbo's experience so compellingly convincing is that she focuses in her prose not only on the extraordinary character of extremity. She concentrates also on actual modes of responding to a stimulus or feeling. Even though her everyday responses to feelings and sensations took place, for her and her companions, in circumstances of extremity, they are relevant to us. Not only do her vignettes, deliberately incomplete and fragmented, leave room for readers to fill in with their own capacity for feeling and responding to her testimony. The vignettes are powerful also in pointing out that the world to be perceived, even though it actually tied into experiences of the extreme, can be

accessed through ordinary, everyday perceptions and emotions if these are pushed to an extreme also. Delbo's experiences are certainly part both of the extreme and of a world that became her everyday one. They unquestionably brought along, in the words of Elaine Scarry, "the de-objectifying of the objects" and "the unmaking of the made" through a process that "externalized the way in which a person's pain causes [her] world to disintegrate" (*The Body in Pain* 41). Yet, by recollecting Auschwitz so profoundly, Delbo enables us to connect also to that very familiar world of hers by calling not only on our own emotions, but also paradoxically, on a changed, opened up sense of perception on our part. The audacity of Delbo's prose thus not only encourages the stretching and expanding of our capacity to feel. It also has us readers, not immediately and cognitively "know" the content of her experience, or "feel" it in its most dramatic effect, but also intimately connect to it.

Delbo's prose operates by, at first, projecting us into a seemingly reassuring, everyday reality. Then it has us witness the abrupt transformation of that reality into something horrifying. This process is extremely destabilizing. The artistic process of defamiliarization that Delbo produces in her prose is meant to act as a powerful, traumatic fracture in our imagination. This traumatic fracture is deliberate. It is intended to be shocking, and to function as the traumatic shock that was experienced by those who were abruptly thrown into the reality of Auschwitz.

By destabilizing the expected environment of her discourse, Delbo has us directly experience the impact of the absurd destruction that was dictated by the Nazis. The episode entitled "Arrivals, Departures" that opens Delbo's trilogy works on this process of estrangement. In this section, Delbo makes the estrangement of the arriving Jews from

themselves and from humanity very clear. She subtly reveals it by bringing into focus the contrast between a “normal” train station, and the “final,” terminal station that will remain “nameless for them,” to which they are deported and where they will be gassed to death (*Aucun* 12). Delbo writes, “Mais il est une gare où ceux [celles] qui arrivent sont justement ceux [celles]-là qui partent.” She further explicates, “une gare où ceux [celles] qui arrivent ne sont jamais arrivé[e]s, où ceux [celles] qui sont parti[e]s ne sont jamais revenu[e]s.” To insist on the immensity of destruction, she concludes, “c’est la plus grande gare du monde” (9). While we are constrained to face the traumatic destiny and final destination of those “who never arrived,” because they were sent directly to the gas chamber, Delbo allows for the hardly “imaginable,” “conceivable,” or “bearable” to be actually imagined, sensed, or emphatically connected to.

Artistically speaking, she achieves this “tour de force” with an extremely precise technique. It consists in locating her experience of reality at the confines where she herself experienced these events at the border between what seems real and what seemed unreal. Her prose comes to “*re-externalize*” the trauma in a space, in a “borderland” of trauma, where experience and the not fully registered can coincide and become meaningful (Laub, “Bearing Witness” 69). Also, if for Felman, the traumatic experience is “essentially, *not available* to its own speaker,” I propose that Delbo makes it, thanks to her awareness and narrative, however accessible (*Testimony* 15). By “reconstructing” her experience through her testimonial, and by “constructing her narrative,” she also contributes to “*re-externalize*” the trauma for others, namely her readers. Her testimonial work can be given the value of a legacy. For François Bott, and in his words, the power of her legacy is achieved convincingly through and thanks to the strange character of her

prose. It is so striking, he contends, that it has a quality of leaving the readers in a “land strange to ourselves.” Discussing the ultimate impact of Delbo’s work on readers, Bott contends,

“Une voix qui chuchote, déchirante. Un chuchotement à fleur de vie et d’horreur. Cette voix une fois entendue vous obsède, ne vous quitte plus. Je ne connais pas d’oeuvre comparable à celle de Charlotte Delbo, sinon *Guernica*, sinon le film *Nuit et Brouillard*, même pudeur, même déchirure, même atroce tendresse, chez cette femme, chez Alain Resnais. Cette douloureuse et bouleversante incantation est de ces livres rares qui laissent soudain le lecteur en pays étranger à lui-même.” (*Aucun* back cover)

Thomas Trezise has also discussed the notion of strangeness that Delbo purposefully brings into her oeuvre so as to destabilize the readers’ levels of comfort. He has addressed the necessity of an active and attentive reading of Delbo’s work. In “The Question of Community in Charlotte’s Delbo’s *Auschwitz and After*,” Trezise claims that the minimalist restraint of Delbo’s descriptions serves a crucial purpose. For him, Delbo’s style, “makes it clear,” how as a reader, “I must collaborate in and bear responsibility for the act of witnessing” (“Question of Community” 876). As I have previously proposed, *Aucun* does not describe or explain trauma. It manifests it and performs it by having its impact made readable. This invitation to the readers to bring their own sense of fear to the text is crucial. It is also vital that readers attempt to register the shock of the horror experienced by Delbo by stretching the capacity of their imagination. This technique of readers’ participation is grounded in Delbo’s use of fragmented prose. As such, we are made to “fill in the blanks” and “sensitively” apprehend, rather than “understand” her experience. Before we turn to the last stylistic device used by Delbo to make trauma “visible” and “felt,” but also “haunting,” I propose to look at the motive that guided Delbo in writing *Aucun* in testimonial form. It will help

illuminate to what extent this form of testimonial literature, which Delbo chose in order to reveal the trauma of her experience, is, in itself, deliberate and meaningful.

In “The Triple Courage of Charlotte Delbo,” Rosette Lamont declares that she has been entrusted with the message of Charlotte Delbo. Delbo vowed to bring back this message to the community of the living after putting it “to the test of time” (485). Delbo, whom Rosette Lamont met as a “living ghost” in Delbo’s own words, saw in *Auschwitz and After* the “testimony of a witness,” her own. Reflecting on the motives behind *Auschwitz and After*, Delbo confided the following: “Although I did not know it at once, I came to the realization that I wrote it so that people might envision what ‘l’univers concentrationnaire’ was like.” Of course, “it wasn’t ‘like’ anything one had ever known. It was profoundly, utterly ‘unlike.’” Delbo continues: “I knew I had to raise before the eyes of a future reader the hellish image of a death camp: senseless killing labor, pre-dawn roll calls lasting for hours, death-directed, minute-by-minute, programming.” As she further states, “We were made to stand for hours on end in the snow, on ice, envying those of our companions who had died that night in the bunks they shared with us.” She also claims, “I hope that these texts will make the reoccurrence of this horror impossible. This is my dearest wish.” Delbo furthers affirms that in writing *Auschwitz and After*, she “did not seek recognition, or honors” for her self. Rather, she “wanted to honor the dead” who had “entrusted” her “with a sacred task.” As such, she wanted “to carry the word” and make of her work a testament. Reflecting on the manuscript that she “buried” for almost twenty years after she wrote it, she felt that it was, by not leaving it accessible to others, like “going into hiding,” that she would respond to the task at hand. She decided to break her long literary silence and to proceed with it. As Delbo declares, “I wanted

above all to honor my comrades, those who did not survive.” But she also wanted to show her reverence to “those who, having returned, were trying to build a life.” Meanwhile, when she was in Auschwitz, she had already “become their voice,” as her camp mates suggested she should (Lamont 485-88).

Remembering that her camp companions expected her to become a bearer of memory, she proceeded to be one. This contributed, to a large extent, to Delbo’s ability to survive. Rosette Lamont has commented on the possibilities of individual survival grounded in a form of communal remembrance. She has claimed that in order “to emerge from the stifling silence of trauma,” one “must strive to reshape a community” (Lamont 488). One value of Delbo’s oeuvre, to which I already have drawn attention, is that it functions as a literary indexer of traumatic knowledge. As such, it is meant to activate, not only on a personal, but also on communal level, a form of awareness. That awareness deals with the despairing realization of a human or cultural possibility to give in to extremely destructive behavior, such as annihilation of fellow human beings. Whether Delbo’s work can succeed in producing a wake-up call on individual or collective levels remains open. My point, though, is that her testimony and testament are in need of being read, or at least, made publicly known. As Lyotard would contend, Delbo’s testimony does not work solely to “inform.” Rather, it seeks to “initiate” in us something, such as a certain responsiveness. In this case, the pain of the initiation here would be that there exists a “human” capacity for destruction (*The Postmodern Explained* 91). Delbo’s testimony certainly initiates in us that an incredible damage can be done, not only to certain individuals, peoples, and selected national groups but also to mankind in its entirety. It becomes therefore all the more urgent for testimonies like Delbo’s to be

disclosed and read as traumatic. Perceiving this type of testimonies as plausible, realistic, and truthful is thus critical. As Felman would conclude, “to testify. . . is more than simply to report a fact or an event or to relate what has been lived, recorded and remembered.” Memory has to be conjured here essentially “in order to *address* another, to impress upon a listener, to *appeal* to a community” (*Testimony* 204).

Felman also claims that a process of mentally revisiting a traumatic place is necessary in gaining access to the traumatic experience. This revisiting can be initiated through what she calls “a historical and philosophical crossing and re-crossing” of the borders of trauma. Felman contends that these crossings and re-crossings, however, should not take place solely “*inside*” or “*outside*” the site of trauma. Instead, they should be grounded simultaneously in both the “*inside*” and the “*outside*” of the traumatic place, and in its confines. As such, Felman encourages the artist or witness to “create a connection.” That connection, she contends, is meant to “set both *the inside* and *the outside* in motion and in dialogues with one another. The acts of “crossing” and “re-crossing” those thresholds, she contends, arise thus from a necessity of “recovering the truth” (*Testimony* 231).

In their attempt to be plausible and truthful, rather than “historically true,” Delbo’s and Morrison’s texts find meaning in their being grounded in testimonial literature. In the line with thinking proposed by Michael Rothberg in his *Traumatic Realism*, both texts can be considered “traumatic realist texts.” As such, they both “point” to the real rather than claim that they “are” the real. I propose that this is what makes both Delbo’s and Morrison’s texts plausible. It is so because the veracity of their

experience, rather than that of the event, is what is actually revealed in their testimonial works.

Rothberg discusses the value of testimonial, and connects it to the truthfulness at the core of “traumatic realist texts” (129). These texts, he contends, are effective because of the plausibility or veracity of the testimony that they offer. As such, he claims that a testimonial form of literature allows for making its object realistic, rather than real. At this point, we may recall Delbo’s remark regarding the veracity of her testimonial work. As an appendix to *None of Us*, Delbo indeed declares the following: “Today, I am not sure that what I wrote is true.” Yet, she further asserts, “I am certain it is truthful” (1).

Rothberg insists on illuminating the truthful character of a work, rather than claiming it has validity as truth. He draws attention to the “realistic” quality of a “traumatic realist text,” rather than its claim to “the real” (*Traumatic Realism* 129). He contends also that “reading the detail as *pointing to* the real instead of claiming to *be* the real (as in Barthes’s reading) is meaningful. “The detail in traumatic realist texts” becomes then crucial. He also states that, “*pointing to* the real instead of claiming to *be* the real” necessarily involves signs. These signs, he proposes, “may be akin to the type of sign that Charles Sanders Peirce calls an ‘index’” (104). Rothberg claims that, in its classical form, “an index is a sign that relates to a referent” as “an effect relates to a cause.” Rothberg gives, in this case, the classic example of “the weathervane that points in the direction that the wind is blowing.” Rothberg further states that “the index in traumatic circumstances,” however, “functions differently than the traditional version.” As such, for Rothberg, the point of the index is not “in indicating an object or phenomenon that caused [the index]” in the first place. It is not meant to make “the

referent present.” Rather, Rothberg contends, “the traumatic index points to a necessary absence.” It is that “absence” in Delbo’s text that I now propose to explore (104). It relates directly to an examination of a “voice” that breaks down and is simultaneously relayed by a traumatic “silence.” This is our next point.

Delbo’s text makes us read an “absence.” It makes us interpret silence, not as void, but as a meaningful break in speech. It results from witnessing an event that is so violent and so overwhelming, that it enacts a traumatic collapse. Its impact is revealed by a moment of silence that, so to speak, seems to be “suspended in time.” I propose to call this silence a “figural moment,” which is comparable to Laurent Jenny’s concept of the “figural event” (“L’événement figural” 13). I will develop this point later. My more immediate concern for now is to establish the meaningfulness of silence in Holocaust testimonies. It is also to illuminate how a figural moment can be revealed by the presence of silence in a text.

For Sara Horowitz, “silence in a Holocaust text” is “a sign of trauma” (*Voicing the Void* 152-53). The following excerpt from Delbo functions as a trace of profound trauma that actually attempts to voice the trauma, but not with words. Rather, it seeks to point at trauma by voicing it with a temporary breach in language that results in mutedness that becomes significant. Delbo’s silence performs this traumatic “trace” of “something,” that, in the words of Jean-François Lyotard, “*will make* itself understood, ‘later’” (*Heidegger and “the jews”* 13). Also, for Susan Suleiman, discussing Georges Perec’s *W or the Memory of Childhood*, this kind of trace can function as “the sign of something” that “once was,” but that “has disappeared” (“The 1.5 Generation” 383). For her, that trace “can be read as an assertion of the writer’s witnessing and life.” Yet, that

trace or silence is “also a reminder of death.” As an indexer of atrocity, this kind of silence is also the assertion of the traumatic “irreparable” (338). As “the sign” that says it “cannot be phrased in the accepted idiom,” as Lyotard would contend, silence suggests thus in this context an “unsayable” (*The Differend* 56-57, *Heidegger and “the jews”* 47). That “unsayable” becomes meaningful as silence, since silence “says that it cannot say it” (*Heidegger and “the jews”* 47). This silence also testifies to an absence, and to a disappearance. But in no way, for Lyotard, do absence and silence “act, act out, enact,” or “re-present” a void (13).

In order to make silence work as eloquence, Delbo constructs her episode on the visual force and impact of the image. She crafts the following episode, of an attack of a woman by a Nazi dog, in a visual, rather than cognitive register. This makes the scene more directly, materially perceptible. This mode of perception is convincing, despite the restraint, even absence, of words at the time of the violent occurrence. The silences by the attacking authority, the woman attacked, and the witness Delbo are potent carriers of meaning. The way that Delbo places in her narrative moments of silence parallels the absence of words and reactions at the time of the episode. Silence in Delbo’s text enacts the traumatic character of the experience in a mutually interacting manner.

Delbo produces the desired effect of speechlessness by giving us to witness, rather than understand, the death of the woman about to be killed in the episode. As Lawrence Langer has pointed out in his introduction to Delbo’s *Auschwitz and After*, Delbo’s art is intended to “give” us “to see.” Delbo thus makes us witnesses of a more immediate, direct, “visual” type. Claiming that Delbo’s favorite expression was “Il faut donner à voir,” that is, “they must be made to see,” Langer contends that, with *Auschwitz*

and After, Delbo attempts to make us not only feel, but also visually perceive her experience. It is the “ruling principle of her art” (x). The following excerpt draws on the singularity and difficulty of having to bear witness to and express the trauma of transgressive acts of violence. It also frames the deliberate and gratuitous viciousness of these violent acts as they were then randomly determined and committed in the camp.

The excerpt illustrates Delbo’s intention to “make us see,” and to “make us hear the silence” that surrounds death. By arranging the vignette as a silent sequence of photographic memories that pass in rapid succession, slow motion, or freeze in front of our eyes, Delbo captures our attention. She actually captures our gaze in such a way that we are “made to” imagine, feel, and see. The staying power of the image, as previously mentioned, is thus the technique of the following episode. As Derrida notes in another context, such a technique brings “the body” back in “*visible* scenes.” It does so by enabling the image to “transcend or replace a body that cannot be located” in a more permanent or physical manner (*The Work of Mourning* 159). The vignette is forceful. It brings back the body in its temporary, visible, living presence. It spells, not the total annihilation that was intended by the Nazis, but the call or duty to remember it. As we are unable to avert our gaze, we are also unable to avert the necessity of remembrance.

Delbo writes,

La femme s’avance. On croirait qu’elle obéit. Face au SS, elle s’arrête. Son dos est secoué de frissons, son dos arrondi avec les omoplates qui saillent sous le manteau jaune. Le SS tient son chien en laisse. Lui a-t-il donné un ordre, fait un signe? Le chien bondit sur la femme—sans rugir, sans souffler, sans aboyer. C’est silencieux comme dans un rêve. Le chien bondit sur la femme, lui plante ses crocs dans la gorge. Et nous ne bougeons pas, engluées dans une espèce de visqueux qui nous empêche d’ébaucher même un geste—comme dans un rêve. La femme crie. Un cri arraché. Un seul cri qui déchire l’immobilité de la plaine. Nous ne savons pas si le cri vient d’elle ou de nous, de sa gorge crevée ou de la

nôtre. Je sens les crocs du chien à ma gorge. Je crie. Je hurle. Aucun son ne sort de moi. Le silence du rêve.
La plaine. La neige. La plaine.
La femme s'affaisse. Un soubressaut et c'est fini. Quelque chose qui casse net.
La tête dans la boue de neige n'est plus qu'un moignon.
Les yeux font des plaies sales. (*Aucun* 48-49)

Delbo's sentences are brief, succinct, precise and to the point. In the terms of Chambers, they are "paratactically disconnected." Delbo's concise writing is voided of unnecessary artifice. It serves to sketch, not describe in abundant terms, the woman's gestures and her body surface. "Severely shorn of connectives" as they are, Delbo's sentences are meant to be abrupt and striking (*Untimely Interventions* 213). They are intended to solicit our interpretative work. They are also meant to prompt in us and from us an emotional response. Delbo's point is to make resonant what Lawrence Langer terms the horror of "man's creatureliness." This "creatureliness," is attained, for Langer, by emptying a human body from its human character. It tends to prevail in forms of literature dealing with an imminence of physical destruction and atrocity (*The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* 289). This is so, I contend, so that the immediacy of destruction and annihilation is all the more evident, even exacerbated. It is also meant for us to face a grave responsibility. Namely that of having to confront our own ethical sense of justice in the face of murderous acts. Delbo's technique to solicit our ethical response is as follows.

The figure of the woman, "avec les omoplates qui saillent sous le manteau jaune" is first projected into a bundle of powerlessness and fragility. It is also surrounded by a deceiving absence of violence whose immediacy, however, is powerfully alluded to, and about to surge. The scene is made up of abrupt, fast and silent images. Once connected by our interpretative work, we get to experience the episode as in a long and silent dream.

This facilitates our perceiving the whole event as traumatic. It reads as an almost eerie and dreamlike occurrence, disconnected and severed from reality. Delbo solicits our attention, however, towards the imminence of the woman's death. She does so through her anticipatory use of a prolepsis in the sentence: "Lui a-t-il donné un ordre, fait un signe? Le chien bondit sur la femme" (*Aucun* 48). The now foreseeable event of the woman's looming and absurd death leaves no possible doubt as to the outcome of the woman's destiny. Delbo's incisiveness of style, similar to the dog's jaw planted in the woman's, in Delbo's, and, after all and finally, in our own throat opens a wound in our sensitivity. It reaches at the physical core of our anguish. "Given to see," we are overwhelmed by a sense of uselessness of suffering, immediacy of pain, randomness of death, and precariousness of life (*Auschwitz and After* x). The secret of how Delbo achieves this is locked in her ethical vision and literary skills. Eminent at evoking atrocity by artistically rendering it through a language bare to the core, her poetry is strangled at the same time as it erupts. An indicator of trauma and pointer to our own responsibility as witnesses, her language meets with the "here," the "now," and "us," at the point of its rupture. Delbo produces, what Patricia Gartland calls, a "more vivid and full[er] meaning than simple description of the reality itself" ("Three Holocaust Writers" 47). It is the response we can bring to her reality, traumatic to the core that brings full significance to Delbo's art.

Made to feel the trauma, we indeed have become suspended in the silence and immobility of what Chambers calls "the unmeasured time" of Auschwitz. This "unmeasured time" of Auschwitz is actually the traumatic moment, the suspended time of death and genocide, the moment of the irreparable, that Delbo renders so delicately

(*Untimely Interventions* 212). She is a master at revealing a time “that is without measure,” grounded in pain and suffering. In order to “connect” to the trauma and feel its presence, as exposed by Delbo, all we have to do is connect to Delbo’s narrative and narrative time. The before mentioned passage reads as follows: “*Et nous ne bougeons pas, engluées dans une espèce de visqueux qui nous empêche d’ébaucher même un geste—comme dans un rêve* (Aucun 48). Before we can return, however, and after Delbo’s momentary silence, into the measured time of her narrative, a pause is announced. She has signified a powerful fracture in our habitual frames of references. As she creates a moment such as this, we, readers, become suspended, unable to move, in a state of profound immobility and stupefaction. Delbo is plunging us in what I have previously named a “figural” moment. This “figural” moment, lived throughout an occurrence of traumatic character is forceful to us, as it ushers us into an unknown world.

While the wound of the figural moment need not only be opened, but re-opened, and re-activated ceaselessly, a newly shared sensibility to it can recur as “an insistence” that delays forgetting (“L’Événement Figural” 13). Also now that, in Lyotard’s words, the “labor of writing” of the author, “allied to” a “work of love,” has inscribed the traces of the initiatory event in language,” we should, as readers, continue to feel compelled by the fracture in our sensibility that has been initiated (*The Postmodern Explained* 97). As Laurent Jenny contends, “[le figural] et [l’événement du figural] détient le secret de la répétition d’un ébranlement en nous.” Jenny further proposes that this figural moment actually operates on us without our active decision. As he closes his argument, he proposes that “le figural,” which secretly unhinges our perception of the real, and to which our sensitivity is exposed, actually does so, while we are not fully aware of it. He

writes that “l’événement du figural détient le secret de la répétition d’un ébranlement en nous, à laquelle notre chair même est soumise, mais sur laquelle nous sommes aveugles” (“L’événement Figural” 13). Delbo’s experience will not let itself be totally known or understood in terms of its historical or personal significance. The figural character of her prose, however, should keep us attending to the factuality and horror of her experience. It should also keep us attentive to what Derrida calls “the spirit,” the “ghost” of injustice *that* “comes” by “*coming back* [revenant]” after “the end of history.” As the testimonial of one of the “witnesses of history,” who “fear and hope for a return,” *Aucun* enacts thus the presence of the “dead who come back” (*Specters of Marx* 10). By being grounded in the “ghost of history,” whose expected return “repeats itself again and again,” Delbo’s sharing of her traumatic experience with us through her testimonial should thus remain “insistent” (“L’Événement Figural” 13). This way, her experience should not be, nor come to be, forgotten. Just as nobody, in her claim, “should have returned from Auschwitz,” so “should” nobody be made to forget or “have forgotten” about it either (*Aucun* 183).

Toni Morrison employs a similar technique of “figural moments” in her art. She also plants numerous and meaningful indexes of trauma in her text. This accounts for the ethical and aesthetic strategies that she shares with Delbo. As I have previously discussed concerning *Aucun*, the artistic device of the figural is meant to activate pain. Yet, in Morrison’s prose, it is the pain not of senseless extermination but of insensible bondage that is the point. Also, as in Delbo’s work, the pain surfaces and permeates her art so as to become an “insistence” as well (“L’Événement Figural” 13).

Toni Morrison uses the ghost of Beloved in *Beloved* to signify the horrors of a denied or repressed past that is, however, still virtually present to many African-Americans. Morrison, however, does not attempt to fill the abyss produced by the feelings of pain that a long history of slavery has produced with univocal or historical formal content. Nor does she fill in the hole made by intense grief around experiences of bondage with determined concepts. Rather, I propose that, similarly to Delbo, Morrison resorts to figural writing and to a form of “hauntology” to reveal, in this case, the effects of the horrors of slavery. As such, and in the words of Derrida, she thus sets out to “ontologize remains” and make them “present.” She achieves this end “*by identifying the bodily remains*” of slavery and “*by localizing the dead.*” At this point, we may also recall that, for Derrida, “all ontologization, all semanticization—philosophical hermeneutical, or psychoanalytical—finds itself caught up in [a] work of mourning.” This work of mourning, since it “does not yet think” of itself “as such,” necessarily anticipates, however, the posing of “the question of the specter” (*Specters of Marx* 9).

The specter of Beloved is a literary means, for Morrison, to initiate a work of mourning while the ghost activates the scraps, traces, fragments, and residues of various traumatic experiences. Along with the specter, Morrison also uses the figural to “capture” and “reveal,” rather than “describe,” the horrors of the traumas produced in bondage (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained* 90). While her writing inscribes itself in a “borderland” of trauma, in which “the unspeakable” and the “unpresentable” ask to be actively read, her art also functions as a reminder, in the words of psychiatrist Judith Herman, that “certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud (Morrison, “Unspeakable Things Unspoken” 201). This is, in Herman’s claim, precisely

“the meaning of the word *unspeakable*.” While for Herman, the “ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness,” it is not this commonplace response that *Beloved* exposes (Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* 1). Recalling Lyotard’s claim about the role of postmodern art and artists is, at this point, instructive. For Lyotard, the artist, who, indeed, clearly “invents allusions to what is conceivable but not presentable,” has “to constantly inquire into new presentations.” This search for new forms of presentations, for Lyotard, is not so that the artist can “take pleasure in them.” Rather, it is intended “to better produce the feeling that there is something unrepresentable” and that that unrepresentable must be made meaningful (*The Postmodern Explained* 15). Morrison makes the unrepresentable signify in *Beloved* in the following terms.

For one, Morrison makes us “perceive” rather than “understand” experiences of slavery. She activates for her readers some of the signs and traces that living in bondage has enacted and left by making these signs visual and perceptible through the senses. In the following instance, Morrison makes physically visible the marks that slavery has imprinted on the enslaved body of Sethe. The signs of the violence that Morrison gives us to read and decipher are, however, very discreet and subtle, even poetic. Intended to encourage, not discourage, the reading of troublesome, even outrageous, events, her technique is meant to be inviting. Morrison symbolizes, or metaphorically reveals, the “real,” in order to point at its senselessness and brutality. But actually, as she comments herself, she does so “in a manner in which it can be digested” (“In the Realm of Responsibility” 248). In the following instance, she constructs symbolic images around the cruelty of beatings that had to be endured in captivity. The network of scars that disfigure Sethe’s back as the result of flogging is a significant example of this technique

while it serves as a key symbol in the novel. The non-provocative reading of Sethe's pain that Paul D produces when he first sees the backside of Sethe's body has us perceive her back as a "wrought-iron maze" that Paul D explores "like a gold miner pawing through pay dirt." But seen in its crude reality, Paul D contends, Sethe's back is a "revolting clump of scars" that indexes the cruelty of the white man (*Beloved* 21). Morrison, however, symbolically and realistically identifies Sethe's back with either version. She rewrites some of the traumatic beatings experienced by Sethe in a poetic manner. Yet, she also points at the floggings endured during slavery from a less aesthetic and more provoking perspective. Through dual images like this one, Morrison invites us readers to become more personally involved in Sethe's ghastly experiences. We can follow in Paul D's footsteps, and become more attuned to Sethe's "sorrow" (17). By being made to "feel" the maze on her back, as Paul D does through his gesture, rather than the clump of scars, we are made to perceive the profoundness of Sethe's pain in an inviting way. But we are also given less opportunity to forget that it is a series of revolting beatings that led to it.

In *The Feminine Sublime*, Barbara Freeman makes a point similar to the one just made. Indeed, Freeman sees in the marks on Sethe's back an act of "aestheticizing wounds" that "have nothing whatever to do with beauty." Freeman proposes that this act of "aestheticizing" by Morrison is actually in keeping with an act of "survival." Freeman grounds her argument in the following terms. Amy, the white girl who helps the escaping Sethe, "can find in Sethe's scars and wounds something other than the cruelty of the white man: she finds the outline of a tree in bloom." As Freeman proposes, "the master's meaning," then, "need not be dominant." In Freeman's contention, the function

of “the aesthetic of reading” in *Beloved* is thus actually meant to “de-anesthetize” these terrible inscriptions. Also, the “aesthetic of reading” in *Beloved* is meant to “bring dead feelings back to life.” Morrison’s poetics, far from eradicating trauma, thus nonetheless “bears witness to its horrifying and ineluctable facticity” (*The Feminine Sublime* 131).

The figural and artistic fabric of *Beloved* is what enables Morrison to succeed in “presenting” the “unpresentable” (*The Postmodern Explained* 15). Another potent motif that achieves this goal relates to the testimonial character of *Beloved*. While Morrison’s prose successfully reveals trauma, it does so thanks to *Beloved*’s narrative technique. This technique is efficient because *Beloved* activates and enacts the individual stories of traumatized former slaves. These stories, however, do not limit themselves to those of Sethe’s, Paul D’s or Baby Suggs’. Indeed, Morrison makes a point of not only suggesting trauma among individuals who have been directly exposed to the shock and pain of slavery at the time set in the novel: Cincinnati, 1873. Morrison also suggests that Sethe, Paul D, and Baby Suggs are capable of suffering from the remote workings of slavery’s past as well. In that regard, she has these characters become mediums in enacting some sequels of the trauma that affected not only themselves, but their ancestors as well. By exposing slavery as an “excessive” event that defies time and space, in the words of Lyotard, Morrison thus succeeds in revealing its long-lasting impact (*Heidegger and “the jews”* 16). The “timelessness” of the traumatic event, which was so crucial to our reading of Delbo, is thus very present in Morrison’s *Beloved* also. Morrison seems indeed very intent in revealing slavery, not only in its “qualitative” terms, through the enormous pain it inflicted, but also in a “quantitative” manner. This entails revealing

slavery beyond the contingency of its “present” witnesses and survivors. It is the point I propose to develop now.

Morrison activates the trauma of slavery not exclusively through those who witnessed it in the immediacy of the narrative time. Morrison is equally concerned with revealing how slavery impacted preceding generations as well. The “Sixty Million and more,” to whom the novel is dedicated, are instances of this particular group of slaves for whom Morrison seeks acknowledgement (*Beloved* 1). Likewise, those who died during the Middle Passage, even though they went unrecognized, were, nonetheless, part of slavery’s traumatic experience. Among those who died during transport or in captivity before they even reached the New World, some are intentionally made to surface in *Beloved*. Morrison deliberately has them “*come back*” as “revenants,” or ghosts (*Specters of Marx* 10). In this manner, their trauma is also made to be provoking as well.

One mode in which Morrison points at the traumatic impact of these “revenants” is by focusing on the distressing intermingling with the living of the dead or dying. Another is by disrupting the physical boundaries that ordinarily separate the sick from the healthy. In the scene of the crossing of the slave ship during the Middle Passage, Morrison paints for her readers a chaotic scene that brings together corpses, survivors, sufferers, and enslaved. This way, she makes their co-existence, not only visible, but insistent and ongoing as well. She grounds the scene on the ship in sheer confusion and profound dislocation. In order to render the suffering of the slaves in a more personal manner, and to make it pervasive, she brings in ghosts from different generations. She also has them come from different geographical places. She brings in the specters of Sethe’s daughter, Beloved, and of Sethe’s mother, Ma’am, in one single scene. As

Morrison focuses on conjuring their outbound quality, she displaces them from their original era and location. As ghosts, they cross and re-cross our expected or habitual barriers of time, space, and physical being. In the contention of Deborah Horvitz, for instance, the ghost of Sethe's mother indeed comes from the "geographic 'other side' of the world," namely Africa. Sethe's daughter, on the other hand, comes from the "physical 'other side' of life," that is death. In the words of Horvitz, as ghosts and women from "the other side," both Sethe's mother and Sethe's daughter are thus "invulnerable to barriers of time, space, and place" ("Nameless Ghosts" 157).

In the scene on the ship, both women are physically abused, raped, dehumanized, and almost discarded as dead (*Beloved* 210). Both women act, feel, speak, and think through the spirit of Beloved. Both women freely associate their thoughts in the face of their horrifying experience. The horror of it surges in the language that they speak through Beloved. In the interview she gave to Marsha Darling, Morrison actually refers to the language of Beloved as a "traumatized language." As such, Beloved enacts the trauma, in Morrison's words, not only "of her own experience," but of others' as well ("In the Realm of Responsibility" 247). Beloved's language is all the more fragmented, disarticulated, and full of confusion. The lack of punctuation and the directness of associations that Morrison activates in the quotation below figure the break in physical, spatial, and temporal boundaries of the scene and forcefully point at the trauma of the whole experience:

All of it is now it is always now there will never be a time when I am not crouching . . . I am always crouching the man on my face is dead his face is not mine his mouth smells sweet but his eyes are locked . . . the men without skin bring us their morning water to drink we have none . . . I am not big small rats do not wait for us to sleep someone is trashing but there is no room to do it if we had more to drink we could make tears we cannot make

sweat or morning water so the men without skin bring us theirs one time they bring us sweet rocks to suck we are all trying to leave our bodies behind the man on my face has done it it is hard to make yourself die forever you sleep short and then return in the beginning we could vomit now we do not . . .

someone is trembling I can feel it over here

We are not crouching now we are standing but my legs are like my dead man's eyes I cannot fall because there is no room to I am not dead the bread is sea-colored I am too hungry to eat it the sun closes my eyes those able to die are in a pile . . . the little hill of dead people a hot thing (*Beloved* 210-11)

With this scene, Morrison awakens in us awareness of unbearable cruelty and suffering that defy ordinary expectations. Yet, she makes also present in our mind the grief felt not only by Sethe's mother and daughter *Beloved*. She also hints at the sorrow and anguish of all those to whom she refers as the "unburied, or at least unceremoniously buried" ("A Conversation" 209). The problematic at the heart of the novel lies thus in knowing how to read the traces of a people whose death left no trace. Yet, by interpreting Morrison's indexes of trauma, which remind us of those who are "disremembered and unaccounted for," we can approach what Morrison names our "responsibility" (*Beloved* 274, "A Conversation" 209). This means that we need to interpret *Beloved* beyond its aesthetic character. *Beloved* as such invites us to remember, through and thanks to the spectral character of their presence, the discarded, the forgotten, the nameless. As such, with *Beloved*, Morrison testifies against forgetfulness. In "In the Realm of Responsibility," Morrison uses the phrase "nobody knows," to refer to the silence that has been made or kept around the Middle Passage. As she attempts to bring this reality to our attention, she also asks for remembrance of those who died in it. Morrison contends that, "nobody knows their name, and nobody thinks about them" (247). Pulling them out of the anonymous character of their death is thus the crucial act to which *Beloved* attends.

As Morrison explains the act of testimonial that *Beloved* performs, she grounds it both in the ethical and aesthetic considerations that prompted her literary decisions. She claims that “the gap between Africa and Afro-America . . . does not exist.” Likewise, “the gap between the living and the dead,” and “the gap between the past and the present” do not either. She further claims that it is such because “it’s bridged for us by our assuming responsibility for people no one’s ever assumed responsibility for.” As she refers to those who are in danger of remaining anonymous in death, she contends that “they are those that died en route.” As such, Morrison claims, “they never survived in the lore” (247). As she puts it, “there are no songs or dances or tales of these people.” Also, as Morrison concludes, “The people who arrived—there is lore about them. But nothing survives about . . . that” either (“In the Realm of Responsibility” 128). Yet, through the presence of the ghosts in *Beloved*, Morrison makes it a duty to bring them back and make them come through. Thus lies what Chambers labels the double “*burden*” that attaches to *Beloved* (*Untimely Interventions* xx). Morrison makes it her responsibility to pick that burden up through a forceful testimonial act of literature. She does so, not only with honesty, but with grace as well. As she contends, there exists a “necessity for remembering the horror.” Yet, she further claims, “there is a necessity for remembering it . . . in a manner in which the memory is not destructive.” As she concludes her remark about her “responsibility” in writing *Beloved*, she claims that, “as such, the act of writing the book, in a way, is a way of confronting [the horror] and making it possible to remember” (“In the Realm of Responsibility” 247-48).

The horror of slavery is not only manifested through the traumatic experiences of *Beloved*, Ma’am, and those who died en route or in captivity. It is also activated through

Sethe. Because the plurality of these stories by Sethe, but also by Paul D and Baby Suggs, ensures that they are personal as well as personally activated, these stories are likewise resonant. As such, we are made to access and perceive the full significance of the trauma of slavery not only on a collective, plural basis, but also on a more individual and personal level.

Sethe enacts the lived story of Margaret Garner, an Ohio fugitive slave who murdered her child rather than see it returned to bondage. As it is, *Beloved* makes of Sethe one of slavery's most direct witnesses. She is one of the characters who appears most burdened and affected by trauma. Not only because her past seems permanently inscribed in the present state of her life. She is troubled also because the trauma of the past which haunts her appears suddenly, and in unexpected thoughts and occurrences. As Judith Herman contends, "traumatic experiences become encoded in an abnormal type of memory that spontaneously erupts into consciousness in the form of flashbacks and nightmares." But "because even apparently insignificant reminders can provoke these memories," what would otherwise "seem a safe environment" can "end up feeling dangerous to survivors" (*Trauma* 37). This may explain why Morrison combines in *Beloved* an at times seemingly ordinary reality with numerous instances and signs of trauma's presence. The acts of the non-corporeal ghost of Beloved as a baby "throwing a powerful spell" are flagrant indexers of that type of recurring trauma (*Beloved* 4). The "two tiny hand prints" that appear in cakes, or the "mirror" that "shatters by 'merely looking' in it are just two other among the many instances of how reality gets to be perturbed and deranged in the world of *Beloved* (3). Even though it is not a physical being, the baby ghost has spells so powerful that it eventually comes to send away

Sethe's sons, Buglar and Howard. Its unseen--yet destructive--presence is frightful to even the most resilient person. As it comes to be seen in the "pool of red and undulating" and "pulsing" red "light" that spreads at the entrance of Sethe's and Denver's house, it is terrifying. It shakes Paul D so much on his arrival, that it makes him "tremble" as a man who "had not trembled since 1856," when he was "locked up and chained down"(8).

The ghost of the baby enables the trauma of the past to be made forcefully perceptible. As it acts as a powerful, disruptive force in the living present of *Beloved's* protagonists, the baby ghost actually comes to signify what Lyotard calls the "excess" that is produced by "the double blow" of the traumatic experience. This "excess," by defying "chronological" time and "localized" place, is not only pervasive, but "uncontainable" as well (*Heidegger and "the jews"* 16). In *Beloved*, the ghost of the baby comes to signify that this "excessive" presence can, in this instance, neither be contained nor discarded (16). It keeps intruding into the lives of the occupants of the house. Not only does it upset their lives, but it also disturbs their mental processes in trying to survive the shocks of their pasts. Also, as a narrative device, the ghost of the baby explodes the barriers that may conventionally enclose a narrative's times and places.

The ghost of the baby plunges protagonists and readers alike into an a-chronological time that *Beloved* makes insistent and obsessive. Traumatic thoughts come to re-surface and impinge on the sufferer of trauma time and again. Whatever has been individually experienced by Sethe, Paul D, and Baby Suggs is, in fact, so shattering, that, at first, it makes them mute with loss and pain. It encloses them in a profound silence about the past. Also, it prevents in them any thought of the present. For Baby Suggs, for

instance, “her past had been like her present—intolerable” (*Beloved* 2). She remains “suspended between the nastiness of life and the meanness of the dead.” Unable to forget the pain of her past, Baby Suggs lets herself die of sorrow. As Morrison writes: “Since she knew death was anything but forgetfulness,” [Baby Suggs] used “the little energy” left in her “for pondering color” (3). For Paul D, the impossibility of facing the present is symbolized by his putting into a “tobacco tin buried in his chest,” that nothing “could pry open,” a major portion of his head and heart (72, 113). As such, “working dough. Working, working dough,” in Paul D’s contention, comes to figure as “nothing better” than “to start the day’s serious work of beating back the past” (73).

Paul D’s refusal to break the silence around his traumatic experience is related to what Shoshana Felman describes as the “impossibility” of “*testifying from inside Otherness*.” Paul D’s silence is more precisely grounded in the impossible character of “*testifying from the absolute constraint of a fatal secret*.” In fact, Paul D’s enclosing his heart in a buried part of his memory has us view his experience as a “*fatal secret*” felt to be so “binding, so compelling and so terrible that it often is kept secret even from oneself” (*Testimony* 228). In that case, Felman contends, “the inside is unintelligible, it is *not present to itself*.” As such, she claims, “*the inside has no voice*” (231). With his heart and mind enclosed in the “tobacco tin, its lid rusted shut,” Paul D remains in a traumatic state of secrecy (*Beloved* 72, 113). It is only later, prompted by Beloved, that he will be able to start listening to his own and Sethe’s traumatic stories. Only then, will he be able to start to voice his own trauma.

Sethe’s past imprisons her life to such an extent that, to her, an ordinary life is not even conceivable at all. In fact, her present existence, in her contention, is just “a matter

of keeping the past at bay.” In her motherly concern for Denver, and in regards to the trauma of her past experiences, all that “matters” to Sethe is actually “keeping [Denver] from the past that was still waiting for her” (42).

The past to be kept at bay for Baby Suggs, Paul D, and Sethe are unwanted memories of “unspeakable” events (“Unspeakable Things Unspoken” 201). These memories of “unspeakable” events continually surge into Sethe’s consciousness, so as to impede on her everyday living. These reminiscences constantly disrupt, through their sudden and unexpected irruption, Sethe’s capacity for living the present moment. By being spontaneous and uncontrollable, Sethe’s memories are so imprisoning that Sethe can neither forget nor escape their effects (*Beloved* 36). As such Sethe’s “past error,” her act of infanticide, takes “possession of the present” and refuses to let go (256). This memory is so impacting into Sethe’s life that, “in eighteen years . . . before and since, all [Sethe’s] effort was directed not on avoiding pain but on getting through it as quickly as possible” (38).

Through Sethe’s reminiscing her past, Morrison brings back the horror of the infanticide. Interestingly enough, though, Morrison succeeds in revealing the tragic character of the murderous act without insisting on its occurrence. Rather, she has Sethe experience and go through its effects. Morrison achieves this literarily by leaving blank spaces that she creates in her text around Sethe’s actions. Here, the infanticide is alluded to by the silence that Morrison intentionally places around it. Leaving a gap after the time prepositions “before and since” of the previously quoted sentence, Morrison inserts here a pause, a “figural moment.” By not naming the referent—infanticide-- Morrison succeeds in “speaking” the “unspeakable.” She does so by making the silence, the pause,

the “figural moment” inscribed around the crime bear the meaning of the act. And yet, she does not need to name the action for us to sense the full impact that this deliberate act of murder has had on Sethe and her family.

Our concern with the “unspeakable” is not unrelated or far removed from what Gloria Anzaldúa proposes with her *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Anzaldúa, however, deals with the notion of “unspeakability” or “unpresentability,” not in an attempt to reveal the shock of an event as massive as slavery, but rather to reveal the “unpresentability” of a culturally complex identity (Morrison, “Unspeakable Things Unspoken” 201, Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained* 15). Anzaldúa’s work is pertinent at this point because it enables the location of “unpresentability” in a site of “border crossing” (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 100). In our case, it is the crossing between voice and silence that the “borderland” enables to explore (101). In that space, as Anzaldúa stresses, the self seeks to ground its identity. Yet, that identity is unable to be presented, Kant would contend, in “unity” or “totality” (*Critique of Judgment* 55). Likewise, the “borderland” revealed by Anzaldúa is a place in which meanings, events, and cultures collide and transform one another. As these events and identities continually come into contact and permeate each other, the meanings that attach to them constantly change. Feelings of “ambiguity” and “ambivalence,” legitimated in Anzaldúa’s “borderland,” come thus to attach to these culturally evolving identities (101). Grounded in unresolved conflicts, these newly formed identities resist or even preclude clear definition or “presentability” (*The Postmodern Explained* 15). This is so, partially, because some issues, and legitimately so, resist the possibility of attaining harmonious, total, or absolute (however illusory) unity or consensus. As such, the “borderland” becomes potent in

the possibilities it offers to signify these unresolved conflicts as legitimately “ambiguous” and not totally “presentable” (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 100, *The Postmodern Explained* 15).

The “borderland” as a site for ambivalence is meaningful also in stressing the importance for readers to experience, by “feeling,” rather than “identifying,” the “unpresentable” or “unspeakable” character of trauma. It is how “the borderland” can be explored here in connection with Morrison’s work. One of Morrison’s narrative techniques for enacting trauma in *Beloved* relates to the ambiguity of “thinking” in rational terms an event as massive as slavery. In this case, the “borderland” enables us to inquire into what Morrison regards as a necessity to reveal, rather than visually present, slavery. In *Women Writers at Work*, Morrison discusses her choice of deliberately setting out to reveal what it must have “felt like,” rather than what it must have seemed like, to live in a time dictated by slavery (357).

Morrison has expressed in critical terms the motive that is behind her “making feel,” rather than “visually present” the horrors of bondage. In the interview she had with Claudia Brodsky Lacour, Morrison reviews some of the aesthetic devices that she uses in *Beloved*. She discusses these devices in terms of how to make slavery meaningful to her readers. She specifically discusses her decision to approach slavery, not as a historical period to be described, but as an experience to “be felt” (*Women Writers at Work* 357). Morrison makes her point with the specific instance of the “bit,” that Sethe’s mother was made to wear so many times. In *Beloved*, the cruelty and poignancy of the experience of the shutting of the slave’s mouth and the muting of her speech is revealed in very sensitive terms. We come to learn that the “bit” disfigured the face of Sethe’s mother.

Yet, it did not do so in the physical manner that we would expect. Surprisingly enough, the “bit” worked on Ma’am’s face, so as to make her face constantly “smile.” The despair comes through, when we learn that Sethe has never seen her mother’s “own smile” (203). As a sign of disfigurement and separation, the figure of the “bit” is thus meant to subtly “reveal” how painful the estrangement that slavery produced must have felt. Morrison’s technique here lies in exposing, through the narrative she constructs around the “bit,” the personal relevance of the experience. In *Writers at Work*, she asserts that the dehumanizing process of the “bit” carried with it a “very personal quality for the person who made it, as well as for the person who wore it.” As Morrison further contends, “I realized that describing [the bit] would never be helpful.” Rather, as Morrison continues, “I realized that the reader didn’t need to *see* it so much as *feel* what it was like.” As such, for Morrison, it became “important to imagine the bit as an active instrument, rather than simply as a curio or an historical fact” (357).

The feeling created around the “bit” is very strong also in the following scene. It is grounded in a memory by Sethe, and sensitively revealed through a conversation between her and Paul D. As Sethe reflects on the effect of the “bit” put on slaves she knew, she can perceive and feel Paul D’s profound pain around it. During the conversation with Paul D, she thinks and says the following,

He wants to tell me, she thought. He wants me to ask him about what it was like for him—about how offended the tongue is, held down by iron, how the need to spit is so deep you cry for it. She already knew about it, had seen it time after time in the place before Sweet Home. Men, boys, little girls, women. The wildness that shot up into the eye the moment the lips were yanked back. Days after it was taken out, goose fat was rubbed on the corners of the mouth but nothing to soothe the tongue or take the wildness out of the eye.

Sethe looked up into Paul D’s eyes to see if there was any trace left in them.

“People I saw as a child,” she said, “who’d had the bit always looked wild after that. Whatever they used it on them for, it couldn’t have worked, because it put a

wildness where before there wasn't any. When I look at you, I don't see it. There ain't no wildness in your eye nowhere." (*Beloved* 71)

Morrison closes her discussion of her narrative choice and technique around the "bit" by making a more generic statement about her art. As she concludes her conversation, she asserts that, "And in the same way I wanted to show the reader not only what the bit could do to an individual, I also wanted to show in general what slavery *felt* like, rather than how it looked" (*Writers at Work* 357).

As Morrison grounds *Beloved* in the individual stories of Sethe, Paul D, Baby Suggs, and others, she contends that her point is for her readers to "listen, participate, approve, disapprove, and interject" their own traumatic stories, as much as she does. She writes her novels, not as a resolution of conflicts, but as a site for discussing some of the issues that pertain or have directly affected the African-American community. As such, she intends her artistic productions to be open-ended. In her words, "there is always something more interesting at stake than a clear resolution in a novel." Morrison claims that she is likewise "interested in survival," as she wants to see "who survives and who does not, and why." Also, she claims, she does not want "to bow out with easy answers to complex questions." This is so because "it's the complexity of how people behave under duress that is of interest" to her. Especially, she claims, "the qualities they show at the end of an event when their backs are up against the wall" is what is meaningful ("An Interview 402). As such, she contends, she wants from her readers "a very strong visceral and emotional response as well as a very clear intellectual response" (403-04). The "haunting," which Morrison admits she deliberately performs on her readers through her fiction, is "testimony" to that effort (404). The responses in readers that Morrison attempts to elicit are thus not only related to *Beloved* being an act of

witnessing that exposes traumatizing memories. They are also connected to how we can reply to *Beloved* as a ghostly narrative.

As previously explored, Morrison grounds *Beloved* in an obsessive recurrence of unresolved conflicts and silences that she inscribes in individual, racial, and cultural “borderlands” (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 100). These unresolved conflicts, which necessarily need to remain unresolved, are made “substance” and become “presence” among others, through some memories of the past. Yet, Morrison also makes the personally unresolved conflicts of slavery signify through disrupting presences of immaterial life forms in *Beloved*. This is the point for now.

Barbara Freeman develops an insightful argument around the presence of ghosts in African-American literature, particularly in the oeuvre of Toni Morrison. In Freeman’s view, the feeling of the sublime can enable one to read an apparent “absence” as an actual “presence.” This “crucial absence,” the result of something that has been discarded or dismissed with whatever personal, historical, or cultural intent in mind, is actually the “concretization of a missing presence” (*The Feminine Sublime* 116). As the “sign of what is there by not being there,” the sublime, for Freeman, is thus like “a ghost,” in that “it marks what has been excluded from the main body of the work.” Likewise, it returns in “an attempt to make up for its loss” (117).

Freeman makes her point by organizing it around “ghosts who come back to haunt the living.” For Freeman, the coming back of ghosts actually occurs to trouble the mind of those who have survived. More precisely, ghosts “come back” if “proper attendance was refused to them while they were living.” To make her point, Freeman reviews the following, commonly held belief around ghosts. Namely, that ghosts appear

“when someone’s departure from this life has not been accompanied by the rites that it calls for.” The “unceremoniously buried” that Morrison compels us to remember through *Beloved* would be among those who were actually refused “proper attendance” (“A Conversation” 209, *The Feminine Sublime* 116). It is, among others, what actually prompts ghostly returns in *Beloved*.

Also, in Freeman’s words, ghosts “come back to keep us in touch with a history we can neither remember nor forget.” They actually keep us in contact “with a past that refuses to die.” Freeman further claims that ghosts can only be laid to rest only when, “the labor of mourning begins to transmit the silence they signify into speech.” So if “the sublime appears to mark a trauma that exceeds language,” she claims, it simultaneously “motivates symbolization while it also resists it” (*The Feminine Sublime* 116). In our case, Morrison’s symbolic attempt at finding expression for “unspeakable things unspoken” is thus grounded not in words as such (“Unspeakable Things Unspoken” 201). The search for the inexpressible is revealed in the haunting presence of the ghosts that overwhelm *Beloved*.

Instead of filling in “unspeakable things” with historical forms of discourse, which Toni Morrison has obviously resisted doing, she proposes, instead, to haunt her characters and readers. Also, her use of an Anzaldúan “borderland” permits her to fill “unspeakable things,” not with speakable things, but with indexers of pain and confusion. Morrison’s art, grounded in silences and figural moments, serves then to reveal, and insistently so, not so much an object, but a sorrow and a trauma deeply ingrained. This particular form of ghostly presence specific to her art comes to be a mode of signifying in itself.

In “Shakespeare’s Ghost Writers,” Marjorie Garber develops a similar argument around silence in connection to ghosts. She draws on Derrida to make her point. She claims that a ghost, in her instance, the ghost of Hamlet’s father, is like a “signature” for Derrida. Both are “signs” that request attention, even if they come across as an “empirical nonpresence.” A “signature,” then, as Derrida has shown, “is simultaneously a present absence and an absent presence.” It is, in fact, “something that must be iterated to be recognizable.” The signature “stands for its signator in that person’s absence” (140). In “Signature, Event, Context,” Derrida contends that, “by definition,” a “written signature” indeed “implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer.” The signature also “marks and retains his having-been present.” As Derrida insists, a “having-been present in a past now,” is also, however, one “which will remain a future now.” With the signature thus, a “having-been present” in the past can be inscribed and evidenced, not only in “a now,” but in a “future” as well. As such, the signature iterates a presence in what Derrida calls a “transcendental form of nowness,” or “*maintenance*” (328). For Garber, a “signature,” such as claimed by Derrida, is “very like a ghost” (“Shakespeare’s Ghost Writers” 140). As such, both signature and ghost stand for something that is recognizable, despite the empirical absence of the signator or death of the person. In Morrison’s text, the ghost, as evidence of the violence done to the mind and the body under slavery points also at the “nowness” or “*maintenance*” of that trauma (“Signature, Event, Context” 328). The ghost reiterates then that the potency of the signifying trauma is there even if it is located in an “empirical non-presence” (“Shakespeare’s Ghost Writers” 140).

The ghost asks not to forget what may have been omitted, forgotten, remained undisclosed, or kept secret. As Lyotard contends, we must indeed always “remember” that “there is the Forgotten” (*Heidegger and “the jews”* 4). As a cultural marker of absence and loss to remind us of the forgotten, the ghost of Beloved also serves the following purpose. It operates to explore further and “descend deeply into the dark and noisome caverns of the hell of slavery.” These words, by Henry Box Brown, quoted by Morrison in “The Site of Memory,” reveal another facet of Morrison’s purpose in writing *Beloved*. Through these words, Morrison alludes to “the dark and noisome” site of slavery as a place that does not let itself be forgotten nor revealed exclusively in words, but in “noise” and in “darkness.” Her overall narrative’s call to attention, then, draws on that often unarticulated, even dismissed presence, of the “hell” that “slavery” was (90). But in Morrison’s *Beloved*, this often dismissed presence of slavery, which, in Lyotard’s words, would stand as that which remains “‘immemorial, unthought and unthinkable’ as such,” is thus concretely taken up by the narrative alternating with the silence made around it (*Heidegger and “the jews”* xx). The following example illustrates how.

In the number of the house that Sethe, Denver, and also Paul D inhabit, namely 124 Bluestone Road, we sense that the third term—the one for Beloved-- is missing (*Beloved* 3). Because number 3 in 124 cannot be named does not mean that number 3 does not exist, or that it cannot mean or signify. It actually signifies, and very traumatically so. I suggest that the missing number, the silenced number 3 in 124, figures not the absence, but the return and presence of Beloved. As that which cannot be contained, or satisfactorily told or spoken, number 3 comes to signify that it must not be forgotten, despite the fact that it seems to have been erased. In “Unspeakable Things

Unspoken,” Morrison explains her technique of opening *Beloved* by giving Sethe’s street and house address. She also discusses her purpose in opening the novel through “a sentence” that “is not one” (228). As she writes the first line of her narrative, she indicates that, “124 was spiteful. Full of a baby’s venom.” Morrison explains that she intentionally meant the first two lines of *Beloved* to be dramatically impacting. Reading “124 was spiteful. Full of a baby’s venom” is indeed a very puzzling and defamiliarizing way of starting a narration. For one, how can a baby be associated with venom, and how can it be spiteful? But then we quickly come to realize that the first two lines of *Beloved* prefigure the pain and the depth of the trauma that is enclosing in grief its inhabitants (3). In “Unspeakable Things Unspoken,” Morrison describes in critical terms her narrative choice, the expected effect, and the meaning of the puzzlement of her opening lines:

Whatever the risk of confronting the reader with what must be immediately incomprehensible in that simple, declarative authoritative sentence, the risk of unsettling him or her, I determined to take. Because the *in medias res* opening that I am so committed to is here excessively demanding. It is abrupt, and should appear so. No native informant here. The reader is snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment completely foreign, and I want it as the first stroke of the shared experience that might be possible between the reader and the novel’s population. Snatched just as the slaves were from one place to another, from any place to another, without preparation and without defense. No lobby, no door, no entrance—a gangplank, perhaps (but a very short one). And the house into which this snatching—this kidnapping—propels one, changes from spiteful to loud to quiet, as the sounds in the body of the ship itself may have changed. A few words have to be read before it is clear that 124 refers to a house, . . . and a few more have to be read to discover why it is spiteful, or rather the source of the spite. By then it is clear, if not at once, that something is beyond control, but is not beyond understanding, since it is not beyond accommodation by both the “women” and the “children.” The fully realized presence of the haunting is both a major incumbent of the narrative and sleight of hand. One of its purposes is to keep the reader preoccupied with the nature of the incredible spirit world while being supplied a controlled diet of the incredible political world. (228-29)

As Morrison further contends,

The subliminal, the underground life of a novel is the area most likely to link arms with the reader and facilitate making it one's own. . . . Here I wanted the compelling confusion of being there as they (the characters) are; suddenly, without comfort or succor from the "author," with only imagination, intelligence, and necessity available for the journey. (229)

While Morrison compares *Beloved* to the less subliminal, more explicitly articulated novels that she has written, she underlines that the "rawness" and "vulnerability" of the language in *Beloved* actually serve to draw on an accrued involvement of the readers.

She concludes that, with *Beloved*, there is indeed

No compound of houses, no neighborhood, no sculpture, no paint, no time, especially no time because memory, pre-historic memory, has no time. There is just a little music, each other and the urgency of what is at stake. Which is all they had. For that work [*Beloved*], the work of language is to get out of the way.

This not only serves to enact "the fully realized presence of the haunting" in *Beloved*, but it does so forcefully ("Unspeakable Things Unspoken" 229). Also, while both Morrison's and Delbo's proses enact "the fully realized presence" of trauma, they also pose as underlying question the possibilities for trauma to be potentially or eventually "undone" (201). Exploring a possible "undoing" of trauma is the major point I propose for the coming chapter.

Chapter 3. Discursive Memory

Chacune se sent mourir et se décompose en images brouillées, déjà morte à elle-même, elle n'a plus ni passé, ni réalité, ni rien.

Elle est rentrée chez elle, elle n'est pas rentrée dans la vie. La vie a glissé sur elle comme l'eau du ruisseau sur les cailloux qu'elle polit, l'a usée jour à jour. Son regard s'est terni, sa voix s'est décolorée, ses cheveux sont devenus gris. Combien d'années maintenant? Elle les a comptées mais le compte n'est pas juste. Auschwitz, c'était hier. Cette nuit-là, c'était la nuit dernière.

Depuis toutes ces années-là, elle fait les menus gestes, les menus pas du quotidien, elle écoute le bruit de la vie qui passe à côté d'elle. Elle n'entend rien que le vent sur la plaine glacée, les cris des gardiennes qui surveillaient les détenues dans les marais gelés, les aboiements des chiens. Elle ne sent rien que l'odeur du crématoire. Elle entend les voix des camarades qui l'ont arrachée à sa sœur morte : "Viens! Viens! Il faut aller à l'appel", qui l'ont entraînée, qui l'ont soutenue dans les rangs, qui lui ont dit : "Pleure", mais elle n'a pas pu pleurer, ni ce matin-là, ni depuis. Faute de larmes, son regard s'est terni.

--Charlotte Delbo, *La mémoire et les jours*

Every dawn she saw the dawn, but never acknowledged or remarked its color. There was something wrong with that. It was as though one day she saw red baby blood, another day the pink gravestone chips, and that was the last of it.

-- Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

With *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, Delbo plunges us in a time that, in the words of Chambers, is "a time without measure" (*Untimely Interventions* 212). It is the traumatic time of Auschwitz. A time of death and destruction, its devastating spell is as "hard" and "solid" as the mortal cold and the frozen light of the camp. With it, we are transported in "a time outside of time" (*None of Us* 32). Its deadly force ongoing, that time limits the possibilities of life at the camp. Likewise, it constricts the memories of life outside the camp. As importantly, as I will propose as the focus of this chapter, the frozen time of Auschwitz not only points at a past that has disintegrated. It also signals, for sufferers of trauma, that the future has been impeded as well.

In her trilogy *Auschwitz and After*, Delbo addresses the challenges of a tormenting and tormented lifetime. Similar to the torment perceived in Sethe and other characters in *Beloved*, an ongoing and significant existential anguish is continually sensed, overwhelming Charlotte. Once it takes possession of her life, it keeps dominating it. It plagues her continually. But actually, it afflicts not only her present life. It is reductive of her past one and it is threatening of her future as well. The point of this chapter is to demonstrate how losing touch with a present life and getting disconnected from a past existence can affect and threaten the future in profound ways.

An initial sign of emotional unsettlement manifests itself early in *Aucun*. In the first work of the trilogy, it comes across as Charlotte's entanglement in the present and in the fading of her past memories. In *Une connaissance inutile*, the second volume, it takes the form of an incapacity to imagine a future life different from the one at the camp. Both works, then, can serve as literary bases for exploring the intricate connections between traumatic past, present, and future that so upset Charlotte's life. It is also the aesthetic design of the trilogy that reveals how much Delbo's life expectations have been reduced. Likewise, it is through *Beloved* and *Jazz*, Morrison's first two volumes in another trilogy, that I will inquire into how a dislocation of time in a life narrative can disarticulate the self. These works will thus enable examination of to what extent some protagonists are able to cope with a deranged time frame and a disadjusted self produced by a tragic past. The critical works of Susan Brison, Henry Krystal, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Derrida provide the analytical backgrounds for our discussion.

Delbo observes that her torment about her existence in Auschwitz does not simply come from knowing that "le passé ne nous était d'aucun secours, d'aucune ressource." To

her, the past is not only an item, useless to possess. Its loss also gives her present experience an unreal, almost surreal character. As she claims, “[le passé] était devenu irréel, incroyable.” As she further admits, “Tout ce qui avait été notre existence d’avant s’effiloçait” (*Une connaissance inutile* 91). Delbo thus implies that the fragmenting of her life is meant to be devastating in more than one regard. It is destructive not only to her past and present prospects. But, as it is assumed in *Une connaissance inutile*, it is negatively impacting the conditions of her future as well.

Intuitively, Delbo knows already, and early on, that living after her release from Auschwitz will not be an actual release. Life will remain challenging. So, not only does Delbo choose to reveal how the experience at the camp has indelibly marked her imaginary with a deadly reality. She also insists on how tainted, contaminated, and senseless living after Auschwitz has become. As Lawrence Langer observes, from Delbo’s survival from Auschwitz to her life-long entrapment in it, Auschwitz has claimed its toll. The remark that he makes about Delbo’s struggles with her existence after Auschwitz is very insightful. He declares, Delbo’s “endeavors to leave [Auschwitz] behind *now* prove as futile as attempts to escape from its reality into an imagined future *then*” (*Holocaust Testimonies* 4).

Being bereaved of one’s future is made very apparent in the self-declared shattering of Delbo’s subjective sense of identity. As she notices quite often, the trauma of the camp has kept pulling her emotional life to an unstable, warfare-like zone. As such, her entire oeuvre is obsessively charged with the presence of the camp. Not only does it reveal how much her sense of living, and reality, have been obscured. It is also illuminating of her doubts and self-questioning about living after Auschwitz. As she

claims in *Spectres, mes compagnons*, “L’enfer d’où je reviens n’était guère favorable au rêve.” Wondering if her capacities to dream or imagine can still function after

Auschwitz, she also asks, “Était-ce rêver que recomposer un monde de l’imaginaire qui, parfois, devait devenir plus réel que le réel où je vivais?”

For Delbo, not only is the interiority of a human clearly threatened by the destructive force of a concentration camp. A capacity to think a life outside of trauma is also problematic. In that regard, she has contended, more than once, that, “she died in Auschwitz,” even though “no one knows it.” Yet, at some point, she also doubts an ability to reconstruct an inner world. She questions being able to have a sense of self that does not involve Auschwitz. Besides, her experiencing Auschwitz has made her engaged in a world and a self, in Auschwitz and after, that were so much unlike hers that either seems now more real than reality itself. As she eventually comes to ask, “Était-ce rêve, . . . ce monde de l’imaginaire . . . qui subsiste en moi aujourd’hui tandis que je commence à douter de l’autre, le vrai, celui où j’étais? Et cette prisonnière au regard sans espoir, était-ce moi? Ou cette Électre insensible? Je ne sais plus” (7). As she keeps on doubting her own sense of existence, she ponders, “J’étais là . . . Là

. . . Ailleurs, nulle part. Dans un monde autre. Comment? Je ne sais pas. Étais-je moi? Étais-je

. . . Quoi? J’étais là.” She further asks, “Combien de temps suis-je restée ainsi en suspension d’existence?” Uncertain of the answer, she tentatively replies, “longtemps. Enfin, on m’a dit que mon absence au monde avait duré longtemps.” Able, however, to vaguely remember the physical condition of her absence to the world, she claims that, “Mon corps était sans poids, ma tête sans poids. . . . Je flottais dans un présent sans

réalité.” Ultimately, she also explains that she spent, “des jours, des jours, sans penser, sans exister, tout en sachant cependant—mais je ne me souviens plus aujourd’hui comment je le savais--, tout en ayant quelque sensation, à peine définissable, que j’existais.” As she concludes how estranging her physical separation from her own self and from the world has felt, she writes that, “Je ne parvenais pas à me réhabituer à être, à me réhabituer à moi. Comment me réhabituer à un moi qui s’était si bien détaché que je n’étais pas sûre qu’il eut jamais existé?” As she hints at the emotional destruction of her previous life, she also points at the tainted color of her future. She asks, “Ma vie d’avant? Avais-je eu une vie avant? Ma vie d’après? Étais-je vivante pour avoir un après? Je flottais dans un présent sans réalité” (44-45).

Delbo’s survival of Auschwitz and her return to life after her liberation are acts that demanded great resilience and courage. This resilience, however, did not liberate her from her traumas. As she claims in *Mesure de nos jours*, “Tout est pareil. C’est en nous que rien n’est pareil. Je sais ce qui en moi n’est pas pareil à ce que j’étais avant, ce qui fait que je ne suis pas pareille aux autres.” For Delbo, this difference lies in, “cette montagne de cadavres entre eux et moi” (59). So for Delbo, not only can trauma preclude the release of the imagination from destruction. Trauma may seclude a person also in a permanent state of senselessness and suffering. Also, trauma seems to have annihilated her sense of reality. As a result, it has predisposed her past, her present and her future to an engulfing existential void.

Auschwitz but also the shed of 124 Bluestone Road, Sweet Home, and the ship of the Middle Passage do thus not only function as places of physical or emotional death. They metonymically stand as places of trauma in which the imagination of a future has

been suspended. With these places, the prospects of past and present, but also future, have disintegrated, in a “time” that is “abolished” (*None of Us* 32). Sweet Home and the camp have contributed to reduce the self to a state of mind that forecloses emotional growth. They have spelled a time of survival that is not so much celebratory of life. Rather, they indicate that life, after all, has been deeply damaged.

Susan Brison has explored the centrality of a temporal component in appraising trauma. In “Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self,” she discusses the collapse of time as a major component of trauma. She claims that the “undoing” of the self is closely related to an “undoing” of time. Brison asserts that the undoing of time and self involves various components. Two are of special interest to us. One deals with a self that is fragmented. The other pertains to a time that is subjectively framed. For Brison, the splitting of the self first entails a “severing of past from present.” It is a time element that indeed plagues and confuses Delbo’s and Morrison’s protagonists. It also relates to both protagonists’ profound desire, willful or not, of severing the self from a hurtful state of existence. In the cases of Charlotte and Sethe, the necessity for release from their past is actually such that it takes control of their lives. It shuts out in them a capacity to live life to the fullest. Instead, a timeless and obsessive presence looms over them. It is so strong that it partially incapacitates them. Their existences, so disfigured and impaired, are frozen in time. Trauma has taken control of their lives. It comes as no surprise that Charlotte’s and Sethe’s existences, at these crisis points, make up the aesthetic frameworks of Delbo’s and Morrison’s trilogies.

Along with a “severing of past from present,” there exists also for the traumatized individual “an inability to envision a future.” This, for Brison, also contributes to shatter

the sense of self in the survivor. As Brison claims, “the ability to envision a future, along with the ability to remember a past” is crucial. They enable a person to “self-identify as the same person over time.” But, she adds, when these abilities are lost, the “ability to have or to be a self” is lost as well. In trauma, not only are “one’s connections with memories of an earlier life” lost. Also gone is “the ability to envision a future.” With this loss comes the possibility that “one’s basic cognitive and emotional capacities” are destroyed.” Or in the least, the capacities to think or feel may be “radically altered.” For Brison, this “epistemological crisis” leaves the survivor with virtually “no bearings to navigate by.” The sufferer of trauma experiences great difficulty at feeling “at home” in the world (39).

Signs of a shattered subjectivity embedded in a traumatic time are prevalent in Delbo’s work. Likewise, a life not free of emotional damage is strongly suggested in Morrison’s oeuvre. As a matter of fact, Morrison’s trilogy does not exactly revolve around the despair of slavery. It reveals, rather, the forms of dejection that keep some of her characters in bondage despite their emancipation. As a matter of fact, her work points at forms of traumatized existence that mainly keep the self imprisoned in quasi hopelessness. This is especially evident with Baby Suggs, Sethe, and Paul D. Not only do these protagonists struggle to cope with trauma. They also strive to live an existence, which they simply wish removed from despair. As a result, they try to loosen the grips that slavery has claimed on them. But their confrontations with trauma, and their personal negotiations for release, pull them back, over and over again, into challenging predicaments.

With *Beloved*, Morrison transports us with Sethe, the ghosts of Beloved, and the “Sixty Million and more,” to places such as the shed of 124 Bluestone Road, Sweet Home, or a ship. These places, in their “cold sunlight,” appear to displace, not only “the dark.” They dislocate “the fabric of life itself.” Also, in *Beloved*, there is present not only a sense of time shattered because of trauma. Trauma disrupts a sense of place also. Particular places are transgressed and infused with traumatic memories, or “rememory,” as Sethe calls them, as she experiences spontaneous recurrences of the past (36). Yet, these places are transgressive also. They are particularly so on two levels. One displays the intense torment that is placed on the subjectivity of the protagonists when they are thinking of those places. The other index of transgression entails the protagonists’ reduced life prospects because of the events of these places. What is more, not only have these places come to emotionally imprison the characters traumatized. They are also threatening to hold in bondage these protagonists who, at some point, and even remotely, come into contact, directly or not, with those places. In the instance of Sethe, the shed in which she committed her act of infanticide is a mentally disturbing site. It is the place of a deep emotional disturbance resulting from her murdering her child. Yet, not only does the shed come to signify the loss of life and death of Sethe’s “crawling-already?” baby girl (159). It also turns out to be the place where the generation following Sethe’s, in this case, Denver’s, has lost a physical connection to a sister. In turn, I suggest that Denver’s loss takes up, in *Beloved*, the form of a repressed desire for a sibling. The impulsive, yet destructive, connection that Denver will eventually form with the ghost of Beloved clearly testifies to that desire. The shed thus comes to stand not solely as a place where

“loss” is “ungovernable.” It is also a place where loss is transgenerationally destructive as well (122).

As readers, we may ask ourselves if these places can eventually come across as safe. After being so traumatizing, can these sites actually be perceived as less threatening? Or are they, on the other hand, to remain emotionally disturbing? Set in a new context, such as Sethe’s emancipation, are these places to keep retaining the memory of their traumatic past? Or can they give way to more promising prospects? “Full of a baby’s venom,” as 124 was, or where “life wasn’t sweet and it sure wasn’t home,” as at Sweet Home, or even where “life was dead,” as in Alfred, Georgia, I propose that these places not only prefigure a despairing present (3, 14, 109). They anticipate a desolate future as well. While Sethe confides in Denver one day, she makes the point particularly clear. As she explains,

“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 of 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.”

“Can other people see it?” asked Denver.

“Oh yes. Oh yes, yes, yes. 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. It’s when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It’s never going away. Even if the whole farm—every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what’s more, if you go there—you who was never there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So Denver, you can’t never go there. Never. Because even though it’s all over—over and done with— it’s going to always be there waiting for you.” (36)

At some point during, or after, a traumatizing experience, a witness is in need of figuring or reconfiguring a sense of self or a sense of identity. This is thus the challenging task that Charlotte, Sethe, and Paul D were facing after their release into presumed freedom. (Re)constructing a life, for them, was to take place, however, in dramatically altered conditions. Their (re)building a life turned out to be an extremely probing experience. It was so because they were unable to return to supposedly normal forms of existence. Return to life, for them, was inscribed in an aftermath. Besides, not only had their experience been fracturing to a sense of self. It had damaged their community and their sense of belonging to it also. That is, if they had felt a sense of communal self in the first place. In fact, (re)insertion was to be made in conditions that had not only been extremely shattering for the individual. It was to be accomplished in relation to a profoundly changed community also. Charlotte's and Sethe's returns were thus not only painful processes to them as individuals. Their return posed a socially and communally based challenge also.

The question of (re)constructing an identity in an aftermath calls for first looking deeper into the shattered sense of time. The contexts of *Aucun* and *Beloved* will provide grounds for this. Probing these narratives and their deranged times is fruitful. Not only does it enable a closer examination of "time" as a functional device of trauma. It also permits examining how to deal with the memory of a traumatic event. The dilemma that these questions pose is as follows. How can both Delbo's and Morrison's narratives go about remembering a trauma which took place in a "time without measure"? (*Untimely Interventions* 212). More specifically, how can Delbo's and Morrison's narratives proceed to remember and inscribe in memory what was experienced in circumstances so

estranging and so unfamiliar, that the experience itself did not seem to take place in the real? That is, if it was even reminisced at all. But also, how do the second novels of Delbo's and Morrison's trilogies repeat or escape the very fabric of trauma of *Arcun* and *Beloved*? What possibilities of a future do Delbo's and Morrison's narratives open? Finally, how do they set about reconstructing a life in an aftermath through a necessary process of mourning?

Marianne Hirsch has posed these questions, albeit in different terms and about other narratives. She has asked whether narratives, such as Delbo's or Morrison's, open spaces that facilitate a "coming to terms with" trauma. Or do they rather attempt to "gain distance from" a traumatic past? ("Marked by Memory" 74). Posed in the terms of Dominick LaCapra, "gaining distance from" or "coming to terms with" trauma would read as follows. Namely, do Delbo's and Morrison's narratives involve an "acting-out" of trauma? Or do they rather suggest what LaCapra terms a "working through" trauma? If the former is the case, how does an "acting-out" enact a "compulsive," unhealthy "repetition" of trauma? Also, how do Delbo's and Morrison's texts ground trauma in "repetitive temporality"? Likewise, if the narratives serve as an "acting-out" of trauma, is the past "compulsively repeated as if it were fully present"? If so, why are "the resistances" of the traumatized subject not "confronted"? Are "memory and judgment undercut"? Or, on the other hand, are the narratives organized around a "working through"? If so, is the repetition of trauma a "critically controlled process"? If so, then, for LaCapra, writing a traumatic text can be a process of healing. It can positively and "significantly change a life" that was originally marked by trauma. It can make possible

a “selective retrieval” of the past. It can also encourage a “modified enactment of unactualized past possibilities” (*Representing the Holocaust* 48, 174).

By posing literary acts that are magnifying, but also silencing of traumatic ordeals, Delbo’s and Morrison’s texts seem to suggest, in the cases of Charlotte and Sethe, that trauma keeps repeating itself without being confronted. Sethe clearly anticipates this resistance and non- confrontational stance in the face of trauma. Especially when she “rememories” her act of infanticide, and is able to recall it solely by “circling, circling . . . the subject . . . instead of getting to the point.” This approach, which is commonly seen in survivors and victims of extreme trauma who go about their somewhat ungraspable and hurtful stories of shame, represents for Sethe her only chance to face the memory of the event. As she aptly puts it, “the circle” that she is making around the subject will “remain one” that she cannot “close in.” Neither can she “pin it down for anybody who had to ask.” She further contends that, “If they didn’t get it right off—she could never explain” it to them (*Beloved* 162-63).

Another presumably non-confrontational acting-out of trauma is revealed through the technique of detachment that is at play in Delbo’s and Morrison’s narrative techniques. It becomes apparent when both authors purposely detach their protagonists from trauma. In this regard, both writers’ testimonial works not only parallel the workings of trauma, and point at the incomplete character of trauma. They actually seem to hint at the difficulties of completely facing or dealing with, much less accepting, the traumatic event. Morrison refers to “the white space” of her text. The detachment in the face of trauma that she endorses at times can be read as follows. By pointing at what “is *not* written,” Morrison insists on the unfinished character of trauma. She may also be

intently pointing at a never ending and unfinished process of grieving in the face of trauma. Whether this grieving process is at an initial stage of melancholic sorrow, or in a mourning phase, matters little at this point. Morrison opens spaces for readers to infer “what is left unsaid.” And as such, these spaces are meant to insist on the emotional pain of experiencing and re-living trauma. Morrison’s blanks thus not only indicate a certain impossibility of grasping the character of trauma completely. They also suggest that a potential processing, much less healing, from trauma is a process that necessarily remains incomplete (*Toni Morrison: A Critical Companion* 9).

(Re)actions by witness in the face of trauma can illuminate ways in which traumatic experiences can be approached, and possibly processed. One attitude, prevalent in Delbo’s and Morrison’s works, is of interest here. It involves a pseudo-indifference, or a purposeful distancing, from the traumatic event. It usually happens in witnesses who attempt to remove themselves from the traumatic occurrence. A need for emotional protection is mainly the underlying motive behind this withdrawal. Witnesses to trauma respond that way because trauma would be too overwhelming if they kept facing it. Its impact would be extremely destructive. This stance is the “protective numbing” that Saul Friedlander sees in many survivors. Friedlander argues that, like the “disruptive emotion” that is caused by trauma, the “protective numbing” is not entirely accessible to consciousness. Both decisions, however, testify to crucial ways of responding to trauma. Not only do they make apparent a certain, though not fully conscious, capacity of the self to think, and even react, in traumatic circumstances (“Trauma, Memory, and Transference” 261). They are also very revealing of Delbo’s and Morrison’s distinctive literary stances in their cultural dealings with trauma.

The idea that survivors engage in protective numbing does not necessarily mean that they, after all, experience a minimized impact of the traumatic event. Rather, and it is crucial to remember at this point, they still acutely perceive trauma. Also, despite their distancing from it, trauma may be no less impacting. Delbo's and Morrison's works reveal this point well. The protective numbing, in which both authors engage, is meant not to be silencing. Paradoxically enough, it points at a culturally active and responsive form of dealing with trauma.

In the following excerpts, both reactions by Charlotte and Sethe initially testify to the responsibility that the witnessing of trauma places on them. At first, Charlotte's and Sethe's responses come across as refusals of that responsibility. Delbo's attempt to avoid looking at the woman clinging to the slope of the camp is one instance of that refusal. Delbo's sense of the "unbelievable," watching with "eyes that cry out," but do not "believe," is another (*None of Us* 34). Sethe's effort at freezing her mind to the "rememory," because it is endangering her future, is another example.

Refusing to acknowledge a traumatic event can be a momentary act of survival. It is especially so when it takes place in deadly conditions, not fully graspable by consciousness. This non-acknowledgement, however, is also connected to another, less fundamental and more conscious form of refusal. It relates to what Henry Krystal defines as the refusal to accept or "integrate" the traumatic event into one's life. According to Krystal, this non-integration by the witness can be extremely problematic. It is so, because it greatly diminishes the chances of the survivor to work through trauma. Actually, the difficulty of the survivor to "integrate" the traumatic event also parallels another difficulty: that of accepting the traumatic event as an event that was "necessary."

In Krystal's contention, the resistances, psychological or cultural, that surge from not accepting the traumatic event as "necessary" can be extremely damaging. They can greatly delay the process of mourning. This form of refusal is thus very critical. Not only does it make it difficult for the trauma sufferer to move beyond the pain and suffering of the experience. It also delays and hampers the processes involved in coming to terms with it. Integrating and accepting the traumatic aspect of one's life is thus necessary in starting a process of healing. It is especially so since it lays out, for the survivor, possibilities of regaining "feelings of identity." It is thus crucial, for a survivor, to be able to (re)capture, along with a sense of identity or "selfhood," a feeling of "self-sameness" over time ("Trauma and Aging" 87). For Morrison, this process would be significant in enabling characters as well as readers to learn "how to survive *whole* in a world where we are all of us, in some measure, *victims of something*" and "in no position to do a thing about it" ("The Seams Can't Show" 40).

The following instance points at Delbo refusing to look at the dying woman on the slope. This refusal is twofold. On the one hand, she will not witness a particular death, that of the woman. On the other, she will not witness the general conditions of dying and death in circumstances imposed on all camp prisoners, including Delbo. Forced by a third party, these circumstances of death open no alternatives or choices to the witnesses. Both refusals also suggest another, correlated, form of rejection. It is the refusal, on Delbo's part, to integrate the dying woman, and her traumatizing death, into her emotional spectrum. Not only does this excerpt make us aware of Delbo's emotional distress. It also makes us face another type of traumatic predicament. It is the difficulty of having to accept the death, not chosen, of millions of concentration camp prisoners, in

events that overwhelmed Europe between 1939 and 1945. In this scene, there is thus not only torment at the thought of the absurdity of the woman dying. There is also anguish at confronting the idea that her death, avoidable in some circumstances, is not in the context we know. As we perceive Delbo's misery at witnessing prevailing death and desolation, we read,

Je ne la regarde plus. Je ne veux plus la regarder. Je voudrais changer de place, ne plus voir. Ne plus voir ces trous au fond des orbites, ces trous qui fixent. Que veut-elle faire? Veut-elle atteindre les barbelés électriques? Pourquoi nous fixe-t-elle? N'est-ce-pas moi qu'elle désigne? Moi qu'elle implore? Je tourne la tête. Regarder ailleurs. Ailleurs.

Ailleurs—devant nous—c'est la porte du bloc 25. (*Aucun* 44)

The next excerpt reveals another emotionally distressing predicament. It is that of Sethe's. As in the instance of Charlotte's look, Sethe's dilemma deals with the refusal to accept or integrate the traumatic event. In the scene, there is, likewise, a sense of the unavoidable, of the inexorable. The scene exposes Sethe in a disturbing self-questioning about the meaning of her experience as a mother under slavery. At first, Sethe is tempted to think of her new emancipated life in promising terms. But she quickly rejects the initial trust that prompts her first encouraging thought. Instead of attempting to integrate a new, more affirmative approach to her life, Sethe keeps thinking of the future in hesitant and mistrusting terms:

[Sethe] thought also of the temptations to trust and remember . . . Would it be all right? Would it be all right to go ahead and feel? Go ahead and *count on something*? She couldn't think clearly . . . Every dawn she saw the dawn, but never acknowledged or remarked its color. There was something wrong with that. It was as though one day she saw red baby blood, another day the pink gravestone chips, and that was the last of it. 124 was so full of strong feeling perhaps she was oblivious to the loss of anything at all. (*Beloved* 38-39)

As I proposed in chapter 2, the types of narratives that actually "perform" trauma are meant to reveal some of the emotional damage that attaches to trauma. Delbo's and

Morrison's texts do so in an urgent manner. Their texts, however, also activate another aspect of trauma. Paradoxically enough, and unlike their protagonists at times, Delbo's and Morrison's narratives offer little possibility for a distancing from trauma. Even though the protagonists of the works willfully attempt to escape trauma, the narratives seem unable to do so. The texts retain in the writing the inexorable suffocating of trauma. Both novelists seem to suggest that accepting or integrating trauma in the continuum of life, and within the self, is extremely challenging, if at all possible. The narratives, then, reveal a continual and a-temporal re-living and re-experiencing of trauma. This is so even when the narratives fail to disclose or purposely silence some of these times of witnessed horror and emotional suffering. Because then, within these times, Charlotte and Sethe are perceived to unwillingly visit, re-visit, and reminisce about the times and the places that have indelibly marked them with pain. Whether Delbo's and Morrison's narratives do so in patterns that attempt to be liberating from trauma is a valid question. Indeed, their narratives sometimes seem to enact trauma compulsively, as a repetition of its horror. In that case, Delbo's and Morrison's narratives point more specifically at the inescapable character of trauma. This is true even if their protagonists want to escape from its grip. Our question thus becomes the following. Do Delbo's and Morrison's narratives make trauma un-escapable to suggest that trauma and its workings actually foreclose healing? Do their narratives, then, work as a Freudian "return of the repressed"? For Krystal, this return would involve for the sufferers forms of "denial" and "psychic splitting" of the self, because that trauma has not been thoroughly worked through. If this is so, one question arises. Does a "psychic splitting" of the self apply to, and assail, Charlotte and Sethe? Or, do the partial silencing, displacing, and even

euphemization of trauma in Delbo's and Morrison's texts, rather point at an active, albeit painful attempt of "*integrating*" and "accepting" trauma? If this is the case, do the narratives suggest an acceptance of the past by the protagonists? Are Charlotte and Sethe inclined to accept their "traumatized self," and the "representation" of that "self"? Are they willing to integrate that suffering self, along with the "other" one, in events that may have been "evitable" and "unnecessary," within their processes of reconstruction? ("Trauma and Aging" 85). Or is the dilemma, between an inability to forget and put behind, and a necessity to remember and transmit experiences of trauma, simultaneously at work in Delbo's and Morrison's testimonies? If so, how do their texts suggest it?

Lyotard has discussed the processing of the traumatic event in a very illuminating manner. Like Cathy Caruth, he has done so by linking trauma to the lack of immediate or direct registration by the perceptive subject. He has actually discussed this connection between effect and event in the context of Auschwitz. Importantly also, he has framed his discussion of trauma around an idea of time.

Lyotard grounds the core of the traumatic encounter in the Freudian "*Nachträglichkeit*," or "belatedness" (*Heidegger and "the jews"* 5). His reading of belatedness enables an in-depth inquiry into the specific types of narratives that interest us here, not only because of the structural and temporal framing of trauma that *Nachträglichkeit* brings to light, but also because *Nachträglichkeit* enables looking into, and appraising, possibilities for closure in the face of traumatizing events. This notion, thus, does not only facilitate exploring "time" in the traumatic realist texts of Delbo and Morrison. It permits inquiring into how, or if, the narratives offer a way out of their traumatic character. Eventually, *Nachträglichkeit* also allows exploring possibilities, if

any, out of a time that has been dis-articulated. At this point, our concern can be posed in the following terms. What is involved in engaging in a process of Freudian “mourning”? Also, what is at stake in a “melancholic” longing for an unscathed self?

According to Freud, “the affects” or occasions for “melancholia” are similar to those of “mourning.” In either case, the affects reveal “a longing for something lost.” In the case of melancholia, however, Freud insists that the loss is located in “*instinctual* life.” The “object-loss” in melancholia is an “unconscious” one. That loss is mainly impacted at the level of the “unconscious.” Freud further makes the following comment. He claims that, in the case of melancholia, “one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost.” As a result, “the patient,” when observed in a state of melancholia, “cannot consciously perceive what he has lost either.” This, Freud adds, “might be so even if the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to melancholia.” This awareness, Freud clarifies, comes only from “the sense that [the patient] knows *whom* he has lost.” Yet, he does not know “*what* he has lost in him.” Charlotte and Sethe know indeed *who* they have lost in their traumatic experiences. Viva, Alice, Halle, and Beloved are only a few among their lost ones. However, neither Charlotte nor Sethe precisely voices *what* they have lost in themselves. We can never get to learn directly from them whether their loss is the loss of an ideal, such as a basic reliance on one’s community. Neither do they explicitly state if the loss was caused by the destruction of a basic trust in humanity. The question remains unanswered. In any case, their loss remains unspoken. My point here is that Charlotte’s and Sethe’s feelings of melancholia corroborate the type of melancholia that Freud discusses here. It is located in an a-temporal and un-localizable site of the unconscious. At this point, Freudian melancholia, in the form of “severe

anxiety” appears to present us with a challenging task. It confronts us with the impossibility of ever being able to locate the object of melancholia precisely in the psychic life of the subject. It also makes it difficult to grasp the loss in more personal terms. The suffering subject has difficulty locating her pain after the experience has ended. Actually, some of the ache could even originate in the un-localizable character of the distress. It could even derive from being unable to frame, or directly address, melancholic emotions. By the same token, attempts at discarding anxiety would be problematic. Freud’s point importantly illuminates how, even though melancholia is actually grounded in the hardly localizable and a-temporal realm of the unconscious, it is perceptible. It is detectable and can be traced through the “affects” of the suffering, and in the “here” and “now” of the survivor (“Mourning and Melancholia” 243-60).

Lyotard has insightfully explored melancholia in the case of human disasters, such as at Auschwitz. He has done so by relating melancholic affects to an idea of “a-temporality.” This notion enables us to look back at traumatic realist narratives in a more incisive way. It permits us to inquire into how trauma can possibly be processed. It also enables us to appraise a traumatic text, which is not exclusively a re-enactment of trauma. Likewise, it allows us to view it not solely as a controlled process. Rather, Lyotard’s argument encourages us to approach trauma in Delbo’s and Morrison’s texts from both angles at the same time. Indeed, Lyotard claims that trauma is not to be inscribed in conscious chronology exclusively. Nor is it framed solely in immemorial time. Rather, Lyotard traces trauma back to a “disjoined temporality” that the sufferer of trauma experiences and that the text reveals, along with other symptoms. The manner in which

Lyotard's "disjoined temporality" can be seen at work in Delbo's and Morrison's texts is extremely revealing.

For Lyotard, *Nachträglichkeit*, in the Freudian sense, has two components. One relates to a "double blow" that is "constitutively asymmetrical." The other element of *Nachträglichkeit* engages a "temporality that has nothing to do" with "consciousness." For Lyotard, both the asymmetrical blow and the disjoined temporality are at work in the experiencing of trauma. When activated, both are present in the mental processing of trauma as well.

Lyotard contends that, with the double blow, the following happens. The psychic apparatus receives a "first blow." It is the first excitation. It "upsets the apparatus with such 'force' that it is not registered." Lyotard compares it to "a whistle" that is "inaudible" to humans, but not to dogs. He also refers to the first blow as a force, an energy. This energy, he claims, is simply "deposited there." Once put in the psychic apparatus, the energy just stays there. For Lyotard, at that point, it is in "unusable form." It resists transformation. It cannot be "'bound,' composed, or neutralized." In Lyotard's contention, neither can it be "fixed," in accordance "with other forces 'within' the apparatus." For Lyotard, then, the "deposit left behind" by the first blow, by the "excessive" excitation, is not "a localizable object in the topology of the soul." As such, it "strikes the apparatus without observable internal effect." It does not "affect" it. In Lyotard's words, the first blow constitutes thus "a shock without affect." Lyotard further contends, that, with the second blow, something else takes place. What happens is "an affect without a shock." In this instance, he explicitly refers to Freud's classic account of individual trauma. He describes the scene enacted by Emma in the candy store. He

elaborates on the evidence, that she is caught in a sudden, apparently inexplicable, crisis of anxiety. He connects the second blow to the following reaction. She claims, “I buy something in a store, and anxiety crushes me.” Then she says, “I flee, but nothing had really happened.” At this time, however, something has happened. The energy, so far formlessly dispersed in an “affective cloud” by the first blow, “condenses.” It “gets organized,” and it “brings on action.” It “commands a flight without a ‘real’ motive.” As Lyotard further explains, “this flight,” however, and “the feeling that accompanies it,” inform consciousness of “something” that has been happening. It is what Lyotard’s names the “*quod*.” For Lyotard, the notion “that *there* is something, the *quod*, comes first. It happens before the “*quid*.” Even though consciousness remains, however, unable, to tell exactly “*what* it is” there is, it knows that, “there is” something. Consciousness “indicates the *quod*,” but it does not designate the *quid*. It just knows that, “this excitation need not be ‘forgotten,’ repressed according to representational procedures, nor through *acting out*.” Even though consciousness is made aware, not of “*what* there is,” the *quid*, but of the *quod*, it knows of something crucially disturbing. Its “‘excess’ (of quantity, of intensity) exceeds the excess that gives rise (presence, place, and time) to the unconscious and the preconscious.” It is “in excess” like air and earth are in excess for the life of a fish” (*Heidegger and “the jews”* 12, 15-16).

For Delbo, consciousness may have been informed more immediately, yet belatedly, of a *quod* through directly witnessing a *quid*. Perception may not have been as direct in the case of Morrison. Actually, the moment or mode of perception matter little in our instances. Indeed, regardless of the accessibility of the witnessing, and of its immediacy defined in temporal terms, the shocks and affects of destruction have, in

either case, been tremendous. Even though it may not even have registered at the time of occurrence, trauma has, however, struck in a profound manner. In both cases, the shock of an incredible violence and violation of the self, and of the other, has certainly been “deposited” there. Lyotard’s construct around the temporal and belated character of trauma is thus central to our argument. It enables me to claim that not only do Delbo and Morrison inscribe the a-chronological time of the traumatic event of extermination and slavery into the temporal form of their narratives, but also, that the time of their traumatic realist texts is actually to be thought of as “constitutively asymmetrical.” The possibilities for the readers to perceive the traumas of the life stories that the narratives expose are not limited to specific times. The texts are indeed constructed in such a way that the perception of the traumatic events and their affects can be achieved independently of the time of occurrence. Little does it matter whether the events are distant or remote in the past.

What matters is that their major impact is the continued shock and disturbing of consciousness. Just as important, what is significant, in Brooks Bouson’s terms, is that readers also “feel compelled and unsettled, if not emotionally distressed, by what they read.” As Bouson implies in *Quiet As It’s Kept*, “if Morrison sees her role as a writer to bear witness,” our role as reader is to bear witness as well. Our reading is meant to be active and participatory. For Bouson discussing Morrison’s work, our reading should be “not unlike that of listeners of real-life shame and trauma stories.” These listeners, indeed, must not only “uncover the shameful secret.” But they must also “reconstruct the fragmented narrative of the trauma sufferer.” Yet Bouson adds, “because Morrison is aware that she risks hurting—that is vicariously shaming and traumatizing—her readers,

she, not unlike the therapist-listener, must create a safe-holding environment for her readers.” While both Delbo and Morrison do so through the fragmented aesthetics of their narratives, their testimonial acts remain compelling. Both authors enable readers to “both experience and process the shame- and trauma- driven stories” of their protagonists in a profound manner (20, 223).

In Lyotard’s contention, some narratives organize or enact a “chronologization of time that is not chronological.” It is especially true of traumatic texts. For Lyotard, these narratives, then, are able to perform, the “retrieval of a time” that “is lost.” It is the time around the first blow that these narratives attempt to actually retrieve. Even though it does not have a conscious “place and time in the psychic apparatus,” the traumatic time can, for Lyotard, be probed for recovery. Usually, it is through the “affects” of trauma that the process is initiated. Even though the recovery of that time may only be partial or incomplete, the affects circling that traumatic time may not be without full impact. I thus suggest this. With Delbo’s and Morrison’s texts, the immemorial time of transgression and violation of the individual cannot be completely recovered, but it can still be perceived, while it is incompletely revealed. Its revelation, somehow, is a way of re-connecting to the moments of trauma. Hence, in Morrison’s and Delbo’s narratives, it is precisely this time of loss, or collapse of ideal or trust, that needs to be, and is being, reiterated. It is also that time that either narrative seems reluctant to put behind.

Delbo’s and Morrison’s texts engage in various literary processes. A distancing from trauma, a suffocated voice, and a partial silencing of the traumatic times are just some of them. Paradoxically, these are intended, so that the traumatic times may not be put behind or forgotten. These devices are indeed meant to have reminding effects,

however subtle. One of these, on which Lyotard insists, paradoxically consists in attempting to “neutralize” an “initial violence.” In that case, the “narrative organization” of the traumatic text enables to “represent a presence without representation.” For Lyotard, it serves another purpose. It “stages the obscene” more compellingly. Also, for him, by literally disassociating the past from the present, the text can better attempt to activate a “recollection” of the trauma witnessed. Delbo’s and Morrison’s texts do not disassociate the past from the present. Rather, they engulf them in uncertain, at times unreal, and confused spans of traumatic awareness. Yet their texts activate the unfinished processing of their respective traumas. For Lyotard, this type of writing serves as an individual or cultural “reappropriation” of an “improper.” Also, the traumatic text that purposely frames a diachronic time may do so in order to “reclaim” an “a-chronological affect.” But in any case it sets off, for Lyotard, from a “realistic decision.” This decision, made by authors, is one that can possibly open the idea of a working through, or closure.

The idea of working through, on a more theoretical level, would consist in literally bringing together the times of the first and second blow. It would have the text inscribe the time of the two blows in so-called “real time.” For Lyotard, this process of narrativization constitutes a “historical decision” in itself. This “decision,” for him, “occults what motivates it.” But likewise, “it is made for this reason.” What first prompts it, Lyotard contends, is the “discrepancy between time 1 and time 2.” Yet a narrative may set out to bring these two times together. It can inscribe the time of the traumatic experience, along with the time of the non-traumatic one. Whether the text reveals these two times, and fuses them on the line of “a single and uniform history” is thus a crucial dilemma for the author (*Heidegger and “the jews”* 16). It poses the

following inquiry for us: with their texts, do Delbo and Morrison attempt to write these two times on the line of a single and uniform history? If not, how are the texts indicative of remaining imprisoned by trauma? How tentative are they of being redemptive? Also, how can a re-insertion into a non-traumatic, non-diachronic time engage the witness of trauma in therapeutic processes of healing?

The literary manners in which Delbo and Morrison are bringing the fractured past, traumatic present, and disfigured future of their protagonists into so-called real time are crucial. Further, whether, or how, both authors attempt to align their characters' lives on a single and uniform history line is meaningful. One instance in Morrison's work is extremely revealing in this regard. Her point concerns how some individual elements of hurt and grief in protagonists can hamper the re-writing of a life story as a continuum. It pertains also to how much the merging of "time 1" and "time 2" can be made more difficult, if particularly afflicting personal circumstances are at play. The instances of Sethe, Paul D, and Baby Suggs are very useful at this point. They shed light on the difficulty of merging "time 1" and "time 2" because of a persistently negative perception of the self. This less than positive view of themselves, as a matter of fact, hampers the pulling together of their existence. As slaves, Sethe, Paul D, and Baby Suggs were indeed made to perceive themselves as less than human. This came mainly through degrading treatment and allusions made to them by "others," mainly their masters. Yet, for Krystal, the process of working through by "making peace" with one's self and one's past, involves a crucial element. It requires a specific sense of acceptance. For a traumatized subject to engage in processes of healing, there are thus some requisites to be met. One is the need to be able to see oneself as "owning up to all of one's living as

[one's] own." Another involves a necessity of accepting, "one's object representation," however negatively it may have been projected. In other words, if an inability of positive (re)claiming of the self persists, the "successful completion of mourning, and/or the successful integration of one's life" becomes, to a certain extent, "impossible." In that case, mourning remains impeded. It cannot proceed to completion. It remains a process solely experienced as one that "brings back the helplessness and the *shame* of the past." Or it reduces itself to re-experiencing the feeling of despair, lack of control, and "helplessness" that was felt at the time of the trauma. Accepting "the past as it was," as "unavoidable," and "*justified by its causes*," is thus one of the most challenging tasks facing Sethe and Paul D. It is the major obstacle that hampers their attempts to integrate their traumatic time within the continuum of their lives. So is it for Charlotte.

By maintaining their narratives in a "traumatic" time, Delbo and Morrison indicate little hope for their protagonists' recovery. More exactly, they point at possibilities for incomplete and partial recovery only, if recovery is even an option. The continued surges of trauma in Charlotte and Sethe keep them indeed, and in the words of Krystal, in a state of misery. It is a position that Krystal describes as a state of "*impoverishment of the areas of one's mind*." It holds them in a condition in which an "*I feeling*" of destructive "*self-sameness*" is predominant. Besides, it also leaves them in frequent and recurring moments in which a "*hypertrophied*" and "*alienated*" state of the "*not-I*" is prevailing. As such, they suffer from what Krystal calls "pseudophobia." It leaves both Charlotte and Sethe in a "post-traumatic depletion of the consciously recognized spheres of selfhood." This state of not being able to feel like their own selves constitutes the major impediment to their working through.

Also, for Krystal, one “feels anger, guilt, or shame” in specific conditions of trauma. One instance is when one is unable, or unwilling, to accept the “necessity,” and the “inevitability” of what has “happened.” Both oeuvres, as I have suggested, point at these forms of non-acceptance. Another form of denial comes across, even though it is partially silenced. It is revealed through a recurring feeling of offense. It relates, in this case, not so much to the “inevitable” character of the events. Rather, it suggests that the events were made even more painful than they should have been. Through absence of understanding from a community of outsiders, the experiences of Sethe and Charlotte were made radically and excessively hurtful. Namely, their grief was exacerbated due to the lack of support that Charlotte’s and Sethe’s respective communities displayed. This lets us suppose, then, that the concentration camp or slavery experiences were, somehow, not inevitable. But experiencing them could, at least, have been more generative of empathy and compassion. Delbo’s and Morrison’s works subtly assume that Charlotte’s and Sethe’s ordeals would have been no less devastating. But they might have been more bearable. Also, the trauma at stake actually moved beyond individual experience and suffering. The trauma, by being also interpersonal, reached a tremendous social dimension of catastrophe. So much so, that some attempts at “restoring a feeling of intimacy” with the world may have been further hampered. Potential healing, if any, was, and then remained, nourished by suspicion. By producing a feeling of “counterfeit nurturance,” a sense of disbelief in Charlotte and Sethe was also opened. Neither Sethe nor Charlotte was able to reintegrate with their community completely on their return. This lack of integration and upheld mistrust only added to their process of estrangement (“Trauma and Aging” 83-85).

As we posed that the traumatic experience is bound to a fragmentation of time, the next inquiry is this. Do Delbo's and Morrison's narratives presume that time can eventually be readjusted? If so, do attempts at reintegrating a supposedly chronologically-based life encourage or affect the traumatized subject in her process of reconstruction? Problematic as it is, this question leads us to turn first to Derrida and to his critical understanding of time in the context of "the readability" of the "legacy" of trauma (*Specters of Marx* 16).

In the words of Hamlet prince of Denmark, a time of devastation, that unhinges time, is a "time" that is "out of joint" (*Hamlet* 1.5). Likewise, for Derrida, a "time" that is "out of joint" is a time that is "*disarticulated*, dislocated, dislodged." It is a time "on the run and run down." It is a time that is "*traqué et détraqué*," besides being "*deranged*." It is also a time, "out of order and mad." It is the "unmeasured time" of Auschwitz, Sweet Home, and 124 Bluestone Road. A time such as this, "off its hinges" and "off course" is a time of disruption. For Derrida, it is a challenging time, because it can resist integration into one's life narrative. By being a time "beside itself, disadjusted," it only exists "besides" the self (*Specters of Marx* 18).

For Derrida, attempts to bring and "maintain together that which does not hold together," can be tried. This stance, however, poses challenges. It is extremely problematic because it implies maintaining "the disparate itself." In our case, "the disparate" in question would be more than the unmeasured time of annihilation and death. It would be the time lived "after" the trauma. It would thus be a time that involves experiencing trauma's effects. It is, as such, not only a time of troublesome confrontation for a self returned to life in an aftermath. It is also a time for painful re-inscription of an

existence in a continuous life narrative or in a literary one, or both. Derrida claims that the “maintenance of the disparate” should be thought in the following terms. First, it is to be grasped not in the context of the present. But it should be grasped in the “dislocated time of the present.” Besides, Derrida poses a crucial question around the “disparate,” as to probe if it can “join.” He also asks if it can “be dialectically transformed” (17). Also, can “that which does not hold together” eventually join? Since the disparate in our case is made up of separate and completely disjoined components, our inquiry becomes this: can the elements of the disparate meet on one single life-line? Can they possibly connect? Relating the question to Delbo’s and Morrison’s understanding of memory as individual and cultural components of the disparate is useful at this point.

Forms of memory at work in Delbo’s and Morrison’s trilogies are very revealing of various ways of remembering. One facet of memory entails a memory of personal but also collective experiences of death and suffering. It is the form of memory that has attached to traumatic histories of extermination and slavery. Another form of remembrance, located at the other end of the spectrum, is also relative to memory. That form of recollection, however, is connected to a long-standing cultural memory. That memory has not been informed by a past necessarily traumatic. This memory is grounded in various histories of long-standing communal experiences. Whether oral or written, official or unofficial, some of its (hi)stories are ingrained in the collective, but also individual mind. Actually, these stories have somewhat defined the selves over time, through a specific or particular sense of belonging. The memories of this collective heritage may even have brought individuals together. They may have strengthened their

sense of selves. This cultural memory is, however, at risk, sometimes. It is especially so when it is threatened with crashing into a traumatic one.

Stories of extermination and exclusion unhinge the cultural memory of individuals. More than likely, they affect the cultural memory of entire communities as well. Because they resist being fully confronted, traumatic histories of individuals or communities need to be thought in terms of “spectral” presence. In Delbo’s and Morrison’s works, this spectral presence reveals what Derrida labels, the “dis-located time of the present.” With it, the memory of death comes to surface in the “radically dis-jointed time” rendered by the narrative. This resurfacing thus takes place, for Derrida’s, in a time “without certain conjunction.” He further asserts that, with the idea of a “dis-jointed time,” he does not refer to a time whose joining is simply “negated.” When time is “dis-jointed,” then, it is not solely “broken, mistreated, dysfunctional.” Time is not “disadjusted,” either, in Derrida’s words, according to “a *dys-* of negative opposition.” Neither is it “dis-jointed” through a dialectical disjunction.” Rather, he argues, the “out of joint” character of time refers to a “time without *certain* joining or determinable conjunction.”

Derrida claims that, “what is said here about the time is also valid, consequently and by the same token, for history.” For him, history then, when it is “out of joint,” is a history, “without *certain* joining” (*Specters of Marx* 18). It is also “without determinable conjunction.” We may then ask if times and forms of memory in Delbo’s and Morrison’s works exist “without *certain* joining”? Are they “dis-jointed”? Also, can some memories of the traumatic past be left out and dis-posed of? Eventually, can left-behind

traumatic fragments be joined to other memories, and be inscribed in a history line made at last bearable?

An absence of joining between traumatic histories and cultural histories is suggested in both Delbo's and Morrison's oeuvres. This absence of joining is what actually reduces the traumatized subjectivities of the protagonists to a continued state of despair. It makes them continually exist in a life that remains grounded in a "hauntology," rather than in an "ontology" of being. Also, the traumatized subjectivities of Charlotte and Sethe are destined to live in a mental state of undecidedness. They exist at the confines between "life" and "death," neither "here" nor "there" exclusively, but present in both times and places simultaneously. By mentally occupying these times and places chaotically, they are unable to embrace life to a full extent (*Specters of Marx* xviii).

Histories of extermination and slavery thus remain haunting. Not only solely because of the traumatic traces that the first blow left. These histories remain haunting also, because of the continued activation of trauma, and the ongoing existence of the disparate. Once inscribed, the traumatic traces cannot be assimilated, absorbed, or dialectically resolved. For Derrida, this is impossible and necessarily so. Also, the "excess" that these traumatic encounters have produced cannot, in the words of Lyotard, be "detached by cutting." Nor can they be "excised." As such, they are to remain as non-assimilated, and they are non-assimilable. At this point, I propose that the continued tormenting revealed in Delbo's and Morrison's works is meant to be read as such. It is the sign of the un-assimilable character of trauma. It is that pain that Charlotte and Sethe are unable to digest.

Lyotard contends that “the time of the unconscious affect,” with the first blow, is invested with traumatic traces and fragments. He further observes that the time of trauma, by “being *there*,” will “remain there” (*Heidegger and “the jews”* 17). It certainly does so in the cases of Charlotte and Sethe. Similar to the “rememory” that Sethe unsuccessfully attempts to escape, that time, in Sethe’s words, “is going to always be there.” She adds that, it will even be, “waiting for you,” even though “it’s all over—over and done with.” As Sethe further comments, “That’s how come I had to get all my children out. No matter what” (*Beloved* 36).

The time of the “unconscious affect” remains within the individual. It becomes an inescapable and irremediable component of her emotional life to the extent that it continues to exist as “a bit monstrous, unformed, confusing, confounding,” besides being “ungraspable by consciousness.” As a result, Lyotard contends, “the soul is exceeded.” It is “dispossessed, passed beyond, excised through by this something.” As Lyotard concludes, “this is the constitutive infirmity of the soul, its infancy and its misery” (*Heidegger and “the jews”* 16-17).

Derrida has inquired into this “infirmity of the soul” in view of appeasing the trauma of its misery. For him, history can, however, also consist in “repairing,” with “effects of conjuncture,” the “temporal disjoining.” For Derrida, this repairing would be operated and enacted through what he names “the world.” Delbo’s *Une connaissance inutile* and Morrison’s *Jazz* can, at this point, be appraised with the following concern in mind: how, for Delbo and Morrison, can the “temporal disjoining” that was enacted through the traumatic character of *Aucun* and *Beloved* come to be “repaired” with “effects of conjuncture?” A question, underlying the concern just formulated, would be,

if such repair of “temporal disjoining” is even possible at all (*Specters of Marx* 18).

Probing further into the question of memory will prove useful.

In *La mémoire et les jours*, Delbo makes a crucial distinction between two types of memory. One memory she calls, “*la mémoire profonde*.” It is the memory that Lawrence Langer discusses as “deep memory.” It is the memory that “tries to recall the Auschwitz self as it was then.” Delbo distinguishes it from “*la mémoire ordinaire*,” a form of “common memory” (*La mémoire et les jours* 13). Common memory has a dual function. As Langer has it, it attempts to “restore the self to its normal pre- and post-camp routines.” It also “offers detached portraits, from the vantage point of today, of what it must have been like then.” As such, for Langer, deep memory “suspects *and* depends on common memory.” It knows “what common memory cannot know but tries nonetheless to express” (*Holocaust Testimonies* 5-6). These two kinds of memory intrude on each other. They constantly disrupt the flow of Charlotte’s experiences of living and narrating. The distinction between these two ways of remembering is closely related to the memory framework that Morrison’s work also suggests. An argument by Sam Durrant, in his appraising the work of mourning in the postcolonial novel, makes this particularly clear. His point is extremely revealing. It revolves around memory and ways of remembrance as well. It also leads to a question that I will pose here. Namely, can traumatic memory and non-traumatic memory somehow join? Can they be inscribed in a single line of history? If so, can there possibly be points of juncture in personal narratives? Even though the argument that Durrant makes concerns Morrison’s work more specifically, it is of relevance to Delbo’s project also. Both texts, indeed, testify to personal stories that seem to remain un-integrated. They also reveal a complex interplay

between forms of memory unable to leave the pain of the past to the past. Both texts, however, contemplate eventualities for at least confronting trauma in a manner that does not completely exclude attempts to grow out of it.

For Sam Durrant, Morrison's novels function at two levels. On one level, Morrison's novels engage in what he labels the "narrativization of African American experience." Durrant relates this narrativization of African American cultural history to what he coins a "*cultural* memory." For him, this cultural memory can be integrated and "assimilated" into "the individual consciousness." It usually acts as a "complement to the individual's sense of identity." It is a "healthy" mode of remembrance. It suggests a form of commemoration that is mainly "self-centered." It informs and develops, but also reinforces, a sense of individual and social subjectivity. It aligns the identity of the self with a mutual sense of communal belonging. For Durrant, this form of "cultural memory" is not only critical for the self. It is also crucial for the community. It comprises, in all its forms, the "verbal accounts" of a "community's history."

On the other hand, Durrant claims, Morrison's novels encompass another form of memory. It deals with the reality of what he labels "the *racial* memory" of the African American experience. That racial memory, according to Durrant, remains "nonverbalized" even though it "passes itself on from generation to generation" as if "it were secretly encrypted within the cultural text." Indeed, for Durrant, the "weight of the whole race" cannot actually "be accommodated within consciousness." But the presence and traces of that racial memory can, however, be made perceptible.

Morrison's racial memory and Delbo's deep memory are very closely related. They are linked to the traumatic memory that we have traced in their texts. It is a

memory that “passes itself from generation to generation” as a “symptom” or “affect.” It crosses barriers of times and places. Also, for Durrant, it transmits itself through the “*memory of the body*.” It is, in fact, the memory of the violence inflicted on a “racially marked body.” So, in Durrant’s claim, a racial memory is “a *bodily memory*.” By bodily memory, Durrant means that it is a memory that “takes on a bodily form.” It does so “precisely because” of this. Namely, for Durrant, it “exceeds” both the individual’s and the community’s “capacity for verbalization and mourning.” As such, it functions, in the words of Krystal, as some of the “undifferentiated, mostly somatic, un verbalized affect responses” that can adversely affect both individuals and communities (“Trauma and Aging” 87). For Durrant, all subjects are in possession of a cultural memory. Only the “racially marked” are truly in possession of a racial memory. To him, this racial memory amounts then to an “inherited memory of collective negation” (*Postcolonial Narrative* 80).

The theoretical or critical ways in which reconfigurations or configurations of identity can take place for sufferers of trauma have nourished some of the discussion so far. So have the literary manners in which Delbo’s *Aucun* and Morrison’s *Beloved* anticipate the desolation of the future. I now propose to look into *Une connaissance inutile* and *Jazz* to inquire into how both authors project the possibilities of a life to be (re)built in the circumstances of an aftermath. It implies examining if or how their second volumes not only inscribe, but also transcend, in the forms of a collective and cultural memory, their subjectively traumatized ones.

The forms of memory at stake here, if we follow Derrida’s argument, suggest that both “deep memory” and “racial memory” are ingrained in a time that can have no

“joining” (*Specters of Marx* 18). Delbo’s *deep memory* and Morrison’s *racial memory* do indeed relate to forms of a more generally speaking traumatic memory. The question about their reality concerns whether “racial” or “deep” memory can be “un”-registered and “dys”-inscribed, to use Derrida’s wordplay. Can a “temporal disjoining,” after all, lead to a joining or re-joining? Or more precisely, can “racial” or “deep” memory be re-inscribed in cultural or ordinary memory with “effect of conjuncture”? (*Specters of Marx* 18).

In *Une connaissance inutile*, Delbo discusses a fear of losing her memory. More specifically, she expresses an anxiety at losing the memory that we earlier posited as her “common” or ordinary memory (*Holocaust Testimonies* 5). This fear is actually embedded in another dreadful presumption. It is grounded in the eventuality of losing connection, or joining, with an “ordinary” reality, or what Derrida calls “the world.” *Une connaissance inutile* insists at first on the challenges facing camp inmates in trying to retain a memory of almost erased forms of existence. It also points at the spectacular endeavors that some prisoners did take upon themselves to keep a sense of connection to their histories. Delbo was one of them. She tried to contain and push back a hideous specter, that of annihilation. It led her to keep alive a common memory and a sense of reality of which she would not let go, nor see lost, or disconnected. For Derrida, Delbo’s efforts served to “maintain” and keep “together” something crucial. Something that was meant to be destroyed without leaving traces. (*Specters of Marx* 18).

A fear of losing one’s memory is also grounded in a fear of losing a sense of self. It is useful to remember here that, for Susan Brison, trauma can bring along an “undoing of the self.” It does so by “breaking the ongoing narrative” of the traumatized person.

For Brison, by “severing the connections among remembered past, lived present, and anticipated future,” trauma shatters one’s sense of “personhood.” Also, as Brison claims, “the ability to form a plan of life,” then, and after, is considered by some to be essential to personhood. But it “is lost when one loses a sense of one’s temporal being.” Besides, it also shatters one’s “fundamental assumptions about the world.” Trauma, by fracturing one’s “sense of safety” in the world, also shatters one’s “sense of existing” in that world (“Trauma Narratives” 40-41). Besides, for Judith Herman, when “the human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed and disorganized,” as in the case of trauma, neither “resistance nor escape” becomes possible. Traumatic events, then, “confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror.” They also “evoke responses of catastrophe.” And because they are traumatic, these events “overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life” (*Trauma and Recovery* 34). The threats of annihilation, continually posed to Delbo at the camp, were, indeed, overwhelming. They induced, however, a chain of responses that were actually acts of resistance.

In the following excerpt, Delbo explains how acts of survival can take the form of mentally exercising her memory. By sustaining forms of common memory, Delbo was capable of remaining partially connected to a sense of self that was not totally dehumanized. Delbo remembers the thought processes that kept her going:

Depuis Auschwitz, j’avais peur de perdre la mémoire. Perdre la mémoire, c’est se perdre soi-même, c’est n’être plus soi. Et j’avais inventé toutes sortes d’exercices pour faire travailler ma mémoire : me rappeler tous les numéros de téléphone que j’avais sus, toutes les stations d’une ligne de métro, toutes les boutiques de la rue Caumartin. J’avais réussi, au prix d’efforts infinis, à me rappeler cinquante-sept poèmes. J’avais tellement peur de les voir s’échapper que je me les récitais tous chaque jour, tous l’un après l’autre, pendant l’appel. J’avais eu tant de peine à les

retrouver! Il m'avait fallu parfois des jours pour un seul vers, pour un seul mot, qui refusaient de revenir. (*Une connaissance inutile* 124-25)

As long as she continued to remain attuned to an ordinary sense of self, she retained a sense of personhood. As such, not only did Delbo come to think up of mental devices to remain attached to the world. Not only did she apply mnemo-technical stratagems to prevent erasure of a non-traumatic emotional life, such as the one she used to know in France. She also succeeded in preserving common forms of memory, from which, for Lyotard, “the SS did everything possible to remove all traces” (*Heidegger and “the jews”* 25).

The survival acts in which Delbo engaged are what Chambers calls movements of “relay.” These movements, vital in increasing Charlotte’s chances of return, became her own way of remaining attached to a sense of the real. These relays occurred at a place where “death and life are likewise not separate.” They verged along the borders where death and life are actually “closely joined.” These relays, however, enabled her to maintain connection to the world of the living. Delbo courageously performed her acts of survival around the living in the camp, who were living on such “intimate terms with the dead” that they actually felt they were inhabiting “the space of death” already. She kept going back and forth between the disparate places, selves, and memories of the camp (*Untimely Interventions* 215). By taking place between a common memory and a traumatic one, the relays thus served the following purpose. They enabled points of conjuncture between Delbo’s self, an ordinary or common one, and her traumatized one.

The relaying movements that Delbo narratively exposes and performed at Auschwitz, Raisko Laboratory, and Ravensbrück, are numerous. One particular instance involves the carrying of the dead bodies of Delbo’s companions, Berthe and Anne-Marie,

back to the concentration camp. In this episode, Delbo brings together a heritage of ordinary ways of being with traumatic ones. By co-joining the world of the dead with that of the living, she emotionally succeeds in bridging the gap between these two. Indeed, she initially acknowledges that “d’abord, c’est Berthe et Anne-Marie que nous portons.” But then, she forcibly has to admit that the movements of relay necessarily involve, at some point, a one-way passage to the world of the dead. As such, this passage eventually comes to exclude the initial joining to the world of the living. She contends that soon, it is not “Berthe and Anne-Marie that we are carrying” (*Auschwitz and After* 80). She writes that, “Bientôt ce ne sont plus que des fardeaux trop lourds, qui nous échappent à chaque mouvement” (*Aucun* 129). At this point, Delbo actually “contaminates” the world of the living with that of the dead. She narratively brings the living into the spaces where the dead force their co-existence with them and confuse them. In this instance, the relay concomitantly operates on another level. It metaphorically prefigures a new form of knowledge. This knowledge, likewise, is confusing and contaminating to the living. As such, the knowledge that Delbo and her companions gathered in the face of death as “carriers of the dead” actually turns out to be, not instructive or didactic, as one might expect. Rather, it turns out to be hopelessly “useless.” This knowledge, whose “uselessness” Delbo reveals through the title of her second work in the trilogy, is despairingly so (*Une connaissance inutile* 185). In the instance discussed, it leaves the four actual carriers of the dead Berthe and Anne-Marie astounded with helplessness and despair. Generally or metaphorically speaking, it points also at leaving any carrier or re-layer of death confounded with hopelessness also.

Brison contends that an “undoing of the self by trauma” can actually be “remade” through “acts of memory.” In that perspective, “the self” can be projected in a “narrative,” with a “beginning, middle, and end.” As such, for Brison, the survivor becomes, “at the same time and once again,” a “second person.” Most importantly, the survivor/narrator is also, however, “dependent on the listener in order to return to personhood.” Telling one’s narrative can thus contribute to recovery. Significantly enough, though, the “survivor’s testimonies must thus be heard, if recovery from trauma is to be possible” (“Trauma Narratives” 41-49).

Delbo claims that the knowledge she gathered at the camp was not only “useless.” It was also ineffectual and to no avail (*Une connaissance inutile* 185). As she writes in *Auschwitz and After*,

I came back from the dead
and believed
this gave me the right
to speak to others
but when I found myself face to face with them
I had nothing to say
because
I learned
over there
that you cannot speak to others.
(228)

The manner in which her own and other prisoners’ testimonies were received after liberation dictated, to a certain extent, the success or failure of their process of recovery. The title of Delbo’s second work, as well as the words just quoted, let us assume that the reception to her testimony at the time was, if not indifference, at least incomprehension. Moved by a desire to forget as soon as possible the war era, post-war audiences revealed themselves inattentive or inhospitable to the prisoners’ stories. Yet, as Brison contends,

in order to enter an experience of *un*-learning of trauma, the “survivors’ testimonies must be heard” (“Trauma Narratives” 41). In this case, the inattentiveness on the part of the living actually infringed on the survivors’ processes of recovery.

As Delbo further writes, “Les larmes coulent de fatigue et d’impuissance. Et nous souffrons dans cette chair morte comme si elle était vivante.” Along with the expression of the uselessness of knowledge that Delbo expresses in *Auschwitz and After*, she also skillfully initiates a movement of reversal. That reversal figuratively returns the two dead bodies to the world of the living. Her point here is to insist on the absurdity of the whole experience. Indeed, and strangely enough, Delbo literally re-inscribes the corpses in the world of survivors. She does so even though her companions, at the time, are already dead. Delbo writes, “La planche sous les cuisses les écorche, les coupe. Berthe. Anne-Marie” (*Aucun* 129). Insisting on the suffering of corpses onto which she projects human qualities, Delbo facilitates the movement of relay to be actually reckoned as useless. It is so because the world of the living, to some extent, is metaphorically dead and deaf to her plea. In this passage, Delbo thus acts, in the words of Michael Rothberg, as the bearer of an “uncanny double heritage” (*Traumatic Realism* 153). As such, the knowledge she brings to us through relay is as somber and as useless as the devastation that sustained it. As she writes in *Une connaissance inutile*,

La mémoire m’est revenue
et avec elle une souffrance
qui m’a fait m’en retourner
à la patrie de l’inconnu

C’était encore une patrie terrestre
et rien de moi ne peut fuir
je me possède toute
et cette connaissance
acquise au fond du désespoir

Alors vous saurez
qu'il ne faut pas parler avec la mort
c'est une connaissance inutile.
Dans un monde
où ne sont pas vivants
ceux qui croient l'être
toute connaissance devient inutile
à qui possède l'autre
et pour vivre
il vaut mieux ne rien savoir
ne rien savoir du prix de la vie
à un jeune homme qui va mourir

J'ai parlé avec la mort
alors
je sais
comme trop de choses apprises étaient vaines
mais je l'ai su au prix de souffrance
si grande
que je me demande
s'il valait la peine
(184-85)

Another movement of traumatic relay, in the words of Rothberg that “contaminates” the receiver of knowledge that is “useless” is enacted in the following example (*Traumatic Realism* 153). It concerns an exchange of gifts that takes place at the Raisko Laboratory during a Christmas party. At that point, Delbo interrogates how to spend Christmas at a death camp. She also brings to light the chasm that separates the common Christian act of rejoicing at a birth, that of Christ, and the traumatic reality of having to witness the extermination of millions of human beings. At this point, Delbo asks, “Comment passait-on Noël au camp de la mort.” In this instance, the death processed by an extraordinary genocide is relayed through a doll, a teddy bear. The teddy bear arrived at Auschwitz “dans les bras d’une petite fille.” It was then left in the antechamber of death. The teddy bear is first pictured next to the little girl’s clothing, which she has neatly folded. She put it there while she was getting ready for the deadly shower. It is, as

such, depicted with “ses vêtements bien pliés à l’entrée de la douche.” In this instance, the bear relays the knowledge of a criminal death at a time of celebration of life and birth. Recovered by a prisoner of the “Sondercommando” working at the crematorium, the bear eventually comes to be given as a gift at the Christmas party. As Delbo writes, “Au bout de la table, une jeune fille caressait un petit ours qu’elle avait reçu. Un ours de peluche rose avec une faveur au cou.” Hailed by Madeleine, one of her companions, Delbo writes, ““Regarde, me dit Madeleine, regarde! C’est un nounours! Un nounours d’enfant.”” As Delbo and her group remembered the arrival of the group of Jews and the little girl that morning, gassed to death on their arrival, she writes, “Et sa voix s’altéra. Je regardai l’ours de peluche. C’était terrible” (*Aucun* 86-87).

Two other examples of relay are worth examining. They both focus on instances in which life and death are co-joined, and also result in fruitless and hopeless knowledge. These instances, however, do not solely focus on the uselessness of knowing and witnessing death. They point at the vitality of Delbo’s memory. Yet, the two excerpts also point out the extent to which Delbo’s ordinary memory risks being destroyed and overwhelmed by her traumatic one.

One example inscribes itself around *Le Malade imaginaire*, a play by Molière. It is the play that former theatre assistant Delbo and her companions decided to re-write from memory, and set up for performance. It indicates the force of memory that Delbo and her companions used as a tool of survival. The play, performed at Raisko on the Sunday after Christmas in 1943, was, in the words of Charlotte, “magnificent” in the “human generosity” that it captured. Its rehearsals required, however, such efforts of memory on the part of its producers and actors as to be astounding. Even though Delbo’s

conditions of living had slightly improved by then, the whole undertaking remained amazingly painstaking. As she remembers,

On a beau avoir une pièce bien en tête, en voir et en entendre les personnages, c'est une tâche difficile à qui relève du typhus, est constamment habité par la faim. Celles qui pouvaient aider. Une réplique était souvent la victoire d'une journée. (*Une connaissance inutile* 91)

The second instance of her going back and forth between an ordinary representation of the world and a traumatic one took place, on an every day basis, at roll call. It incited Delbo to daily recite Molière's *Misanthrope*, so as to keep her ordinary memory alive. Both instances point to the following question: how does or did Delbo's ordinary memory succeed in "maintaining together," with "effects of conjuncture," that which had been "disjoined"? (*Specters of Marx* 18). As Delbo remembers,

J'ai appris *Le Misanthrope* par coeur, un fragment chaque soir, que je me répétais à l'appel du lendemain matin. Bientôt j'ai su toute la pièce, qui durait presque tout l'appel. Et jusqu'au départ, j'ai gardé la brochure dans ma gorge. (*Une connaissance inutile* 124-25)

Delbo's attempt at maintaining connections with an outside world is grounded, in both cases, in an ordinary memory that wants to live on. For Michael Rothberg, this conscious undertaking by Delbo and her companions at remaining connected were acts of the will to survive. These acts, he contends, represented the desire to preserve the self through the community. Actually, they were sustained through connections to a sense of the real through communal efforts. For Rothberg, these conscious acts of survival were also mainly grounded in the preservation of "some modicum of *continuity* between the every day and the extreme." In his words, it is precisely this relative preservation of a sense of continuity and solidarity within a community established in extreme

circumstance that actually “resulted in an ‘exceptional, unique’ survival rate” for the women of Delbo’s group (*Traumatic Realism* 150).

In another instance of Delbo’s inscribing an experience of normality at the heart of extremity, the experience does not make a cognitive or verbal statement. But it appeals to the memory of instinctual or learned gestures used in ordinary life that, Delbo confesses, she had to relearn in extreme circumstances. The episode has her re-connect to ordinary gestures that a traumatic memory has threatened to destroy. This episode, set sixty-seven days after her arrival in Auschwitz, has Delbo do some simple gestures that she has forgotten because of the living conditions at the camp. It also has Delbo savor, for an extremely short moment, a reprieve from camp life. In this episode, Delbo describes her opportunity of cleaning her body. It makes her realize how dreadfully meager and filthy it has become. Delbo recalls the bathing session she experienced in the cold water of the river by the death camp in the month of April. Her memory insists on the extraordinary corporal changes that have occurred since she has arrived. It also expresses feelings of astonishment at thinking of how simple gestures of life can be easily forgotten in changed circumstances. Delbo performs them with a sense of rediscovery. She writes,

Après avoir rangé chaussures, jaquette et foulard, j’ai enlevé mes bas. Je ne les avais pas enlevés depuis l’arrivée, depuis soixante-sept jours. Je les ai retirés en les retournant. A la pointe du pied, j’ai senti une résistance. Les bas étaient collés. J’ai tiré un peu fort et les bas sont venus à l’envers, avec un drôle de dessin au bout . . . J’ai regardé mes pieds. Ils étaient noirs de crasse, et, au bout, d’un noir particulier, plutôt violet, avec des épaisseurs séchées aux orteils et mes orteils étaient bizarrement déguisés; sauf les deux gros, ils avaient perdu leur ongle. Et c’étaient les ongles qui, détachés et collés aux bas, y faisaient ce curieux dessin. Après, j’ai compris que mes orteils avaient dû geler. . . Voir ses ongles de pied incrustés dans ses bas, je vous assure que c’est étonnant.

C'est mystérieux, l'odorat. Il y avait longtemps que j'étais rentrée, et je prenais alors au moins deux bains chaque jour—une vraie manie—en me frottant avec un bon savon, il y avait des semaines que j'étais rentrée, que je sentais toujours sur moi l'odeur du camp, une odeur de purin et de charogne. Et ce jour-là, près du ruisseau, j'ai ôté ma culotte empesée par la diarrhée séchée—si vous croyez qu'il y avait du papier ou quoi que ce soit, avant que l'herbe repousse...-- et je n'ai pas été écœurée par l'odeur.

Je suis descendue dans l'eau. Elle était froide et j'en ai été saisie. Elle venait à peine au-dessus des chevilles et c'était un surprenant contact, le contact de l'eau sur la peau.

Maintenant, je commence par où? . . . je me suis passé de l'eau sur la figure. D'abord doucement, parce que cette sensation de l'eau sur le visage était si nouvelle, si merveilleuse, mais je me suis vite reprise. Il n'y avait pas de temps à perdre. (*Une connaissance inutile* 60-61)

Despite the efforts that Delbo made to remain connected to an ordinary reality in the camp, she admits, however, that she never totally succeeded in doing so. As such, she declared that in the camp, one could never pretend or take refuge in the imaginary. In *La mémoire et les jours*, Delbo writes, “au camp, on ne pouvait jamais faire semblant, jamais se réfugier dans l'imaginaire.” Likewise, her friend and companion Yvonne Picart, in an attempt to alleviate her own suffering once wondered why she could not picture herself carrying her books to one of her classes on boulevard Saint-Michel, instead of bricks from the marsh. As she replied to herself, “Les mains bleues de froid, les lèvres fendues par les gerçures,” she claimed that a distancing from reality was utterly impossible. She remembers, “C'est impossible.” At the camp, “on ne peut s'imaginer, ni être autre, ni être ailleurs” (12). In *Holocaust Testimonies*, Langer contends that “Endeavors to leave [the camp] behind *now* prove as futile as attempts to escape from its reality into an imagined future *then*” (4). As Delbo herself claims in *La mémoire et les jours*

Quand je récitais un poème, quand je racontais un livre ou une pièce de théâtre à mes camarades autour de moi, tout en bêchant la boue du marais, c'était pour me garder en vie, pour garder ma mémoire, pour demeurer moi-même, m'en assurer.

Cela ne réussissait jamais à annuler, même une seconde, le moment que je vivais. C'était une grande victoire sur l'horreur que penser, se souvenir, mais cela n'en atténuait rien. La réalité était là, mortelle. Impossible de s'en abstraire.

As Delbo further contends,

A Auschwitz, la réalité était si écrasante, la souffrance, la fatigue, le froid si extrêmes, que nous n'avions aucune énergie de reste pour cet effort de dédoublement.

The weight of the trauma of the past, indelible and profound, eludes coherence and attachment to an ordinary life. It also prevents, as in the case of Delbo, a total reconnection to the self, present, and future. Upon her return, Delbo wondered about the ways available to get away or withdraw from the reality of Auschwitz. She confessed, in fact, an incapacity to give a satisfactory answer on how to avoid the camp's presence. Not only were her chances of escaping Auschwitz limited then. The potentiality of a complete return from it are also limited and remain scarce now. As she writes,

Comment ai-je fait pour m'en dégager au retour, pour vivre aujourd'hui? Une question qu'on me pose souvent, à laquelle je cherche une réponse, sans la trouver. (12)

She further declares,

Auschwitz est si profondément gravé dans ma mémoire que je n'en oublie aucun instant. – Alors, vous vivez avec Auschwitz? –Non, je vis à côté. Auschwitz est là, inaltérable, précis, mais enveloppé dans la peau de la mémoire, peau étanche qui l'isole de mon moi actuel. (13)

To make her point even clearer, Delbo metaphorically uses the image of a snake's skin. Through the metaphor of a skin that she cannot shed, Delbo insists on the inalterability of the presence of Auschwitz in her memory. At first, she sets out to explain that a serpent can renew its skin. It sheds the old skin by leaving it behind. That way, it can start afresh as a new organism fitted and protected by a new body envelope. Unlike the serpent, Delbo claims that she, however, was unable to shed her traumatic skin. Neither

could she renew her memory. As she contends, “A la différence de la peau de serpent, la peau de la mémoire ne se renouvelle pas.” Eventually, she hoped that the skin of her memory, since it could not shed, would grow thicker and harder. She prayed that it would also keep her separate from her experience at Auschwitz. As such, she begged for the skin of her memory to remain strong and impermeable. She pleads “Oh! Qu’elle durcisse encore.” Fearing, however, that her distancing from Auschwitz would only be an illusion, she comments, “Hélas! Je crains souvent qu’elle s’amincisse, qu’elle craque, que le camp me rattrape. Y penser me fait trembler d’appréhension” (*La mémoire et les jours* 13).

While at the camp, Delbo was faced with the impossibility of escaping the reality of Auschwitz. She could not distinctly separate a traumatized self from an ordinary or common one either. What Lawrence Langer calls a protective movement of “de-doubling” of the self was thus impossible for Delbo at the camp (*Holocaust Testimonies* 5). Through an interesting movement of reversal, however, this de-doubling of the self that Delbo claims was absent at Auschwitz is what actually made her life tolerable upon her return. As she asserts,

C’est une grande chance, sans doute, que ne pas me reconnaître dans ce moi qui était à Auschwitz. En revenir était si peu probable, qu’il me semble n’y être pas allée. Au contraire de ceux dont la vie s’est arrêtée au seuil du retour, qui depuis vivent en survie, moi, j’ai le sentiment que celle qui était au camp, ce n’est pas moi, ce n’est pas la personne qui est là, en face de vous. Non, c’est trop incroyable. Et tout ce qui est arrivé à cette autre, celle d’Auschwitz, ne me touche pas, moi, maintenant, ne me concerne pas, tant sont séparées la mémoire profonde et la mémoire ordinaire. Je vis dans un être double. Le double d’Auschwitz ne me gêne pas, ne se mêle pas de ma vie. Comme si ce n’était pas moi du tout. Sans cette coupure, je n’aurais pas pu revivre. (*La mémoire et les jours* 13)

This de-doubling that Delbo describes obviously invalidates the question of re-writing a life history in a continuum. It also preempts re-inscribing the time that Delbo

experienced as traumatic in her everyday life. Reintegrating continuity in time, a time with “conjuncture” was thus, if not impossible for Delbo, very unlikely (*Specters of Marx* 18). As such, the self that Delbo attempted, in Morrison’s words, to “remake” after Auschwitz was not only damaged (*Jazz* 229). It remained fragmented and fragile as well. In her case, a remaking of self distinct from a traumatized one could not be durably accomplished (“Trauma Narratives” 39). As she claims,

La peau dont s’enveloppe la mémoire d’Auschwitz est solide. Elle éclate pourtant quelquefois, et restitue tout son contenu. Sur le rêve, la volonté n’a aucun pouvoir. Et dans ces rêves-là, je me revois, moi, oui, moi, telle que je sais que j’étais : tenant à peine debout, la gorge dure, le cœur dont le battement déborde la poitrine, transpercée de froid, sale, décharnée, et la souffrance est si insupportable, si exactement la souffrance endurée là-bas, que je la ressens dans tout mon corps qui devient un bloc de souffrance, et je sens la mort s’agripper à moi, je me sens mourir. Heureusement, dans mon agonie, je crie. Le cri me réveille et je sors du cauchemar, épuisée. Il faut des jours pour que tout rentre dans l’ordre, que tout se refourre dans la mémoire et que la peau de la mémoire se ressoude. Je redeviens moi-même, celle que vous connaissez, qui peut vous parler d’Auschwitz sans marquer ni ressentir trouble ou émotion. (*La mémoire et les jours* 13-14)

In this excerpt, Delbo refers to the possible rupture of the skin that envelops her deep memory. She also, however, points at the inalterability of the traumatic feelings and sensations forever grounded in her. These sensations, leaving her little respite, always act as traces that remain indelible. As she claims, “dans cette mémoire profonde, les sensations sont intactes” (13). Not only do these sensations resist erasure from her traumatic memory. They remain irrevocable and unalterable. She likewise admits that they have contaminated her ordinary memory also. As she claims,

Parce que, lorsque je vous parle d’Auschwitz ce n’est pas de la mémoire profonde que viennent mes paroles. Les paroles viennent de la mémoire externe, si je puis dire, la mémoire intellectuelle, la mémoire de la pensée. La mémoire profonde garde les sensations, les empreintes physiques. C’est la mémoire des sens. Car ce ne sont pas les mots qui sont gonflés de charge émotionnelle. Sinon,

quelqu'un qui a été torturé par la soif pendant des semaines ne pourrait plus dire : "J'ai soif. Faisons une tasse de thé." Le mot aussi s'est dédoublé. Soif est redevenu un mot d'usage courant. Par contre, si je rêve de la soif dont j'ai souffert à Birkenau, je revois celle que j'étais, hagarde, perdant la raison, titubante; je ressens physiquement cette vraie soif et c'est un cauchemar atroce. Mais, si vous voulez que je vous en parle...

C'est pourquoi je dis aujourd'hui que, tout en sachant très bien que c'est véridique, je ne sais plus si c'est vrai. (*La mémoire et les jours* 14)

Delbo closes the second volume of her trilogy with a long poem that evokes her return to the world. This world to which she returned is actually ours, the one that we think we know. We think of it as one that we presuppose ordinary in its present state of existence. The excerpt illustrates, however, the confusion between the two worlds that Delbo has come to know. The poem indicates an impossible return to a world exclusively ordinary.

As Delbo writes,

Je reviens d'un autre monde
dans ce monde
que je n'avais pas quitté
et je ne sais
lequel est vrai
dites-moi suis-je revenue
de l'autre monde?
pour moi
Je suis encore là-bas
et je meurs
là-bas
chaque jour un peu plus
je remeure
la mort de ceux qui sont morts
et je ne sais plus quel est vrai
du monde-là
de l'autre monde là-bas
maintenant
je ne sais plus
quand je rêve
et quand
je ne rêve pas.
(*Une connaissance inutile* 184)

Not only does the excerpt pose an impossibility of return for Delbo. *Une connaissance inutile* actually also posits the existence of a world that is not left intact after Auschwitz. Delbo makes this clear in the last poem of the book. In it, she addresses a plea to the living. More precisely, she appeals to a community of readers. She demands their attention on the necessity of grounding one's life, not in a useless knowledge, but in a worthy one. While she interpellates her readers, Delbo invokes the worth of an uncontaminated, ordinary, useful life. More specifically, she illuminates the potential value of a life that has been spared the atrocity of her own experience. She also re-instates the uselessness of the knowledge that she gathered at Auschwitz by insisting on its devastating character. She also reminds us of the futility of her experience, because it has left the living in a state of indifference towards the survivors. In the poem entitled "Prière aux vivants pour leur pardonner d'être vivants," Delbo writes,

Je vous en supplie
faites quelque chose
apprenez un pas
une danse
quelque chose qui vous justifie
qui vous donne le droit
d'être habillés de votre peau de votre poil
apprenez à marcher et à rire
parce que ce serait trop bête
à la fin
que tant soient morts
et que vous viviez
sans rien faire de votre vie

*

Je reviens
d'au delà de la connaissance
il faut maintenant désapprendre
je vois bien qu'autrement
je ne pourrais plus vivre

*

Et puis
mieux vaut ne pas y croire
à ces histoires
de revenants
plus jamais vous ne dormirez
si jamais vous les croyez
ces spectres revenants
ces revenants
qui reviennent
sans pouvoir même
expliquer comment.
(*Une connaissance inutile* 190-91)

In the context of African American experiences, cultural memory, for Durrant, can be assimilated into the individual consciousness as a complement to the individual's sense of identity. Racial memory, however, threatens to destroy this sense of identity. This form of memory is "unhealthy" because it envelops the self in an experience of negation. Also, for Durrant, racial memory yields along "a melancholic identification *with the dead*." It constitutes a "life-threatening, other-centered mode of being claimed *by the dead*." It marks the individual with a "mode of being-for-death." Like melancholia, Durrant claims, "racial memory" is a way of "identifying with the way in which one's ancestors have been forgotten," even while they were alive. For African Americans, it is a mode of recognizing oneself as a victim, nameless and unacknowledged, of the Middle Passage or slavery. As such, "racial memory" involves recognizing that the "the institution of slavery was founded on the foreclosure of the slave's humanity" (*Postcolonial Narrative* 80).

Morrison's novels reveal and lay bare the logic of repetition of trauma, violence, and negation. For Durrant, this can constitute a mode of working through. In that case, the traumatized self chooses to take action that can affect the outcome of events that are

emotionally disturbing. She wants to change the course of her history. Yet, Morrison's novels, including *Jazz*, also point at a certain mode of acting-out. Indeed, in Morrison's oeuvre, as in *Jazz*, the responses to disturbing events do not actually have protagonists confront their dilemmas in a constructive way. Rather, they mostly repeat a logic of violence whose structure seems inalterable. To use Delbo's metaphor of the serpent's skin, the memory of a negated humanity which cannot be shed, and the unacknowledgment of the pain that it caused threaten to keep intruding time and again. When it ruptures, acts of violence surge in uncontrolled negativity. This type of violence comes across as extremely destructive. This destructive behavior is not exclusively aimed at the self. It is aimed at others as well.

Even though the events that damage Morrison's characters are different from those experienced by Delbo, a similar type of splitting of the self seems to have taken place as a result. Disturbing memories, such as those that disconnect the protagonists from an ordinary perception of the self, are indeed at work in *Jazz*. Like Delbo's, Morrison's second volume of the trilogy thus suggests that little can be done to push back the despairing memories of the past, and get on with life. Not only does a profound life disturbance negatively affect those characters who have survived slavery and violence. More insidiously, impaired selves disconnected from reality are found in the generations following Emancipation and Reconstruction as well.

In the case of Violet, nicknamed "violent" by her peers in *Jazz*, the re-enactment of violence is grounded, among others, in a lack of connections to a supporting environment (75). Not only does this absence of generational nurturing in Violet inscribe itself in missing a foundational family in the first place. It is also grounded in Violet's

unwillingness, then inability, to start a family of her own. As she indeed promised herself “to never never have children,” she realized that it was “the most important thing, the biggest thing” she could do. “Whatever happened,” she would never want to see a “small dark foot rest on another” while “a hungry mouth” would say “Mama?” (102). As a matter of fact, Violet feels not only disconnected from a past and future history of familial benevolence. She is disconnected from an emotionally balanced self as well. It comes as no surprise, thus, that she also feels very distant from Joe, her unfaithful husband. Even though they are still a couple, they are “barely speaking to each other,” let alone “laughing together” or acting like “the ground” is “a dance-hall floor” (36). Violet’s quasi absence from the world has only added to the psychological entrapments in which she has confined her self. These have nourished in Violet some forms of restraint, but also of anger and excess, in the face of life, and in her relationships. She is unable to “do the things worth doing,” and to feel “supported by the core of the world” (63). As previously mentioned, this lack is mainly rooted in an absence of motherly care during her adolescent years. It is also due to the violent death of her mother, who committed suicide after a degrading dispossession of their meager belongings. The internalized feelings of trauma, helplessness, and shame that Violet felt then made her want to think, at first, of her life in different, more promising terms. As she first recalls the scene of dispossession, she reflects on

Her mother. She didn’t want to be like that. Oh never like that. To sit at the table, alone in the moonlight, sipping boiled coffee from a white china cup as long as it was there, and pretending to sip it when it was gone; waiting for morning when men came, talking low as though nobody was there but themselves, and picked around in our things, lifting out what they wanted—what was theirs, they said, although we cooked in it, washed sheets in it, sat on it, ate off of it. That was after they had hauled away the plow, the scythe, the mule, the sow, the churn and the butter press. Then they came inside the house and all of us children put

one foot on the other and watched. When they got to the table where our mother sat nursing an empty cup, they took the table out from under her and then, while she sat there alone, and all by herself like, cup in hand, they came back and tipped the chair she sat in. She didn't jump up right away, so they shook it a bit and since she still stayed seated—looking ahead at nobody— they just tipped her out of it like the way you get the cat off the seat if you don't want to touch it or pick it up in your arms. You tip it forward and it lands on the floor. No harm done if it's a cat because it has four legs. But a person, a woman, might fall forward and just stay there a minute looking at the cup, stronger than she is, unbroken at least and lying a bit beyond her hand. Just out of reach. (97-98)

What made Violet's mother jump into a well to end her life may not have been clear.

It can be related, however, to the "one and final thing [Rose Dear] had not been able to endure or repeat." The humiliations and negative projections, as well as dispossession, that African- Americans endured in slavery and in the Reconstruction era may certainly offer some grounds in uncovering Rose Dear's motivation to end her life. Yet, there is present also, in the depiction of this drama, the enduring feelings of helplessness in the face of trauma and shame that arose in the aftermath of the event. Impacting the following generation, including that of Violet, the shame that transmitted itself then through what Durrant calls the "racial memory" endured (*Postcolonial Narrative* 80). Inalterable and impossible to erase, it definitely stayed with Violet. It is encrypted in Morrison's text, as the narrator of *Jazz* further speculates on Rose Dear's suicide. We are asked to wonder:

Had the last washing split the shirtwaist so bad it could not take another mend and changed its name to rag? Perhaps word had reached her about the four-day hangings in Rocky Mount: the men on Tuesday, the women two days later. Or had it been the news of the young tenor in the choir mutilated and tied to a log, his grandmother refusing to give up his waste-filled trousers, washing them over and over although the stain had disappeared at the third rinse. Might it have been the morning after the night when craving (which used to be hope) got out of hand? When longing squeezed, then tossed her before running promising to return and bounce her again like an India-rubber ball? Or was it that chair they tipped her out of? Did she fall on the floor and lie there deciding right then that she would do it. Someday. Delaying it for four years while True Belle came and took over

but remembering the floorboards as door, closed and locked. Seeing bleak truth in an unbreakable china cup? Biding her time until the moment returned—with all its mewling hurt or overboard rage—and she could turn away from the door, the cup to step toward the limitlessness beckoning from the well. What could it have been, I wonder? (101)

Rose Dear's suicide does not only have the narrator of *Jazz* relate the fracture that it provoked to Violet's "crazy" behavior. The narrator also implies that Violet's troubled history and affected present are actually symptomatic of her perturbed and shameful family past in general. Yet, this lack of coherence in Violet's life does not seem to have receded later on in life, at times of improved financial situation or affective involvement with her husband. As the narrator comments on Violet's lack of stability and coherence, she poses the question as to whether "the children of suicide" are not, after all, "hard to please" and "quick to believe no one loves them," just because "they are not really here" (4).

Violet's emotional life, impaired first by the loss of a mother in distress, then by withdrawal from life, Joe, and even herself, thus seems at a dead end. It has Violet being content to live just in the presence of her birds, especially with the parrot who says "I love you" (3).

The profound need for love and care that Violet did not receive is paralleled by the story of Golden Gray, the illegitimate son of wealthy Miss Vera Louise and Henry Lestroy (143). The "yellow curled" child that True Belle, Violet's grandmother, helped raise was provided in abundance with motherly care, servant's love and material possession. While True Belle did take care of him at the cost of her own family, she projected onto the child a model of love and nurturing. Investing him with the most desirable qualities, Golden Gray became the epitome of the perfect child not only to True

Belle. He came to represent, for Violet also, a model of childhood freed from racial consciousness. Yet, as it took Golden Gray's mother "eighteen years to get around to it" and say that "his father was a black-skinned nigger," it took as long to bi-racial Golden Gray to discover the truth, trace, and find his father (143). While Golden Gray's absence of fatherly connections is very similar to the missing of maternal bonds in Violet, but also in Joe, it points to the despair and trauma that overwhelm children, and later adults, of parentless heritage. The following excerpt reveals how Morrison aesthetically discloses the irreparable sufferings that followed the explosion of family bonds in the postbellum South due to slavery, racism, poverty, or violence. While this form of loss touches practically every character in *Jazz*, it comes as a racial memory that becomes ingrained in Golden Gray, Joe, and Violet, with great despair. In the following instance, Golden Gray offers a poignant view of the destructive forces that have resulted from his being an orphan:

Only now, he thought, now that I know I have a father, do I feel his absence: the place where he should have been and was not. Before, I thought everybody was one-armed, like me. Now I feel the surgery. The crunch of bone when it is sundered, the sliced flesh and the tubes of blood cut through, shocking the bloodrun and disturbing the nerves. They dangle and writhe. Singing pain. Waking me with the sound of itself, thrumming when I sleep so deeply it strangles my dreams away. There is nothing for it but to go away from where he is not to where he used to be and might be still. Let the dangle and the writhe see what it is missing; let the pain sing to the dirt where he stepped in the place where he used to be and might be still. I am not going to be healed, or to find the arm that was removed from me. I am going to freshen the pain, point it, so we both know what it is for.

And no, I am not angry. I don't need the arm. But I do need to know what it could have been like to have had it. It's a phantom I have to behold and be held by, in whatever crevices it lies, under whatever branch. Or may be it stalks treeless and open places, lit with an oily sun. 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. Stroked my hair, fed me food; took the far end of the load to make it easier for me to carry. This arm that never held itself out,

extended from my body, to give me balance as I walked thin rails or logs, round and slippery with danger. When I find it, will it wave to me? Gesture, beckon to me to come along? Or will it even know who or what I am? It doesn't matter. I will locate it so the severed part can remember the snatch, the slice of its disfigurement. Perhaps then the arm will no longer be a phantom, but will take its own shape, grow its own muscle and bone, and its blood will pump from the loud singing that has found the purpose of its serenade. Amen.

As Golden Gray further reflects on the damage done to him, he also wonders if it can ever be made up somehow. He asks,

Who will take my part? Soap away the shame? Suds it till it falls away muck at my feet to be stepped out of? Will he? Redeem me like a pawn ticket worth little on the marketplace, but priceless in retrieving real value? What do I care what the color of his skin is, or his contact with my mother? When I see him, or what is left of him, I will tell him all about the missing part of me and listen for his crying shame. I will exchange then; let him have mine and take his as my own and we will both be free, arm-tangled and whole. (158-59)

In the words of Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, “memory is an active and constructive process.” As such, “memory” enables a mental re-experiencing, or at least re-thinking, of previous experiences. This re-thinking can thus open for the subject spaces of mental or emotional confrontations, which have been left unexplored. In this regard, the mental re-enacting of previously unsolved traumas and losses can entail some form of positive confrontations. These can lead towards acceptance of the image of the self in negating experiences. This process is visibly at work with Golden Gray, but also with Joe and Violet. Her conversations with Alice Manfred, the aunt of orphaned Dorcas, her husband's lover, testify to that. Alice's and Violet's emotional exchanges are in fact an active re-thinking of reactions to past events and experiences that have been shattering. The unfinished business of slavery marks all of *Jazz*'s characters with absences of fathers, losses of mothers to racial violence, and disruption and dislocation of the family unit. Yet, for van der Kolk and van der Hart, this “remembering,” which

operates within an “organic response,” should be “adaptive.” In Morrison’s *Jazz*, the “organic response” to parental abandonment and loss of marital bonds does not, however, take the form of positive sorting out of emotions. Rather, Violet’s response to pain remains a status quo of negation and wrong-doing. Not only does this perpetuating of violence remain enduring and permanent. It also hinders Violet’s process of working through (“The Intrusive Past” 170).

The same process of negative repetition has hampered Joe as well. It has prevented him from growing out of his feelings of shame, pain and loss for his mother Wild. A fugitive woman living in a cave, “powerless, invisible, wastefully daft. Everywhere and nowhere,” Joe’s mother, presumably Beloved, abandoned Joe “without a trace” (*Jazz* 179). “Shaming him before everybody,” she is so “brain-blasted” that she has not done “what the meanest sow managed: nurse what she birthed” (*Jazz* 178-79). Maternal abandonment has marked Joe so deeply as to cast him in a deep emotional unrest that he seems unable to put behind.

Both Violet and Joe, however, once expected to eventually change the course of their lives. First through improving their economic situation by migrating North. They also hoped to grow emotionally, and socially, by starting afresh in a new city, New York City. As the narrator of *Jazz* states,

Even if the room they rented was smaller than the heifer’s stall and darker than a morning privy, they stayed to look at their number, hear themselves in an audience, feel themselves moving down the street among hundreds of others who moved the way they did, and who, when they spoke, regardless of the accent, treated language like the same intricate, malleable toy designed for their play.
(32)

Yet, for Violet and Joe, “part of why they loved it” so much was because of “the specter they left behind” (33). Their need to “run from want and violence” was only exacerbated

by their desire to escape the “sad stuff. The bad stuff. The things-nobody-could-help stuff. The way everybody was then and there.” Full of drive to leave the past behind, they were eager to “forget that History is over, you all, and everything’s ahead at last.”

Yet, the positive outcome they expected from their move from Vesper County, Virginia, to the “City,” has not, however, fully materialized (7). Rather, the intrusion of their painful past into the present has actually become for Joe and Violet a main source of negative impulses and poor choices. The grief that they felt at the absence of parents, due to lack of economic opportunities and racist outbursts, has not departed from them, or receded over time. Instead, it has become even more obsessive. It has kept them enclosed in a pattern of repetition of transgressive behavior. As Joe declares,

He had struggled a long time with that loss, believed he had resigned himself to it, had come to terms with the fact that old age would be not remembering what things felt like. That you could say, ‘I was scared to death,’ but you could not retrieve the fear. That you could replay in the brain the scene of ecstasy, of murder, of tenderness, but it was drained of everything but the language to say it in. He thought he had come to terms with that but he had been wrong. (29)

For Sam Durrant, Joe and Violet Trace’s lives clearly testify to the claim that Morrison’s narratives are unable to “offer closure.” He makes his point through the following assertion that Morrison clearly demonstrates in *Jazz*. For one, Durrant posits that, “the injustices of slavery and its aftermath” can actually “never be fully worked through.” Also, Morrison’s oeuvre cannot offer complete healing because, for Durrant, “racial oppression remains a contemporary reality.” Likewise, “because the cycle of abuse and self-abuse and violation is still playing itself out in black communities across the United States,” the narratives are locked in repetition, and they are unable to bring “closure.” For Durrant, Morrison’s novels, marked by racial memory as they are, thus serve to indicate how the history that they infiltrate “threatens to collapse into itself.” As

such, Morrison's novels point at how African American history threatens to remain a history of trauma, since Morrison's oeuvre "refuses to close the wound of African American history." Her novels actually testify to "the impossibility of ever fully coming to terms with the history of racism." Also, the origin of the trauma in Morrison's work is not to be located at the confines of the "individual case history" only. It positions itself "within a collective history of racial abuse" as well. As such, closure remains thus even more hypothetical. For Durrant, it is so because Morrison's work deals with a history that is "not so much a history." The history that she reveals is rather a "suspension of history." It is made of "an infinite repetition of an original scene of molestation" that keeps being re-enacted. For Durrant, such a "history" can never be properly "abreacted or adequately mourned" (*Postcolonial Narrative* 83).

The unrest that permeates Joe and Violet's life stories hinders their progression towards emotional liberation. The musical playing of jazz in their lives is testimony to the dangerous repetition of this turmoil. Infused with insecurities and choices of behavior leading to loss of control of the self, Joe and Violet get caught in stories of self-generated abuse and self-inflicted offences. The improvisatory, jazz-like feel of the novel is especially indicative of these transgressions that both characters attempt, unsuccessfully, to resolve. Violet's attack and stabbing of Dorcas's corpse at the burial ceremony is only one instance of her deeply rooted emotional unstable character. This lack of grounding of the self is particularly manifest in the "private cracks," the "dark fissures" that the narrator of *Jazz* perceives in Violet (22). Premises of a de-doubling of personality, these cracks distract Violet from a continuous attachment to reality. As such, at times, she clearly lacks connections and grounding to a nurturing cultural history. Instead, she

attaches to a racial memory that testifies to her missing a solid foundation in the self. Violet's surges of disconnectedness are particularly evident in the following excerpt. Like Charlotte did after Auschwitz, Violet experiences forms of dissociation from her own self. In the words of Marlene Steinberg, this is similar to the "dissociative state of altered consciousness," from which a person may suffer in a case of "depersonalization." In that state, the individual reports "feeling a sense of unreality about the self." Or, she feels that "her real self is distanced." Sometimes, she may even feel that "she is observing the self from the outside" ("Systematizing Dissociations" 62). As such, the "private cracks," not the "openings or breaks," but the "dark fissures in the globe light of the day" that Violet displays are very revealing (*Jazz* 22). Piercing Violet's frame of mind, the narrator observes,

She wakes up in the morning and sees with perfect clarity a string of small, well-lit scenes. In each one, something specific is being done: food things, work things; customers and acquaintances are encountered, places entered. But she does not see herself doing these things. She sees them being done. The globe light holds and bathes each scene, and it can be assumed that at the curve where the light stops is a solid foundation. In truth, there is no foundation at all, but alleyways, crevices one steps across all the time. But the globe light is imperfect too. Closely examined it shows seams, ill-glued cracks and weak places beyond which is anything. Anything at all. Sometimes when Violet isn't paying attention she stumbles onto these cracks, like the time when, instead of putting her left heel forward, she stepped back and folded her legs in order to sit in the street. (22-23)

Violet's lack of active involvement in ordinary life is continually underscored by her over active inclination for destructive acts. Even after Joe kills his lover in a murderous act of jealousy, Violet feels the urge of vengefully knifing the corpse. As such, "the girl's memory" remains "a sickness in the house—everywhere and nowhere." While there is nothing for Violet "to beat or hit," after the girl's death, Violet sustains her desire for revenge. As Morrison writes, "and when she has to, just has to strike it somehow," there

is “nothing left” for Violet to harm. “All there is left is straw, or the sepia print of the girl staring from the mantelpiece” (28, 12). This may explain why, back to her apartment after the burial, Violet “took the birds from their cages and set them out the windows to freeze or fly.” She also sent to an almost certain death her parrot who said, “I love you” (3).

Violet’s violent nature, and her repressed, yet undying longing for a child, once even had Violet half-consciously kidnap a baby in the street. This act of public craziness made her the target of the shaming gaze and gossip of the neighborhood people. Even though she protested her innocence at the time, she still views the kidnapping accusation as “an outrage to her character.” Despite Violet’s denial, she is unable, however, to put behind the feelings surrounding her possessing the stolen baby. The memory of “the light . . . that had skipped through her veins” when she held the light-skinned child occasionally comes back to her. She then imagines “a brightness that could be carried in her arms.” Eventually, that brightness could be “distributed, if need be, into places dark as the bottom of a well” (22).

While *Jazz* indeed emphasizes the need to invent new ways of understanding experience, the novel clearly underscores specific aspects of the African-American experience that remain clearly “undigested.” The experiences, of improvising a new life set in freedom, clearly draw on the musical qualities of jazz as a “distinct and brilliant art form with a clear African heritage” (*Oxford Companion* 397). Not only do they remain improvisational and unfinished, but as importantly, the processing of the trauma they engendered remains improvisational and unfinished as well.

Chapter 4. Ambiguous Communities

If we assume that *Auschwitz and After* narrates a single story, Delbo's traumatic realist writing could have this general outline: the first volume, *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, begins with a scene of arrival at Auschwitz. It ends while Delbo is still in Birkenau, the Auschwitz camp for female inmates. The second work, *Une connaissance inutile*, begins in Birkenau and ends with the liberation of Ravensbrück. The third testimonial book, *Mesure de nos jours*, which tells initially of repatriation, consists mostly of testimonies. These are attributed to certain of Delbo's fellow survivors, who were her companions in the camps and her comrades in the aftermath. For Michael Rothberg, *Auschwitz and After* works thus on at least "three different narrative modes," all of which capture "different aspects of the concentrationary universe." According to Rothberg, the first mode, that of *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, serves to assemble Charlotte's testimonial "micronarratives." These "reveal the spatial closure and repetitive temporality of Auschwitz." *Une connaissance inutile*, on the other hand, proposes the narrative as a "metonymic chain." The chain both traces and transgresses the various internal and external borders of the camp universe, which *Aucun de nous ne reviendra* had brought forward. While *Une connaissance inutile* adds frames of references from the everyday to the narrative, these frames are perceived to overlap with those of the camp. The realms of the ordinary and of the extreme keep mutually interfering with each other. So not only does *Une connaissance inutile* evidence a profound unsettling of spatio-temporal boundaries. It also indicates, and insists on, a seemingly lasting psychological traumatization. *Une connaissance inutile* reveals thus the inevitable extension of the concentrationary universe into the space and time of postwar everyday life. As one of

Charlotte's camp companions notices, "Once we were free and had resumed our daily lives we mourned as we had not done over there." As she further considers her process of grieving, she reflects that "The empty places were noted more keenly, we missed intensely those we lost." She also poses the question about "Why their absence had seemed less cruel over there, and so unbearable once we were free?" As she attempts to bridge the gap between the "then" and "there" of the camp, and the "here" and "now" of the everyday life thereafter, she tentatively suggests that it is "because over there nothing seemed real." Even though the return was "hard for everyone," for Poupette, "the return was wretched. Wretched, sordid, a pile of shabby details" (*Auschwitz and After* 271).

For Michael Rothberg, this metonymic chain also purports the failure of "ordinary society to respond to the message borne by survivors." As Delbo reveals it in *Une connaissance inutile* the disappointment at the failure of "postwar history to alter its course accordingly" has kept numerous survivors in trauma (*Traumatic Realism* 175, 165). In her own voice, and throughout *Mesure de nos jours*, the third volume of her trilogy, Delbo keeps writing of her failed attempts to make non-survivors understand "the difference" between "our time there . . . which was empty," and "time over here . . . which is hollow" (*The Measure of Our Days* 343). As she explains in the third volume of her trilogy,

Je ne peux pas leur faire comprendre la différence entre le temps de là-bas et le temps d'ici, entre le temps de là-bas qui était vide, et qui était si lourd de tous ces morts, parce que les cadavres avaient beau être tout légers, quand il y en a des milliers de ces cadavres squelettiques, cela fait lourd et cela vous écrase sous le poids, entre le temps de là-bas qui était vide, et le temps d'ici qui est du temps creux. (*Mesure de nos jours* 197)

The remembering and recording of experiences after liberation takes, however, a new dimension in *Mesure de nos jours*. More so than in *Aucun de nous ne reviendra* and in

Une connaissance inutile, *Mesure de nos jours* advocates memory as a collective and public performance. Indeed, in Delbo's third volume, memory is no longer mainly an individual and private act. Similarly to Morrison's narrative strategy of revealing African-American history through various (hi)stories told by several narrators, Delbo's trilogy offers that kind of space where the cultural work of remembering is actively and collectively engaged. Through, but also beyond, a plurality of individual voices, Delbo attempts to keep revealing the profound scarring that followed her and her friends' internment experiences. As such, in *Mesure de nos jours*, Delbo concentrates on assembling individual stories written by former camp inmates unhealed from their personal traumas. Even though every testimony insists on separate aspects of personal or collective experiences by the survivor, all stories seem to converge towards the same incapacity of readjusting to everyday life. As such, *Mesure de nos jours* is not only crucial in transmitting collective, rather than individual, acts of testimonial. It is relevant also in examining a collective experience of readjusting—or not—to life, and attempting to rebuild a future after Auschwitz.

Most troublesome for many Auschwitz survivors was their facing the coexistence of the two temporalities that we discussed earlier. Most of all, their inability to integrate these into their lives was what was most challenging. As a result, as I noted in Chapter 3, the self-splitting that this layering entailed became so problematic as to diminish individual agency. But *Mesure de nos jours* shows that this double image of the self is threatening to a collective sense of identity also. Ida, a Jewish survivor, summarizes it best for most survivors. She reports,

J'étais double et je ne parvenais pas à réunir mes doubles. Il y avait un moi et un spectre de moi qui voulait coller à son double et n'y arrivait jamais. Je le voyais

s'approcher comme une forme molle dans laquelle je me reconnaissais quand elle était près de moi et qui se défaisait en charpie quand j'y touchais.

. . . J'ai repris ma place à la maison. J'étais guérie.

Je me croyais guérie mais je ne l'étais sans doute pas . . . Je suis heureuse. Et soudain, sans savoir comment, pourquoi à tel moment plutôt qu'à tel autre, sans que j'en aie le moindre pressentiment, je sens monter cette angoisse qui m'a envahie pour la première fois après la naissance de Sophie . . . Ce jour, j'ai été prise d'une angoisse insurmontable. Ma gorge s'étranglait, ma poitrine était écrasée dans un cerceau de fer, mon cœur m'étouffait. Je me suis mise à crier de terreur. Tout à coup . . . je suis sans force. C'est comme si, tout à coup un ressort se cassait. (119-21)

The ghost, the "*spectre*," but also the "*revenant*," whose notion Rothberg explores with this excerpt, haunts Ida, and keeps haunting her. It is the "sign," for Rothberg, of a trauma that is "temporal" in "two senses." Not only does the ghost "return without warning, thereby upsetting the continuity of everyday time." But also, and it is my point here, the ghost functions in this case in a way similar to Morrison's ghost in *Beloved*. In the insidiousness of its character, it signals, as it does in Morrison's, "a rupture." Not only in the continuity of time, but of life's expected "generational continuity" (*Traumatic Realism* 165). In the case of Ida, this rupture comes from the acknowledgment that Ida's child Sophie cannot take the place of a lost generation, that of her parents, both of whom Ida lost in Auschwitz. The split is first revealed, for Ida, after she happens, one day, to unexpectedly see her father in the camp. Spotted by Ida in a column of men marching towards the factory at Auschwitz, her father does not, however, recognize her, even after she tries to catch his attention with "'Papa! Papa! C'est Ida! Ida!'" The radical "change" in him, as Ida remembers him then, "vieux, maigre, en haillons," while, as a "tailleur . . . il était toujours si bien mis," is an insurmontable shock (*Mesure de nos jours* 117). His failure to recognize Ida and his "turning around and throwing a frightened look in her

direction” is hurtful to Ida (*Auschwitz and After* 296). Not only does the father’s lack of acknowledgement partially produce, and later maintain, the rupture of continuity in her everyday time after Auschwitz. It also points at the destruction that the loss of irreplaceable connections with other generations has generated.

Mesure de nos jours presents thus an--at times contradictory--collective of individual voices that upsets the temporality of before/during/after Auschwitz. Then, not only does Delbo’s work extend the experience and social significance of genocide beyond the individual experiencing of the death-world. It also grounds the stories of the survivors into psychologically, historically, and communally persisting malaises that Rothberg calls “the maladies of time and space” (*Traumatic Realism* 165).

While Delbo’s trilogy may lend itself to a certain chronological experience, for Thomas Trezise, “chronology constitutes neither its sole nor even its most important organizing principle.” Not only does the trilogy include poems whose interconnections and overlapping disrupt any rigorous narrative continuity (“The Question of Community” 859), but the prose of *Auschwitz and After* contains temporal embeddings, which are not predominantly linear. What is at stake then is thus a fragmentary articulation of trauma, survival, and irreversible psychological and collective damage caused by experiencing the concentrationary universe. Delbo keeps problematizing these paradigms, already probed in *Aucun* and *Une connaissance inutile*, in *Mesure de nos jours*. She raises in it, and in *Convoy to Auschwitz* and *La mémoire et les jours*, volumes published in the mid-sixties and mid-eighties respectively, the fundamental question that I wish to address in this chapter: that of the role of community. In proposing a testimonial trilogy that pushes back the limits of official histories and chronology, and aligns individually and

collectively based testimonies, Delbo makes the examination of a collective French post-war public experience even more pressing. The last piece of her trilogy will thus enable us to scrutinize how a notion of community can assume a relative intelligibility of traumatic experiences in an aftermath.

Along with the question of community, this chapter explores how forms of communal lives shape not only past experiences, but also those of an aftermath. It examines the roles that communities can take—or decline to adopt—when it comes to writing a piece of history that inscribes itself in an ambivalent future.

Just as the characters of Morrison's *Beloved* and *Jazz* must learn to negotiate a need to confront their individual traumas, and remember their painful past, they must also move forward with their lives. While in *Beloved* it is ambiguously stated that the story of *Beloved* "is not a story to pass on," Morrison's prose clearly suggests that *Beloved* should indeed be a necessary story to pass on (275). Likewise, while the nonlinear design of *Jazz* entices the reader to engage with the different narratives and stories of the novel's characters, there is also in the book, an invitation for the reader to participate in the construction of the story on his or her own terms. As the epilogue of *Jazz* has the narrator, who is also a listener and receiver of the novel's stories, whether individual or collective, secret or public, claim,

But I can't say that aloud; I can't tell anyone that I have been waiting for this all my life and that being chosen to wait is the reason I can. If I were able I'd say it. Say make me, remake me. You are free to do it and I am free to let you because look, look. Look where your hands are. Now. (229)

For Nancy Peterson, "books literally do not speak to readers." Yet, paradoxically, the narrator of *Jazz* manages to say what she has just mentioned she is not able to express.

For Peterson, "somewhere in the course of the novel," something in the "typical story, the

typical history” has “gotten off track,” and this requires a response or reaction. In this puzzling instance of interpellation and need for public recognition of African-American lives and stories, lies an insight that has repercussions for Morrison’s project of historical reconstruction. Namely, that “(black) history books have no life, no meaning, unless they engage readers and compel them to ‘make’ and ‘remake’ the story in order to locate something useful for living today and tomorrow.”

Morrison’s trilogy as a whole enacts thus the complex engagement of revealing black history through forms of memory. These, for Morrison, like for Delbo, should encompass not only individual forms of recollection. These should definitely be collective as well. Enabling survivors’ memories like Sethe’s, Paul D’s, Violet’s and Joe’s to become “rememories” thus allow for such testimonies to play a major part in Morrison’s dynamic process of disclosure. But also, while not having experienced the trauma firsthand, we, as readers, should also be possibly enabled by those testimonies. Morrison’s community of readers might want to engage in mutual and collective acts of remembrance as well. They would possibly connect to a “‘genuine’ and useful African-American history,” whose restitution Morrison asks for (*Against Amnesia* 87).

Morrison, like Delbo, is committed in her trilogy to exploring the limits of official and historical discourses. She is also willing to probe the limits, not only of individual, but also collective, memory which underlie those narratives. As such, her work specifically examines three major premises which undergrid the whole of the trilogy. For Justine Tally, these three underlying, and a-chronologically layered, “themes” are “history, memory, and story.” According to Tally, the “focus” in each of the novels, however, is “shifted.” Whereas *Beloved* focuses on the role of memory, *Jazz* is centered

around the development of story and multiple story-telling. Yet, for Tally, *Paradise*, the last volume of the trilogy, “is devoted to the cultural production of History/history and its unstable relationship to both memory and story” (*Paradise Reconsidered* 14). As such, her trilogy, and *Paradise* in particular, rests on the understanding that is also proposed by Therese Higgins, that,

Slavery, persecution, ancestry—all deeply rooted, deeply psychological matters—are wrestled with between people who have experienced a brutal, painful past and people who are attempting to experience a more hopeful and less painful future. (“Paradise: The Final Frontier” 125)

Morrison’s narratives, like Delbo’s, rest on a circular, rather than linear or chronological organization. Her work, like Delbo’s, assembles, and is grounded in, actual historical data, which inspired the creation of the characters of the trilogy. Sethe of *Beloved*, for instance, is modeled on nineteenth century Ohio fugitive slave mother, Margaret Garner. Hers is the story of a mother who preferred to kill her child rather than see it returned to bondage. The funeral photograph of the body of a teenage girl inspired Morrison to write *Jazz*. This was after Morrison first viewed the photograph by the “now-famous Harlem photographer” James Van der Zee in the *Harlem Book of the Dead* (*Against Amnesia* 54). Not solely because the young girl was shot at a party by a jealous boyfriend did the story catch Morrison’s attention. Because she died refusing to identify her assailant so that he could get away was Morrison’s interest piqued. These historically grounded incidents of African-American experience undeniably inspired Morrison. She, then, decided to explore them in the realms of her imagination and fiction. Through these events, Morrison also came to offer profound insights into a subject of critical concern to her. It eventually became the title of her latest novel, *Love*. The theme of love, so dear to Morrison, centers around the nature of maternal love in *Beloved*, and concerns the

romantic type in *Jazz*. Yet, it is approached in her trilogy from an unusually negative perspective. Both novels indeed delve into how obsessive kinds of love can sabotage the self. As such, Morrison demonstrates how love, when excessive, can lead to destruction. Morrison found both records for *Beloved* and *Jazz* when she was editing *The Black Book*, “an ‘anecdotal’ collection of clippings and snapshots,” published while she was an editor at Random House (*Paradise Reconsidered* 15).

With *Paradise*, Morrison keeps documenting less conventional, more destructive, kinds of love present in African-American experiences. The kind of love we encounter in *Paradise* is more of a collective nature, though. It is essentially grounded in the pride of belonging to a community, albeit one that rests on practices of inclusion and exclusion. With *Paradise*, Morrison sets out to portray how forms of communal love can be empowering. However, she also reveals how traumatically destructive an excessive love for community and its ideals can be, especially when that love is defined on the premises of excessive pride that leads to elimination of those not deemed to fit or belong. This love is also disastrous when it ruptures ordinary ways of responding to community matters, and pushes reactions to an extreme. In other words, the type of excessive and transgressive behaviors that can emerge from a simulacrum of love for a community is what I propose to examine first in this chapter. As Alain Badiou would put it, if love has you name what he calls the “*innommable*,” it can induce “*un Mal désastreux*.” Nazism, for instance, did so, as I demonstrate later, as did the leaders of *Paradise* who engineered the collective murder of five helpless women (*Ethique* 76).

As was the case with *Beloved* and *Jazz*, the detail that sparked Morrison’s interest and imagination for writing *Paradise* was a historically grounded piece of information.

In this instance, it was the founding of all-black towns in Oklahoma. Especially the promises and shortcomings that these towns held for their newly formed communities was of interest to her. The idea specifically came to Morrison, according to Nancy Peterson, from a recurring headline in a black newspaper. It appeared in the *Langston City Herald* that was published during the years 1891-1892. While all-black towns of Oklahoma often distributed pamphlets, ran ads, and used methods to promote their town, the line that caught Morrison's attention was this. Based on a financially exclusionary premise, it said, "Come Prepared or Not at All" (*Against Amnesia* 90).

These towns, as a matter of fact, were supposed to have been havens for black communities, since they could remove themselves from white racism and lynching. They were not, however, always successful. They indeed always ran the danger of cutting themselves off from larger political, economical, and collective spheres. Morrison examines and fictionalizes this possibility in the third novel of her trilogy.

Prior to the founding of Ruby, in whose "enclosed space and repetitive temporality," most of *Paradise* takes place, a group of ex-slave families had long traveled (*Traumatic Realism* 175). They first had moved from Mississippi to Louisiana, and finally to Oklahoma. There, they had expected to turn their experience out of slavery into a life of safety and freedom. Before settling Ruby, however, they had intended to join other ex-slaves in their newly established towns and lives. But they had been rejected, humiliated, and disillusioned. Turned down everywhere, the group of ex-slaves had finally decided to found a town of their own, which they had named "Haven." As they recall their painful journey, we read in *Paradise*,

the one hundred and fifty-eight freedmen were unwelcome on each grain of soil from Yazoo to Fort Smith. Turned away by rich Choctaw and poor whites, chased

by yard dogs, jeered at by camp prostitutes and their children, they were nevertheless unprepared for the aggressive discouragement they received from Negro towns already built. The headline of a feature in the *Herald*, "Come Prepared or Not at All," could not mean them, could it? Smart, strong, and eager to work their own land, they believed they were more than prepared—they were destined. It stung them to confusion to learn they did not have enough money to satisfy the restrictions the "self-supporting" Negroes required. In short, they were too poor, too bedraggled-looking to enter, let alone reside in, the communities that were soliciting Negro homesteaders. This contemptuous dismissal by the lucky changed the temperature of their blood twice. First they boiled at being written up as "people who preferred saloons and crap games to homes, churches, and schools." Then, remembering their spectacular history, they cooled. What began as overheated determination became cold-blooded obsession. "They don't know we or about we," said one man. "Us free like them; was slave like them. What for is this difference? (13-14)

As a result of repeated refusals, the one hundred and fifty-eight freedmen kept moving west. They became "stiffer, prouder with each misfortune." As Morrison adds, the "details" of this self-proclaimed "disallowance" were now "engraved" into "the powerful memories" of some of the founding members of Ruby, actual descendants of the founding fathers of Haven (14). The feelings of shame that had accompanied the rejections, fueling anger and pride, were indeed now, not only remembered, but also transmitted to the younger generations.

In the novel, these strong feelings are mainly articulated through the hegemonic discourse of Deek and Steward Morgan, the all-powerful founders of Ruby. The twins are the ones, indeed, who, one day, took responsibility in assuming the unilateral discursive version of the history of Ruby. Memory, in this case, and in the words of Justine Tally, has become, then, more than just memory. It is a locus, in which the "inadvertent preserver of cultural memory," of "social difference," and of "ideological struggle" have come together (*The Story of Jazz* 13).

The plurality of voices and testimonies that Delbo and Morrison engage in their works do, however, present venues for contesting the hegemonic construction of history that was desired by Hitler, and by Deek and Steward Morgan. Also, the non-linear and circular literary modes that Delbo and Morrison bring forward in their narratives may also provide aesthetic and ethical spaces for guarding against unique—dominant and controlling—forms of discourse. It is with this line of reading that I examine the works of Delbo and Morrison.

I propose to delve into some of the forms of community, and communal ideals that are found in the trilogies of both writers. As such, the values promoted by National Socialism in Nazi Germany, and by the empowered 8-rock patriarchs of Ruby, are the ones that will come under scrutiny. In both instances, an ideal of communitarian substance, and existence, have turned utopic and deliberate forms of action into scenes of death and destruction. Alain Badiou's *Ethics: An essay on the Understanding of Evil*, examines this process very clearly. Badiou's discussion, around a theory of evil, relates, indeed, to an ideal of community, similar to that of Nazi Germany and Ruby, that has turned its content into war and massacre. I propose to look at it in detail now.

For Badiou, the evil fostered by Nazi ideology is first and foremost grounded in “a fidelity to a simulacrum.” The simulacrum here is the posing of the existence of an Aryan race, believed to be leading to some kind of necessary “truth.” The simulacrum of Nazi ideology can also be related to the following process. Namely, that the “National Socialist revolution,” which sought a “break with the old order,” would lead to the construction of a new, “truthful” type of order or “event.” This pseudo process of truth, coming into being with the Nazi era, was, importantly enough, rooted in some typical

community ideals. For Badiou, these ideals encompassed a characteristic pride in “soil, blood, and race.” The novelty of this break with the past, grounded in revolutionary National Socialist ideals, provided thus a major vehicle in constructing and implementing Nazi ideology.

Badiou explores how a “process of truth” can come about through “the novelty of an event.” Yet, for Badiou, along with this truth building process, the event is eventually to disappear in time. The event is, indeed, just “a kind of flashing supplement that happens to a situation.” What ultimately should serve to guide “the fidelity” to that event later on is nothing more than a “name,” or a “trace.” Besides, for Badiou, the truth that “relates to the particularity of a situation,” should then only be attained through “the bias of its void.” That way, the “void,” which Badiou defines as “the multiple-of-nothing,” would neither “exclude” nor “constrain anyone.” It would be the “absolute neutrality of being.” For Badiou, this neutrality of being allows this. Namely, that a genuine “fidelity” that “originates in an event,” while it operates “an immanent break within a singular situation,” can “nonetheless” occur and be “addressed.”

For the Nazis, however, both ideology and revolution served to “carry a particular community,” that of the German people, not towards a necessary neutrality of being. Rather, ideology and revolution served to carry their particular community “towards its true destiny,” which, Badiou observes, was arbitrarily defined as one of absolute and “universal domination.” That destiny, brought into being, thus “named” not the “void” of the earlier situation. Instead, it called for what Badiou refers to as its “plenitude.” It conveyed “not the universality of that which is sustained, precisely, by no particular characteristic or particular multiple.” Instead, it brought forward the “absolute

particularity of the Nazi community,” which “worked directly against truths,” as it staged that community as a universal (73). There can be no doubt, on this account, that it brought “terror” and “violence.”

Fidelity to a simulacrum, instances of which are found in *Auschwitz and After* and *Paradise*, allows for the following claim. Namely, that the “closed particularity” of the “abstract set,” or “*ensemble*,” of the “Nazi Germans,” the “Aryans,” or the “8-rock” families, gives sustenance to their particular group. Truly enough, for Badiou, the “invariable operation” of any particular *ensemble* is directed towards the “unending construction” of its own set. The problem, however, is that, in our cases, it enables no other means of doing this construction except eliminating, or “voiding,” what surrounds. The “void” thus “avoided,” or “*chassé*,” by the simulacrum, returns then with “what must” have “been accomplished,” in order for the substance of the event to emerge and be. For Badiou, it implies that, for those, arbitrarily designated, as “that which did not belong to the German communitarian substance”—the Jews, the Gypsies, the mentally ill, the homosexuals, the communists—“it meant death.” As Badiou adds, if it was not death, it was at least “that deferred form of death,” which is “slavery,” in the service of “the German substance.”

Inasmuch as it served to organize the extermination, “the name Jew,” for Badiou, was “a political creation of the Nazis.” Up to that point, according to Badiou, the name Jew had indeed been without “any pre-existing” referent. He further claims that the name Jew later became “a name” whose “meaning no one can share with the Nazis.” As such, it “presumed the simulacrum and fidelity to the simulacrum,” as well as the “absolute singularity of Nazism as a political sequence” (74-75).

The name Jew as a Nazi construct, and death-filled referent, is at work in Delbo's writings. It is important to remember that Delbo entered the camp universe as a political prisoner, and not as a Jew. From the point of view of the Nazis, this difference was obviously radical. It had fundamental implications for the kinds of handlings and sufferings that the Nazis imposed on their victims. Actually, the survival rate of less than twenty-five percent of Delbo's non-Jewish convoy was still significantly greater than that of deported French Jews (*Convoy to Auschwitz*, backcover). While only forty-nine Frenchwomen returned out of the originally two hundred and thirty of Delbo's group, the point here is that Delbo's dead comrades, and the Jews murdered in the Nazi genocide, died, however, at the hands of the same system. For Michael Rothberg, "both groups" must "make demands on our memory and conscience" (*Traumatic Realism* 149).

The following instance makes clear how the Nazi construct of a Jewish category impacted the conditions of survival of the prisoners. In *Convoy to Auschwitz*, Delbo discusses this point, as she at first makes a reference to her own group. She writes,

We were by no means the only Frenchwomen at Birkenau, but we were the only ones under the rubric "political." The others were "Jews." A Jew might be taken in combat, gun in hand, or in a roundup; it made no difference. To the Gestapo, he was a Jew, never a political prisoner. Jews no longer had a nationality. Since Jews and non-Jews were all at Auschwitz, what was the difference? The difference was enormous from the first. On arrival, the Jewish convoys faced a selection. Only young people able to work entered the camp. The others were gassed right away. Often there was no selection: the entire convoy was sent to the gas chamber.

As Delbo further explains,

At Birkenau, conditions for Jews and non-Jews were nearly the same. Nearly. But that slight difference led to a higher mortality rate among the Jews. The blocks of Jewish women were more overcrowded than the others. Not everyone could lie down for the night. Those who did not find a place on the planks of the tiers spent the night standing in the aisles. The Jews suffered general punishments

more often than we did, doing roll call on their knees with their arms in the air, for example: something we never experienced. (9)

Not only is the Nazi process of making differences in the treatment of Jews and non-Jews suggested in *Auschwitz And After*. It is also explored through the awareness that both groups had in tentatively estimating their chances of survival. Delbo attests to this process in the following, very moving, passage. The excerpt, entitled “*Dialogue*,” relates to a very brief encounter that Delbo has with a young Jewish woman at the camp. The discussion centers around the greater probability of dying, that the Jewish woman senses in her instance, based on her ethnicity. As she initiates the conversation, she asks Charlotte,

“Tu es française?

- Oui.

- Moi aussi.”

Elle n’a pas d’F sur la poitrine. Une étoile.

- D’où ?

- Paris.

- Il y a longtemps que tu es ici ?

- Cinq semaines.

- Moi, seize jours

- C’est beaucoup déjà, je sais.

- Cinq semaines... Comment est-ce possible ?

- Tu vois.

- Et tu crois qu’on peut tenir ?”

Elle mendie.

- “Il faut essayer.

- Vous, vous pouvez espérer mais nous...”

Elle montre ma jaquette rayée et elle montre son manteau, un manteau trop grand tellement, trop sale tellement, trop en loques tellement.

“Oh, nos chances sont égales, va...”

- Pour nous, il n’y a pas d’espoir. ”

Et sa main fait un geste et son geste évoque la fumée qui monte.

- “Il faut lutter de tout son courage.

- Pourquoi... Pourquoi lutter puisque nous devons toutes...”

Le geste de sa main achève. La fumée qui monte.

“Non. Il faut lutter.

- Comment espérer sortir d’ici. Comment quelqu’un sortira-t-il jamais d’ici. Il vaudrait mieux se jeter dans les barbelés tout de suite.”

Que lui dire ? Elle est petite, chétive. Et je n'ai pas le pouvoir de me
 persuader
 moi-même. Tous les arguments sont insensés. Je lutte contre toute ma raison.
 On
 lutte contre toute raison.
 La cheminée fume. Le ciel est bas. La fumée traîne sur le camp et pèse et
 nous
 enveloppe et c'est l'odeur de la chair qui brûle. (*Aucun* 26-27)

In the silence of the gesture by which death is evoked, the smoke of the
 crematoria indicates the very tension at the center of the conversation. According to
 Thomas Trezise, and his "The Question of Community in Charlotte's Delbo's *Auschwitz
 and After*," "*Dialogue*," indeed, focuses on the following, partially silenced,
 understanding. Namely, that the "us" for whom the Jewish woman speaks is at much
 "greater odds" of being "excluded from speech" or "dialogue" than Delbo's. For Trezise,
 the victimization of "the Jews," and I would add, of those deprived of their nationality,
 such as the Gypsies, the mentally-ill, the homosexuals, etc., was indeed "exceptional." It
 was exemplary in the following regard. The victimization of the Jews reflected "the
 general strategy" whereby Nazism "exploited differences" both "between and within
 communities," in order precisely to better "destroy them" (862).

The eradication of Jewish particularity, which the Nazis purposely promoted in
 the camps to discourage and demoralize their victims even further, is very apparent in the
 following instance. The excerpt, from *Aucun*, concentrates on the arrival of a Jewish
 convoy in Auschwitz. With it, Delbo makes clear the process of depersonalization that
 the Nazis made gruesome for the Jews. In order to reveal their being dispossessed of
 their material or moral, familial or communal significance, Delbo uses a depersonalized
 third person plural to refer to the group. Not only does she insist on the sudden forms of
 thorough deprivation and confusion that was their lot. Her choice of an impersonal style

of writing also draws attention to the brutal loss of a personal or communal voice that the Nazis forcefully imposed on their Jewish prisoners. For Trezise, in this instance, “the particularity of the first person is ruthlessly converted into the universality of the third.” As such, it makes prominent, the “deprivation of speech,” and the “general dispossession” of the Jewish inmates, that Delbo sets out to convey. As she witnesses their disorientation on their arrival, Delbo writes,

Ils ne savent pas qu’à cette gare-là on n’arrive pas.

Ils attendent le pire—ils n’attendent pas l’inconcevable.

Et quand on leur crie de se ranger par cinq, hommes d’un côté, femmes et enfants de l’autre, dans une langue qu’ils ne comprennent pas, ils comprennent aux coups de bâton et se rangent par cinq puisqu’ils s’attendent à tout.

Les mères gardent les enfants contre elles—elles tremblaient qu’ils leur fussent enlevés—parce que les enfants ont faim et soif et sont chiffonnés de l’insomnie à travers tant de pays. Enfin, on arrive, elles vont pouvoir s’occuper d’eux.

Et quand on leur crie de laisser les paquets, les édredons et les souvenirs sur le quai, ils les laissent parce qu’ils doivent s’attendre à tout et ne veulent s’étonner de rien. Ils disent “on verra bien,” ils ont déjà tant vu et ils sont fatigués du voyage. (10-11)

Whatever sense of particularity may still be conveyed in this description--with its specific references to the categories of men, women, mothers, and children within the group--is, however, soon to be erased. For Trezise, “particularity,” in the following instance, is in fact elided by “its insertion within an endless series of more or less identical convoys” that will keep arriving at Auschwitz. The “abstractness of the third person includes a space and time” that actually allows for an even more abstract form of speech. It is the use of the “*on*” form, that insists on the regularity and indifference, with which the Jews kept being disinherited. While dispossession can be said to even transcend death itself, we read,

On habillera un orchestre avec les jupes plissées des fillettes. Le commandant veut qu’on joue des valses viennoises le dimanche matin.

...

On distribuera aux Allemandes malades des olives noires et du lokoum mais elles n'aiment pas les olives de Calamata ni les olives en général.

Et tout le jour et toute la nuit

tous les jours et toutes les nuits les cheminées fument avec ce combustible de tous les pays d'Europe

des hommes près des cheminées passent leurs journées à passer les cendres pour retrouver l'or fondu des dents en or. Ils ont tous de l'or dans la bouche ces juifs et ils sont tant que cela fait des tonnes.

Et au printemps des hommes et des femmes répandent les cendres sur les marais asséchés pour la première fois labourés et fertilisent le sol avec du phosphate humain. (*Aucun* 17-18)

For Trezise, the loss “of the distinguishing features” of the Jewish community rendered by Delbo, not only produces an idea of “literally naked uniformity.” It also results in perceiving the Jews in “complete isolation from other communities, from one another, and from themselves.” This, Trezise adds, comes from the “severance” of a certain “*relationality*,” that normally “precedes and informs” an acknowledgment of an “identity” through an “other.” That certain *relationality*, indeed, is also crucial in enabling and maintaining what Trezise calls, the “universal” as a “condition of community.” “Particularity,” for Trezise, would thus call for an “intrication” or “involvement” with “alterity.” For him, it is precisely this alterity that would give birth to the self, whether it is an “individual” or “collective” one. Only at the condition of acknowledging alterity, can the self be “in turn construed as a tension between particular and universal.”

As Delbo demonstrates, it is in fact that type of *relationality* that Nazism sought to destroy at all cost. Since the denial of particularity “severs the dialogical or differential relation” that is “constitutive of social life itself,” it became one tool of destruction that the Nazis exploited with great ferocity. They converted the “universal,” or the possibilities of a first person singular or plural, and switched it from the

“possibility of community” to the “actuality of its annihilation.” Thus, not only did Nazism deprive its victims of any interlocutor. Nazism also voided each and every one of those victims of their possibility of having a particular referent, an “I,” to refer to themselves. For Trezise,

The tension between particular and universal was “resolved” by Nazism through the strategic prohibition of the universal itself to *certain* particulars. In the “final solution” of “the Jewish problem,” . . . Jews became the indistinguishable third persons named “the Jews” insofar as each was denied the universal right to speak, or more precisely, the right to be *heard* in the first person and hence to state something other than his or her membership in this collectively stereotyped Other.

The position, in which any speaker can normally assume a voice in the first person, was thus radically altered by Nazism. So was the dialogical relation that this position of the subject presupposes. These voided spaces came to be occupied *only* by those considered worthy of having a self or community identity. This idea, for Trezise, which I have already introduced through Badiou, implied thus also “the evacuation” of all those “others,” for whom “a space once existed,” but was threatened to the core (“The Question of Community” 880-81).

The loss of an individual and collective agency, which the Nazis engineered by suffocating speech in those who were the recipients of their hate, is clearly rendered throughout the trilogy. *Mesure de nos jours*, and *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, to some extent, offer however, an interesting complement to the silencing of voices that Nazism sought to implement. Indeed, with *Mesure de nos jours*, Delbo crucially encourages a resurgence of some of those voices that were threatened by annihilation. Not only does Charlotte bring forward her own voice to bear witness to the attempted extermination. She also goes beyond the particular form of narration that she used to articulate her own experience. She posits in her work a communal voice as well. Crucially enough, that

voice is one that acts as an enabler of collective experiences and remembrances to be brought forward. Not only does it bring to light, and reveal, the almost total annihilation that Delbo witnessed. But yet, through its communally grounded tone, this collective voice succeeds in re-assuming, albeit incompletely, the necessity and condition of community, which was so threatened during the Nazi era.

In *Mesure de nos jours*, Delbo's voice is supplemented by those of her companions, Gilberte, Gaby, Germaine, Louise, and many more, all camp survivors themselves, to whom she remained attached in the aftermath. Her trilogy takes, at that point, the form of a collection of memories and testimonies. All insist on the uselessness of the knowledge gathered at Auschwitz, and on the relative indifference, and lack of understanding, with which that knowledge was received in post-war France. Her trilogy, however, also presents a plurality of voices that offer more than lamentation and despair. It encompasses the trials and tribulations experienced by these women. But it also testifies to the communal exchanges, and the emotional support, that Delbo's companions and the women of her group provided to one another. By soliciting the testimony of other survivors, and playing the role of an active listener, Delbo thus succeeds in carrying "a word" that is collective rather than individual. Even though the "word" is not transmitted "as such," but passes through Delbo's literary transformations, it successfully carries out the following, formidable task: that of re-engaging a dialogical relation, that Trezise sees critical in re-constituting a "social life." But also, by the same token, Delbo and her surviving companions assumed, with the passing of the word, a crucial "ethical responsibility." That of transmitting a message that, even though it is useless, is nonetheless necessary for the world to hear ("The Question of Community" 865).

The dialogical relations that Delbo brings to light in the aftermath had already been established, and actually maintained, at the camps. Delbo makes these social bonds and signs of community exchanges particularly visible in *Convoy to Auschwitz*, a “collective biography” of “the 230 Frenchwomen who were deported from Compiègne to Auschwitz on January 24, 1943” (xi). Delbo first proceeds to contrast group interactions and abundant exchanges among her companions, with the lack of support, and the isolation, which, we observed earlier, overwhelmed the Jewish women. At first, Delbo reiterates the differences between the Jewish inmates and the women of her group, in regards to their unequal chances of survival. But she also insists on how mutual care, compassion, and social contacts among her group pushed back the limits and imminence of death. She writes,

. . . These Jewish women, thrown together at the eve of deportation, rarely formed cohesive, supportive groups. Their blocks were a mixture of Jews from different countries without a common language or much basis for friendship and mutual aid. If our convoy had so many survivors—and for Birkenau in 1943, fifty-seven out of two hundred and thirty after six months was exceptional, unique in the history of the camp—this was because we already knew each other (having spent weeks, and sometimes months, together at Romainville) and had formed small, tightly knit units within a large, homogeneous group, helping each other in all sorts of ways, often quite small: holding each other’s arms while walking, rubbing each others’ backs during roll call; and of course, we could talk to each other. Speech was self-defense, comfort, hope. By talking about who we were before, about our lives, we perpetuated the time before, we maintained our reality. Each of the survivors knows that without the others, she would not have returned. (9)

Delbo further explores forms of connections to others, and the existence of a vital and life-sustaining community in the following instance. This time, she makes the point through a negative reversal, which makes her tackle the question of survival in the face of loneliness and abandonment. As her clinging to life, and hope for a return, somehow dwindle at the thought of being left alone, Delbo writes,

Je reste seule au fond de ce fossé et je suis prise de désespoir. La présence des autres, leurs paroles faisaient possible le retour. Elles s'en vont et j'ai peur. Je ne crois pas au retour quand je suis seule. Avec elles, puisqu'elles semblent y croire si fort, j'y crois aussi. Dès qu'elles me quittent, j'ai peur. Aucune ne croit plus au retour quand elle est seule. (*Aucun* 164)

Charlotte's endurance and belief in a return were thus only conceivable because she felt supported by the women sharing her ordeal. Delbo inscribes, and insists, in the trilogy, on the necessity of relying on a communal life-supporting system. The following excerpt is a powerful example of this system. It shows how the women of her group united in joint efforts of communal acts of resistance and resilience while they were in Auschwitz. The women seem to make one body, one circulatory system, while they are connected, through one another, to one sustaining will to survive. Set in the context of the infamous roll calls on the frozen plain of Auschwitz, Delbo writes,

Dos contre poitrine, nous nous tenons serrées, et tout en établissant ainsi pour toutes une même circulation, un même réseau sanguin, nous sommes toutes glacées. (103)

Almost all testimonies by Delbo's companions make clear, as presumed by Delbo in *Une connaissance inutile*, that returning to a so-called "normal" self, or to a genuine way of being after Auschwitz was impossible. Yet, as Delbo's testimony did, the women's also all bring to light, in *Mesure de nos jours*, the companionship and the persisting sense of solidarity that they maintained within their group. Encouraged by supporting friendship and mutual exchanges, many, if not all, also believed, correctly, that their chances of returning were increased if they did not remain isolated from each other.

Mado, one of Charlotte's companions, is one of those who saw collective support as a means of survival as well. As she reflects on her tribulations, she inscribes them

within the personal, but also overwhelmingly collective and social dimensions of her experience. Through a profoundly honest, yet very disturbing testimony, we learn, however, that the strength she derived from her companionship at Auschwitz did not help her re-attach to a community-at-large after she was released.

Mado first reflects on complex feelings of relief and joy at her liberation that, in her case, often got mixed with guilt, helplessness, and despair. While moments of discouragement would often assail her at the camp, she would, already then, call on Charlotte and other women of her group, to help assuage her desolation and hopelessness. Sharing so much together, ultimately, had her achieve, then and later, a degree of mutual understanding, never experienced before, with the women of her group. As she keeps investigating, later on, into her “before,” “during,” and “after” Auschwitz, she clearly remembers the burden of having “to decide every minute between living and dying.” She also acknowledges, at that point, how generational continuity with the past, and communal bonding were influential in the women’s opting for life. As she reflects,

Là-bas, nous avions tout notre passé, tous nos souvenirs, même des souvenirs lointains qui venaient de nos parents, nous nous sommes armées de notre passé pour nous protéger, nous l’avons dressé entre l’horreur et nous pour nous garder entières, pour garder notre moi véritable, notre être. Nous puisions dans notre passé, dans notre enfance, dans ce qui avait formé notre personnalité, notre caractère, nos goûts, nos idées, pour nous reconnaître en nous-même, pour nous garder, pour ne pas nous laisser entamer, pour ne pas nous laisser anéantir. Nous nous sommes cramponnées à nous-mêmes. Chacun a raconté sa vie mille et mille fois, a ressuscité son enfance, le temps de la liberté et du bonheur pour s’assurer qu’il l’avait vécu, qu’il avait bien été celui qu’il racontait. Notre passé nous a été sauvegarde et rassurance. (49-50)

While she recalls that the extensive and intimate talking sessions that she and her companions entertained at the camp encouraged them to remain alive, she also acknowledges the following, very upsetting truth about herself. Namely, that the bonding

and verbal exchanges, however crucial, did not succeed in maintaining her emotionally alive in her life “after” Auschwitz. Neither did the companionship experienced at Auschwitz release her from her other companions, dead at the camp, who now live in her mind and in her future as ghosts. As she writes,

Je fais ce qu’on fait dans la vie, mais je sais que ce n’est pas cela, la vie, parce que je sais la différence entre avant et après. . . . En rentrant, j’ai voulu un enfant. Quand mon fils est né, j’ai été baignée de joie. Je dis baignée parce que c’était comme une eau caressante et tiède qui montait autour de moi, montait en moi, me portait et me faisait légère, heureuse, baignée de joie. Ce fils que j’avais souhaité, il était là, à moi. Une joie calme et bienfaisante. Je n’ai pas pu me laisser porter par cette joie, je n’ai pas pu m’y abandonner. En même temps que montait autour de moi, en moi, cette eau douce et enveloppante de la joie, ma chambre était envahie par les spectres de nos compagnes. Spectre de Mounette qui disait : “Mounette est morte sans connaître cette joie.” Spectre de Jackie qui tendait des mains inutiles. Spectres de toutes ces jeunes filles, de toutes ces jeunes femmes qui sont mortes sans avoir connu cela, sans avoir été baignées de cette joie. L’eau soyeuse de ma joie s’est changée en boue gluante, en neige souillée, en marécage fétide. (*Mesure de nos jours* 49, 55-56)

A process of identification, or identification “at-a-distance,” would, for Kaja Silverman be opposed to a type of identification that she calls “heteropathic identification.” While the latter recognizes the “other” and her experience as “other,” and not as one’s own, the former, for Silverman, entails “precisely the opposite state of affairs—the condition or quality of being ‘other’” (*The Threshold of the Visible World* 15). Inasmuch as an identification at-a-distance would be “inimical” or detrimental to a process of working through, it is clear that Mado is helplessly challenged by and caught in it. This becomes particularly clear when she discusses her newly born son, whose image she interchanges with corpses. While she keeps investing the world of the living with that of the dead, she writes,

Je revoyais cette femme—tu te souviens, cette paysanne, couchée dans la neige, morte, avec son nouveau-né mort, gelé entre ses cuisses. Mon fils était aussi ce nouveau-né là. Je regarde mon fils et je lui reconnais les yeux de Jackie, le vert-bleu des yeux de Jackie,

une inflexion de Mounette. Mon fils est leur fils à toutes. Il est l'enfant qu'elles n'auront pas eu. Leurs traits se dessinent par dessus les siens, parfois s'y confondent. Comment être vivante au milieu de ce peuple de mortes ? (*Mesure de nos jours* 55-56)

In the same despairing tone, she keeps expanding on how enormous her loss has been in a re-traumatizing post-Auschwitz life. She implies that the uncomprehending reception of the significance of Auschwitz by “ordinary” people has led to an emptiness in her postwar life that is insurmountable. While she is facing the failure of her attempts “to construct an utopia that would counter the concentrationary dystopia,” in Rothberg’s terms, she, however, also reiterates an idea of community that was possible in Auschwitz, but not in an aftermath (*Traumatic Realism* 173). She also acknowledges how overwhelming the distance and estrangement has been from a post-Auschwitz French community that has failed her. As she mourns a severance from that community, and deplores a lack of connection with its future and future generations, she claims,

Et depuis que je suis rentrée, tout ce que j’étais avant, tous mes souvenirs d’avant, tout s’est dissout, défait. On dirait que je l’ai usé là-bas. Ma vraie sœur, c’est toi. Ma vraie famille, c’est vous, ceux qui étaient là-bas avec moi. Aujourd’hui, mes souvenirs, mon passé, c’est là-bas. Mes retours en arrière ne franchissent jamais cette borne. Ils y butent. Tous les efforts que nous avons faits pour empêcher notre destruction, pour persévérer dans notre nous, pour maintenir notre être d’avant, tous ces efforts n’ont servi que pour là-bas. Au retour, ce noyau dur que nous avons forgé au cœur de notre cœur et que nous croyions solide parce qu’il nous avait tant coûté, ce noyau a fondu, s’est dissout. Plus rien. Ma vie a commencé là-bas. Avant, il n’y a rien. Je n’ai plus ce que j’avais là-bas, ce que j’avais avant, ce que j’étais avant. Tout m’a été arraché. Que me reste-t-il ? Rien, la mort. Quand je dis que je sais la différence entre avant et après, je veux dire qu’avant je vivais et que j’ai tout oublié de cette vie-là, ma vie d’avant. Maintenant, je ne suis plus vivante. Cette différence, j’en ai l’exacte mesure, la connaissance sensible et ma lucidité ne m’aide pas. Rien ne peut combler l’écart entre les autres et moi, entre moi et moi. Rien ne peut combler la différence, rien l’amenuiser. (*Mesure de nos jours* 49-50-51)

Social interactions, verbal exchanges, and physical gestures of care and comfort helped Delbo and her companions maintain conditions of alterity and community at the

camp. These same dialogical or differential relations—or lack thereof—also contributed to the reframing of their identity in an aftermath. Even though, for most survivors, this identity turned into states of disassociation, split personalities, and moments of distressing remembrance or erasure, Nazism did not succeed, however, in annihilating their identity altogether.

A similarly destructive, but not eradicating either, identity-shattering process can be traced in Morrison's *Paradise*. One variation, however, can be observed in the authors' trilogies. Delbo seems to insist, as does Morrison, on the importance of life-sustaining and vibrant communities. For Delbo and her companions, in an identity-reconstructing process, it is mainly alterity and social interaction among human beings—or loss thereof—that helped them shape or reshape their identity. For Morrison, it seems, so too. Yet, for her, it is also under the significance of memory that this vital exchange takes place. Even though each author may delve into one agency more intensively than in the other, the two writers acknowledge the necessary incidence of interactions among and between the two paradigms. Deborah Barnes makes the point of the privilege of memory in Morrison's oeuvre very clearly. In "Movin' on up: The Madness of Migration in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*," she insists that,

As in all Morrison's novels, memory is the saving grace. Without memories of a historical, cultural, and personal foundation, the sojourner will have no identity, no point of orientation, no way to proceed and nowhere from which to begin anew. Even an evolving identity must be rooted in a past. (293)

In *Paradise*, then, memory is not simply the preserver of a tortuous past. Even if it wants itself to be empowering and glorifying. It is also what the descendants of the survivors of slavery, in exodus and in search of Paradise, hold as their most precious commodity. When they set out to found Ruby, their sole possession is indeed their

remembrance of a communal past. Instilled in them, there is thus a profound need to preserve that true communal spirit of the past that they seek to keep alive. Not only do the founders of Ruby set out to create, or recreate, the spirit of their history. But by establishing an authentic, strong, and hard-working community, they also wish to write, and even rewrite, the story of that community. Meanwhile, they also see to it that a sense of belonging, grounded in the past, be maintained. And for the new community of Ruby, and for Deacon Morgan in particular, one of its founders, memory is an idealizing, yet powerful, and enduring tool indeed. As memories of past wanderings of the ancestors, and of the new settlers, forcefully compel Deek in his remembrance and reverie, Morrison writes,

What they saw was sometimes nothing, sometimes sad, and Deek remembered everything . . . Even now the verbena scent was clear; even now the summer dresses, the creamy, sunlit skin excited him . . . So among the vivid details of that journey—the sorrow, the stubbornness, the cunning, the wealth—Deek’s image of the nineteen summer ladies was unlike the photographer’s. His remembrance was pastel colored and eternal. (*Paradise* 109-10)

At this point, *Mesure de nos jours*, along with *Paradise*, enable us to emphasize how a framing of cultural consciousness can be informed, and approached, through various pointers. One of these, as previously mentioned, is directed towards memory. Another is made up of social and discursive interactions, whose workings we have seen at play in Delbo’s work. It is now appropriate to bring these out in Morrison’s oeuvre.

In his *Up from Bondage: The Literatures of Russian and African American Soul*, Dale E. Peterson brings to light how memory and social interactions contribute to ideological and communal productions. At first, he poses the question of the “strange meanings of being . . . black” in a world that “measured civilization by a single standard of literacy” (200). As he draws parallels between Russian and African-American

experiences, especially those that have been partially or totally left out in history, he comes to explore forms of cultural nationalism. Doing so, he insists on a particularity he has observed among many African-American writers, namely that there is a majority that has attempted to give “visibility and voice to a native culture” that has “been hidden from view,” and that has been “held in bondage to narrow Western standards of civility and literacy” (6).

This uncovering of African-American experiences is definitely part of Morrison’s archeological project. But one point that needs to be made very clear here is this. As Morrison goes about her task, she does not attempt to privilege one form of discourse over another. She, as Badiou would have it, does not use her art to fill a “void” with one singular, specific, form of “plenitude” (*Ethics* 73). Rather, like Delbo, she chooses to align a plurality of voices, to which the reader has the responsibility to respond. As a matter of fact, *Paradise*, like *Mesure de nos jours*, states a belief in, and offers an interpellation from, a plurality of experiences. As such, both works are instrumental in displaying a necessary diversity of verbal and cultural interactions. They also point at a much-needed multiplicity of social and community exchanges that can help defy any single totalizing meaning. As Justine Tally very aptly remarks in her discussion of *Jazz*, relevant for our own argument around *Paradise*, a “story may be useful in constructing alternative history, but that still does not raise it to the category of ‘Truth’” (*Paradise Reconsidered* 35). Also, as Alessandro Portelli contends, the “truth of the story” is the “truth of art.” As such, it does not “vouch for the facts but tells another kind of truth, and this is why it is told” (*The Text and the Voice* 119-20).

While bringing to the foreground a multitude of stories, Morrison thus facilitates a process of verbal exchanges constitutive of dialogues between self and self, self and other, and self and community. She, then, has stories purposefully, yet partially, told from one person to another. In turn, these are re-told in another situation, or to another person with more information, or even from a different perspective. That way, Morrison enables some sort of historical process, or at least communal process, to come about. For Rafael Pérez-Torres, this historical process, signaled by Morrison's narrative strategy, consists in being grounded in their "drawing together." Not only do the stories become a "means" of "articulating the accumulated wisdom of communal thought," they also enable "hearing the dead through the voices of the living" ("Knitting and Knotting the Narrative Thread" 104). Besides, as Morrison herself contends, "it's important not to have a totalizing view." As she explains in her *Paris Review* interview, "in American literature we [African-Americans] have been so totalized—as though there is only one version." But yet, "we are not one indistinguishable block of people who always behave the same way." Hence for Morrison, it became crucial to structurally organize her work, and *Paradise*, around "several voices speaking throughout each book" (*Women Writers at Work* 369).

The dialogic attributes of language and experience that Mikhail Bakhtin postulates in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* can shed light on Morrison's practice. Even though Bakhtin's theory of language, especially "heteroglossia," seems to concentrate on the linguistic elements and the literary aspects of language, his work is relevant in our context because it enables us to approach, beyond a mere linguistic line of thinking, the ideological points of view, values, and opinions that attach to and are

reflected by language. As Michael Holquist phrases it in *Dialogism*, “there is an intimate connection between the project of language and the project of selfhood.” It is that “they” actually “both exist in order to mean” (23). Also, the relevance and modernity of Bakhtin’s theory of language, for Holquist, not only lies in its being a “pragmatically oriented theory of knowledge that seeks to grasp human behavior through the use humans make of language” (15). It also enables us to access, in Bakhtin’s own words, “specific points of view on the world.” While “each” of these viewpoints is “characterized by its own objects,” it is also guided by its “own meanings and values” (“The Dialogic Imagination” 348). The multi-dimensional character of heteroglossia, that may be found in the consciousness of individuals, but also communities, can thus enable us here to examine whether some forms of discourse are inviting--or not--of dialogical interaction.

For Bakhtin, there is no self at all without an “other.” It is through this other that the individual “self” comes into being. This process of fusing this “other” into the self takes place precisely through language, which, for Bakhtin, is always open-ended and dialogic. It is always social. This dialogic, and thus polemical, nature of language is inherent in the individual’s awareness of the self, and his self-affirmation. Also, what is crucial for Bakhtin is how the discourse and consciousness of the other shapes, alters, and establishes the self and his discourse. As Bakhtin develops his argument on the “word,” he insists that it “does not exist without its intense sideward glance at someone else’s word.” While he insists on the necessary presence and existence of the “other” in the self, and of the language of the “other” in the hero’s, he asserts that,

The hero’s attitude toward himself is inseparably bound up with his attitude toward another, and with the attitude of another toward him. His consciousness of self is constantly perceived against the background of the other’s consciousness of him—“I for myself” against the background of “I for another.” Thus the hero’s

words about himself are structured under the continuous influence of someone else's words about him. (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 203-07)

The concern of the individual for the past, and the cultural, communal voicing of it, is prevalent and vital in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*. Similar to Bakhtin's work, it offers a comprehensive examination of human action based on attitudes revolving around language. In *Paradise*, there is present, then, the fundamental concept of dialogism, or doubled-voiced consciousness. It is made visible through a plurality of discourses, recollections and experiences. Yet, there is also, revealed in *Paradise*, a lump of human action that is dangerously grounded in a monological voice, and in a fixed, self-centered form of consciousness and remembrance. This voice is brought about by a memory shaped in a communal experience of rejection and disgrace. It is also informed by denials of interactions from other communities. It relates, as a matter of fact, to a memory that has gradually transformed the ways of thinking of many, even most, among the *Paradise* community, to one of intolerance. It centers around an approach or world view that has become non-dialogic, dominant, and controlling. With great aesthetic skill, Morrison posits, however, that there are other forms of thinking possible. The incidences, and collisions of these diverging memories and discourses are thoroughly at work in the novel. Not only do these interactions, or lack thereof, ask for ethical perception. They also require the reader's active contribution in appraising the negating acts of violence that these collisions have produced.

In his work, Bakhtin proposes a rhetorical correlate to his famous concept of heteroglossia. It concerns the constant struggles that the "centripetal" and "centrifugal" forces of language oppose to each other. The centripetal forces provide the coherence in language necessary for communication. The centrifugal forces of language allow for its

constant renewal. In our case, the former concept would relate to modes of thinking and grasping realities of the world from a more centered, established manner. Acting within more improvisational attitudes, and evolving in the realm of the less contained and more imaginative would be the stance around the latter. While Bakhtin discusses these phenomena in linguistic, rather than existential, terms he, nonetheless, draws attention to the idea that these spheres of influence should inscribe themselves in a context that is necessarily dialogical. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin asserts that “the authentic life of prose discourse . . . must be based not . . . in a ‘text’ excised from dialogic interaction, but precisely within the sphere of dialogic interaction itself, that is, in that sphere where discourse lives an authentic life.” He further claims that,

The word is not a material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction. It never gravitates toward a single consciousness or a single voice. The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to the other, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation. In this process, the word does not forget its own path and cannot completely free itself from the power of these concrete contexts into which it has entered. (202)

Through the dialogic character of prosaic language, the dangers of a fixed, rigid, and dead word can thus be illuminated. What Justine Tally contends about Morrison’s work in general and in the context of *Jazz*, is also very appropriate to *Paradise*:

It is precisely the *plurality* of experiences, manifest in language, which Morrison has insisted is necessary to combat the ossification of authoritarian discourse; that is, we very much *need* the Babel of competing narratives to combat an oppressive, dominant social myth that privileges some human beings over others. (*The Story of Jazz* 61)

In *Paradise*, tensions between diverse experiences, points of view, and opinions on values and life are constantly at play. I propose to examine, at this point, these different tensions as they emerge from, and are enacted in, the following conflicting discourses.

One of these is shaped through the language of the Founding Families of Ruby, also called the “8-R.” One of the numerous narrators of *Paradise*, Patricia, contends that “8-R” is “an abbreviation for eight-rock.” She explains that the name suggests the “deep deep level in the coal mines.” But it also refers to the “Blue-black people, tall and graceful, whose clear, wide eyes gave no sign of what they really felt about those who weren’t 8-rock like them,” when they established the community of Ruby (193). As numerous one-sided narratives and violent acts in *Paradise* indicate, theirs is a discourse of supreme authority. It wants itself righteous and rigid, and it seeks to make past history cohere with a present one. The forms of discourse with which it collides are the communal actions of the women inhabiting the Convent, and the words of the young people of Ruby. Both the women’s and the youth’s discourses come from a language of change and challenge. It is the language of “the other.” Finally, there exist, among these almost stereotyped forms of discourses, a plurality of individual voices, situated within a wide spectrum of experiences. It is these voices, as Michiko Kakutani states, with which Morrison “is constantly having her characters spell out the meaning of her story” (“‘Paradise’: Worthy Women, Unredeemable Men” 2).

It would be acceptable, I believe, to posit Toni Morrison as a master of dialogism. Likewise, *Paradise* can be read as an instance of dialogic discourse. *Paradise*, indeed, allows for meanings to emerge from deeply sustained tensions revealed at the core of the novel. Yet, the discourse of the Founding Fathers is highly problematical, because it has become non-dialogic and non-relational. With it, the “generalizing centripetal forces of [the] extra-personal systems” of the empowered 8-rock patriarchs violently engage with the “chaotic and particular centrifugal forces of subjectivity” of the erring females who

have taken refuge in the Convent (Holquist, *Dialogism* 28). An imposing mansion, it was once a school for Native American girls. But it now serves as a haven to five women's uncertain steps. It is also a place of massacre where the deeds of the Ruby Fathers have threatened the existence of the other to its very core.

The discourse of the empowered New Founders of Ruby, grounded in the story of the original nine –or eight—or fourteen--Founding Families of Ruby, is mostly articulated through Deacon and Steward Morgan, Nathan DuPres, Arnold Fleetwood, and Reverend Pulliam. Theirs is a discourse that wants to allow no side-way glance. Neither does it permit doubting or interpellation. It is a discourse solidified by the memory of a past that seeks to establish the actual, present-day living experiences of the thoroughly black community of Ruby in an exclusive and prescriptive manner.

This resistance to change is particularly articulated by the twins Steward and Deek. They are the ones who attempt to unequivocally control the discourse. Their position becomes especially assertive when it is challenged for the first time in the controversial re-naming of the great Oven, which the young people of Ruby have requested. Symbol of the past and constant reminder of a collective history, the great Oven has become central to the citizens' concept of themselves. Yet, while it later becomes the subject of the internal strife of the community, it also stands as the topos where the word of the ancient, of the past, comes into collision with the word of the young, of the present.

The justification of the power of the past over the present lies in the glorification, quasi sacralization, of the deeds of the Old Fathers. This matter allows, according to the twins, for no dialogue. As Deek declares, plainly and loudly to all willing to re-name the

Oven, “Nobody, I mean nobody, is going to change the Oven or call it something strange. Nobody is going to mess with a thing our grandfathers built” (*Paradise* 85). The Oven, in its capacity to distinguish the present from the past, and to enact the story of Ruby based on its history, comes to exemplify the monologic aspect or principle of the Ruby Fathers. As their discourse concentrates around one center, one consciousness, and subordinates itself to one unified voice, the Ruby Fathers tolerate no objection. As we understand from *Paradise*, Steward Morgan is the character who has the final say in the official version of the discourse. As we read, “as could have been predicted, Steward had the last word.” His words to anyone willing to challenge and change the “*Beware the Furrow of His Brow*” inscribed on the Oven, into the “*Be the Furrow of his Brow*” requested by the younger generation, sound somber and threatening. He declares: ““If you, any one of you, ignore, change, take away, or add to the words in the mouth of that Oven, I will blow your head off just like you was a hood-eye snake”” (87).

Another menacing symptom of the twins’ discourse of exclusion requests attention here. It does not so much concern expressing threats in the face of necessary processes of change and challenge that the Ruby Fathers read as acts of defiance. More insidiously, Deek and Steward Morgan are also observed justifying the power of their individual voices in a semblance of communal consensus. As such, they relate and ground their acts through forms of speech, and values that, at one time in the past, were spelled in communality. But then, they are justifying their own, individual stories of human experience by appropriating and manipulating for their own, exclusive voice, the stories of these ancestors. They have not only, questionably, re-collected the past under-goings of their forefathers. They have attempted to re-write the painful story of the

“Disallowing” of their community in view of their own personal need for justification of racial exclusion (194).

The sufferings and the deep wounds that the repudiation by other black groups inflicted on the Ruby families then, we understand, rendered the subsequent deeds of the ancestors quasi sacred. Their acts became symbols of bravery and valor in the face of rejection. But by the same token, as this rejection deeply marked the history and the identity of the community, it encouraged the Morgan twins not only to seek prescriptive control on Ruby. It also led them to read in the words of the Oven encouragements to angered pride, and deep racial segregation within their own, all-black community. As such, the twins have not only not condoned, but appropriated, the unspeakable and unspoken rule that “blacker is better” in “the separation” between “light-skinned” against “black” (194). By reading the past history of their community in a non-evolving and non-dialogic manner, the twins have thus subverted the historical process of the present. They have made it to fit their own purpose. Once disallowed by other blacks, they have, in their monolithic way of experiencing communal life, become disallowers themselves. As Reverend Richard Misner, talking about the Fathers of Ruby, reflects, “they think they have outfoxed the whitemen when in fact they imitate him.” As he pursues his reflection, he states that “they think they are protecting their wives and children, when in fact they are maiming them.” And “when the maimed children ask for help, they look elsewhere for the cause” (306). Not only have they induced a truth, appropriated a word, and regulated a discourse that they not only want exclusive and univocal. They have also decreed that their vision and deeds would be immutable and prescriptive. As Deek

repeats his dominant and controlling narrative as a way to justify his rejection of a challenging discourse, he insists that,

“Nobody is going to mess with a thing our grandfathers built. They made each and every brick one at a time with their own hands. . . . They dug the clay—not you. They carried the hod—not you. . . . They mixed the mortar— not a one of you. They made good strong brick oven when their shelter was sticks and sod. . . . And we respected what they had gone through to do it . . . so understand me when I tell you nobody is going to come along some eighty years later claiming to know better what men who went through hell to learn knew.” . . . “That Oven already has a history. It doesn’t need you to fix it.” (85-86)

By relating Ruby solely to its past, and reducing its history to “non contradictory” statements, the Ruby Fathers have, in the words of Badiou, forced “the naming of the unnameable.” Yet, “the community and the collective,” for Badiou are “the unnameables of political truth” par excellence. In order to remain viable, they need to remain, as such, unnameable. Badiou’s *Ethics* warns thus against the danger of arbitrarily forcing a certain political truth to come about under one name. As Badiou claims, “every attempt ‘politically’ to name a community induces a disastrous Evil.” He then gives the extreme example of Nazism, which was discussed previously in the context of Delbo’s work. Yet, Badiou also cites another name as potential instance of disastrous Evil. It concerns “the reactionary usage of the word ‘French.’” With *Paradise*, the word that is foretelling of evil is not French, but “8-Rock.” In their capacity to mean in an intransigent manner, the words “French” or “8-Rock,” in their narrowed and limiting usage, do, for Badiou, only serve one “purpose.” It is to “persecute some of those who live [here] in France under the arbitrary imputation of being ‘foreigners’” (*Ethics* 86). In the instance of *Paradise*, I propose that the persecution would be directed against those in Ruby whose skin is “of sunlight” complexion, of “racial tampering,” or whose blood is presumably impure (197).

Morrison's concern for the responsibility of the individual to his community parallels Bakhtin's insistence that the individual subject, however, only acquires meaning within the group. Michael Holquist, in *Allegory and Representation* emphasizes that same concept, anticipated by Bakhtin, and revealed in Morrison's. Holquist states that, indeed,

Men define their unique place in existence through the responsibility they enact, the care they exhibit in their deeds for others and the world. Deed is understood as meaning word as well as physical act: the deed is how meaning comes into the world, how brute facticity is given significance and form, how the Word becomes flesh. (176)

The problem we are facing here is as follows. The memory that the twins access to re-write a history of exclusion and rejection excludes any history or group that does not conform to theirs. It leaves out individuals who are not as "dark-skinned" as they are. Likewise, it rejects those who are not ready to "consolidate the 8-rock blood," like Patricia's father, "who was the first to violate the blood rule" (*Paradise* 194-95). Moreover, the substance that gives sustenance to the twins' self-righteousness is not only unreliable and hazy, but it is personal. Also, it is not grounded in shared beliefs of home, love, true companionship, and connection. Since the memory of the New Founders in *Paradise* is more than just memory, but a topos of ideological struggle, we, readers, are then faced with the following ethical responsibility. Namely, we may ask, what is the viability of the construction of identity, collective and individual, based on memories and words of one or two individuals who want to prescribe it for an entire community?

Even though the process of arriving at the "twins' truth" is clearly stated through Steward's testimony, we should keep in mind that it is merely indicative of one version of reality, namely his reality. As we read about Steward's inner thoughts, we certainly come

to reflect on how the words of the Oven somehow helped shape his vision. We also understand how the discourse of his elders impacted him and his twin, as they heard “the strong words, strange at first,” prior to the founding of Ruby. But we also read that these words “became familiar, gaining weight and hypnotic beauty the more they heard them.” We realize, then, that the twins have “made” those words dangerously “their own.” Also, they have reduced the meaning of these to only one possible interpretation (111). Yet, we may reasonably ask, how could the construction of this simulacrum of truth have been so unequivocally binding and blinding?

A semblance of choice among the plurality of voices around the history of Ruby needs, at this point, be discussed. Revealed through the novel’s dialogical narrative technique, there is, in *Paradise*, not only an abundance, but also a complexity and intricacy, of versions and stories. It is especially true when it comes to explain the historical past of Ruby. I propose, however, that the tensions resulting from these contradictory stories about the past can be read as falsely implying that the political or communal construction of Ruby has remained “unnameable,” and, as such, acceptable (*Ethics* 86). The following point reveals otherwise.

As we know, the memory of the inscription on the Oven, “*Beware the Furrow of his Brow*,” was consecrated by the old generation of Ruby. It is interesting to note, however, that it was transmitted, according to Arnold Fleetwood, by Esther, a baby girl. It was brought down to the community of Ruby, through memory, oral tradition, and story-telling. The value of the word of baby Esther, for the patriarchs of Ruby, commands respect. It mandates approbation that wants itself uncontested and unchallenged. While Reverend Misner, the voice representing the young people of Ruby,

suggests that Esther, “was a baby” then, he attempts to make clear that “she could have been mistaken.” Yet, in his response to Misner, Arnold Fleetwood leaves no doubt as to who will preserve the memory of the event and control the discourse. Insisting on the veracity and accuracy of the original words “*Beware the Furrow of his Brow*,” he retorts that, ““Esther was there”” and ““Esther never made a mistake of that nature in her life. She knew all there was to know about Haven and Ruby too.” In a similar episode of denying the voice of anyone not in agreement, Harper Jury silences a young voice of Ruby, who professes the claim that, ““ It’s our history too, sir. Not just yours.”” Instead of listening to the words of the youth, Harper Jury plainly states that ““That [Destry] boy needs a strap. Blasphemy.”” Even though it is not “specified what the Furrow might cause to happen and to whom,” the reply by Harper Jury leaves no doubt that, “Beware means ‘Look out. The power is mine. Get used to it’” (86-87, 195).

It is interesting to note, however, that in the story about the powerful words at the base of the Oven’s mouth, told by another narrator (one of the twins), in another chapter (in chapter one), “it is still not clear where the words came from. Something [the possible author of the inscription] heard, invented, or something whispered to him while he slept curled over his tools in a wagon bed.” As the narrative goes on, we, readers, comprehend that “His name was Morgan.” We are also asked to ponder on whether “he invented or stole the half-dozen or so words he forged.” What becomes particularly clear, however, is that those “words that seemed at first to bless them” later “confounded them,” and finally “announced that they had lost” (7).

The power of control over discourse, memory and ideology are excessively present in the Morgan twins, who, born in 1924, “heard for twenty years what the

previous forty had been like.” As we read, “They listened to, imagined and remembered every single thing,” because “each detail was a jolt of pleasure, erotic as a dream, out-thrilling and more purposeful than even the war they had fought in” (16). Their reminiscence of facts, words, deeds, seems so powerful, however, that it keeps raising the before-mentioned and serious issue, not only of the non-reliability of their memory, but of the non-dependability of their one discourse as well. As we read, “The twins have powerful memories. Between them they remember the details of everything that ever happened—things they witnessed and things they have not” (16,13).

Also, the idea that their personal history, here their participation in World War II, is actually less relevant than, and subordinated to, the history of their ancestors, is actually very puzzling. Even though Morrison very clearly advocates the necessity of keeping in touch with the “ancestors,” and of not being “removed from their experience,” she makes clear that this connection to the ancestor should be predicated on the following significance. Namely, that these nurturing relations play a beneficial role in connecting the individual with his or her past in order to enhance his or her “present” and “future,” not limit them. As she contends in “Memory, Creation, and Writing,”

If my work is to be functional to the group (to the village, as it were) then it must bear witness and identify that which is useful from the past and that which ought to be discarded; it must make it possible to prepare for the present and live it out, and it must do that not by avoiding problems and contradictions but by examining them; it should not even attempt to solve social problems, but it should certainly try to clarify them. (389)

As Morrison claims in “Rootedness” the ancestors are thus not just “parents.” They are sort of “timeless people whose relationships to the characters are benevolent, instructive, and protective.” They are the ones who “provide a certain kind of wisdom.” Most often, it is “the presence or absence of that central figure” that determines “the

success or the happiness of the character.” As Morrison has seen at play in some contemporary fiction, it is often “the absence of an ancestor that is frightening, that is threatening, and [that] causes huge destruction.”

Morrison instructs against the danger of the loss of connections with the ancestors not solely in her critical work, but in her fictional one too. She often insists on the idea that “the progression” of an individual within the community may be “really diminishing of his or her abilities” if the ancestor is absent from his or her life in a “nourishing way.” It is thus when, or if, “we don’t keep in touch with the ancestor” that “we are, in fact, lost.” Morrison proclaims, then, that, “when you kill the ancestor, you kill yourself” (344).

In *Mesure de nos jours*, it is precisely this type of loss, namely a loss of connections with a past “before” Auschwitz that progressively disconnected Mado from her self. It is also the bereavement of parental and intergenerational bonding that produced the split in her and “killed” her future. For Deek and Steward Morgan, it is not only their obsessive idealization and freezing of the words of the ancestors that have diminished the possibilities of an enhanced tomorrow. The absence of intimacy with, and support from, a live word, has been equally detrimental. As such, losing touch with the present, and living in a sort of ivory tower, removed from the community, has, for Deek and Steward, turned very problematic. And for Morrison, if there is a loss of “balance” between past and present, but also, in her words, between “male” and “female,” the consequences can be utterly devastating. In her view, if “that balance is disturbed, if it is not nurtured, and if it is not counted on and if it is not reproduced,” we face a “disability” against which “we must be on guard” for “the future.”

Deek and Steward's grandfather, Morgan, who led his people in exodus to finally found Haven, certainly appears as a mythical, benevolent figure whose guidance nourished the ex-slave families who followed him. But, certainly, Morrison does not simply caution against losing touch with the ancestor, which, in the instance of Deek and Steward, did not quite happen. However, she pointedly advises against loss of balance in the attachment to the ancestors. Her suggestion is particularly resonant if, or when, these ties exclude a live connection, or when this exclusion prevents living the present out. Morrison does not solely warn against rigid attitudes in reading the discourse of the past. She also guards against the dangers of psychological entrapment resulting from an excessive love for an idealized past. Exclusive reliance on the past and on the self, inducing a loss of consideration for present and collective needs can, thus, for Morrison, be as destructive as a loss of nurturing connection with the ancestors.

Losing touch with the present may appear to have been devastating only to a small extent to Deek and Steward. But it has certainly been profoundly detrimental to the entire community of Ruby, and not only in regards to the women of the Convent, who, by the way, were never considered part of the community. They were, rather, just outcasts accused of threatening the ways of Ruby. But the deeds of the twins have been extremely damaging to the group of people that somehow got beneficially connected to these women. As Morrison claims, "I want to point out the dangers, [I want] to show that nice things don't always happen" to the "totally self-reliant" if there is no "conscious historical," or, I would add, communal, "connection" ("Rootedness" 343-44).

Besides, the authority exerted by both Deek and Steward is not limited to memory and discourse. It is also inscribed in a context of social and financial power as well. As

affluent residents and owners of the only money lending institution of Ruby, it comes as no surprise, that Deek and Steward become more and more defiant towards Reverend Misner and his community-oriented attitudes. The twins' resentment is particularly strong after Misner forms a sort of "piggy bank," that offers "no-profit—small emergency loans to church members; no penalty payback schedules." As K.D., nephew and sole heir of Deek and Steward, reflects on Reverend Misner's actions, he ponders on the menace that these could pose. As K.D. claims, "A man like that, willing to throw money away, could give customers ideas. Make them think there was a choice about interest rates" (*Paradise* 56).

Reverend Misner, the young people of Ruby, and the women of the Convent greatly contribute to revealing the heteroglossic nature of *Paradise*. Standing for the centrifugal forces of language, and its ideological decentralization, they posit, indeed, types of discourse profoundly different from that of the prominent inhabitants of Ruby. Belonging to fundamentally "discordant" social groups, they deconstruct the presumption of a unitary ideology, which they will come to undermine. Among their group, each individual is seen articulating and enacting the "discordance" or "decentralization" of that language through his or her own mode of expression. Misner, as the reverend who has "scripture and the future" on his side, for instance, is opposed to Senior Pulliam, who has "scripture and history" on his (150). As the former welcomes the ideological movement of the young people who want to "voice opinions about the words," he, as such, is made to revitalize the univocal discourse of the elders in control (83).

Likewise, the women of the Convent not only come to oppose the Founding Fathers' obsession with the purity of the race. They not only challenge the Ruby rule of

welcoming interactions exclusively with people of deep dark skin, or marrying inside a prescribed racial group. The women also come in conflict with the strictures of a self-sufficient life that has shut itself off from the outside world and the future. In fact, what the women have to oppose to the life style of Ruby is a fecund, anarchic, and vital enactment of life. That productive living out grounds itself in resounding eroticism, mutual caring, and acceptance of the other. This reverence for life stands in sharp contrast with Ruby, where a need for safety from intrusion, and an active and vibrant construction of the present are absent. As Reverend Misner ponders Ruby and its inhabitants, he wonders:

But why were there no stories to tell of themselves? About their own lives they shut up. Had nothing to say, pass on. As though past heroism was enough of a future to live by. As though, rather than children, they wanted duplicates. (161)

These impressions about life in “RUBY POP. 360,” a dead and empty town constructed on exclusion and isolation, is also indicated by Mavis, on the day of her arrival in Ruby: “Mavis’ immediate impression of the little town was how still it was, as though no one lived there” (45).

Consolata was a little Panama orphan girl rescued and brought to the Convent by Sister Mary Magna decades ago. She, however, also stands as the sort of ancestor figure or healer whose presence has become so indispensable in Morrison’s work. Not only does she instruct a future based on opportunities for living in the present moment. Rather, she also grounds the present in the respect of an other, and in communal values, which, for Morrison, can spell out possibilities for a sustainable future. Consolata, like Pilate in *Song of Solomon*, is thus the “ancestor” whose role is crucially outlined in *Paradise*. Here is how her presence and her story are, not frozen and rigid, but

significant and vital. This is also how her talent for living, and being attentive to the other, will be passed to the members of the community.

When she arrived at the Convent at age nine, Consolata was instructed by the Sisters, along with a few other Native girls. She soon became the one who “slept in the pantry, scrubbed tile, fed chickens, prayed, peeled, gardened, canned and laundered.” For thirty years, “she offered her body and her soul to God’s Son and His Mother as completely as if she had taken the veil herself.” To Sister Mary Magna and the Virgin Mary, “of the bleeding heart and bottomless love,” she offered a life of piety and devotion (225). But when Mary Magna died, Consolata, who was fifty-four years old at the time “was orphaned in a way she was not as a street baby and was never as a servant” (247). Yet, when she becomes the only woman left in charge of the Convent, she clearly comes to stand as a metaphor of acceptance of, and sharing with, an other.

Just as Delbo was in *Auschwitz and After*, Consolata is revealed as a character, in *Paradise*, who most noticeably contradicts a language of singularity that wants to be voided of an other. As such, Consolata is the one who comes to articulate most clearly a communal language of love and care. In Morrison’s terms, she is “the critical voice which upholds tradition and communal values and which also provides occasion for an individual to transcend and/or defy group restrictions” (“Memory, Creation, and Writing” 389). She is also the woman who challenges “blackness” as “racial purity” in favor of human solidarity (*Paradise* 112). It is certainly how she appears to the four women, Mavis, Gigi, and Seneca, including “the white girl” Pallas, whose distressed lives and drifting steps have led to the Convent. To them, Consolata is,

This sweet, unthreatening old lady who seemed to love each one of them best;
who never criticized, who shared everything but needed little or no care; required

no emotional investment; who listened; who locked no doors and accepted each as she was. (262)

At one point in her life, however, Consolata had found her self empty and blank, with only absence at the center of her life. Void of definition and meaning, she had let hopelessness and despair overwhelm her, especially after her passionate, yet illicit, love affair with Deek turned out fruitless. Even though Consolata and Deacon loved ardently for a few months in the shade of two loving trees, theirs was a love with no future. Announcing the desertion of Deek, Morrison writes, “No figs ever appeared on those trees during all the time they met there, but they were grateful for the shade of dusty leaves and the protection of the agonized trunks” (231).

Consolata’s gifts of life and love are, however, powerful. After months of trying to drink herself to death in the darkness of the cellar of the Convent, she re-claims her self. Urged by Lone DuPres to act against the dying of the son of the man she used to love so intensely, she successfully revives Deek’s son, Scout Morgan. As she returns him to life, she also brings him back to his mother Soane, wife of Deek. Even though she is “half exhilarated by and half ashamed of what she has done,” the reviving deed re-opens the way to other, smaller and greater, acts of love. She starts, for instance, a long-lasting relationship of friendship with her rival, the wife of Deek. At that point, her “gift” of love and life is so abundant, that it becomes paramount in helping the young lost, displaced, or abandoned women who start arriving at the Convent (245).

Not only does Consolata help the women re-claim a voice that has been muted because of traumatizing experiences. She is instrumental also in encouraging the women to re-construct a lost sense of self. By the same token, she also enables them to face, possibly re-cover, from their lives, however shattered these have been. These lives,

indeed, have not only been broken by the irresponsible death of infants, parental betrayals, and pain of rape. They have been fractured also by anguish at abandonment, loss of romantic ideals, and heartbreak.

The women of the Convent re-work and vocalize their traumatic memories and their dramatic past. They do so by first listening to Consolata's stories of loss, disorientation, and pain. Then, under Consolata/Connie's directions, they start telling and retelling their own stories to themselves and to each other. They stop reliving their traumatic history on their own. Instead, they start working through their pain by sharing it. This collective work of narration, as Nancy Peterson puts it, "enables the women to enter each others' separate pasts." As such, the narrative exchanges in which they engage at the Convent allow the women to "rememory" their terrible past, so that "the hurt and trauma are shared" (*Against Amnesia* 93). Together, they face the quiet sleep of the newly born twin girls that Mavis has accidentally left suffocating in the heat of her husband's Cadillac. Together, they confront the profound need for parental and romantic love that has been refused to Gigi, as she wanders in search for an idealized form of erotic love she never finds. Together, they confront the pain of maternal abandonment and sexual abuse that Seneca has experienced, as she wanders from foster homes to bus stations covered in self-inflicted wounds and cuts. Together, they swim, panic-stricken, away from male pursuers, as Pallas did, after running away from the traumatic memory of her lover Carlos betraying her with her own mother.

As collective enunciation of pain and trauma begins, it allows real healing to begin. As such, a collective "loud dreaming," painfully, yet beneficially, takes place among the women. With it, "accusations directed to the dead and long gone" are

“undone” by “murmurs of love” (*Paradise* 264). Also, as the women inscribe their own sufferings, they symbolically draw their bodies in chalk on the floor. They do so in a space external to themselves. Not only the loud dreaming, but the ritual painting on the basement floor, allow them to transfer the pain and wounds from their own body to their traced image. Soon, then, “the Convent women were no longer haunted.” As might have been perceptible to the visitor of the Convent, with its “life” now so “real and intense,” the women were indeed no more haunted, but “connected” (266). After telling, sharing, transposing their stories, and articulating their trauma, the women are now unable “to leave the only place they were free to leave” (262). In the haven of the Convent, surrounded by the comforting, non-judging, welcoming presence of Consolata and the other women, they now find grounds to reply to their own questions,

What is she talking about, this ideal parent, friend, companion in whose company they were safe from harm? What is she thinking, this perfect landlord who charged nothing and welcomed anybody; this granny goose who could be confided in or ignored, lied to or suborned; this play mother who could be hugged or walked out on, depending on the whim of the child? (262)

At that point, along with the orderly discourse of the Ruby Fathers of *Paradise*, and contrasted to it, come the narratives of renewal of the women of the Convent. With this concurrence of discourses, however, the foreshadowing of the implacable act of hate, the massacre of the women, is skillfully introduced. It is Lone, the “gifted midwife,” sent on a mission by God to rescue the women of the Convent, who first indicates that, “the men spoke of the ruination that was upon them.” Informed of their anger, she also reports them expressing “how Ruby was changing in intolerable ways” (273-75). An “abandoned child picked out of poverty and neglect by a feisty Fairy, but not a member of the 8-rock families,” Lone’s voice is not only, in Tally’s words, “a voice which is

easily drowned out” (*Paradise Reconsidered* 36). Hers is also an informed and lucid voice that exists adjacent to the official side of discourse. Through Lone, we learn that, for the men of Ruby, the women of the Convent, indeed, “this new and obscene breed of females,” had something to do with that change (*Paradise* 279). We also read that “[the men] did not think to fix it by extending a hand in fellowship or love.” Instead, “they mapped defense,” and “honed evidence for its need.” Finally, we learn, still through Lone, that “the leadership was twinned” (275).

Syncrisis and anacrisis, two basic devices of the Socratic dialogue elucidated by Bakhtin in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, are useful at this point. With them, we can gain another insight into the multiple and complementary narratives of *Paradise*. We can also possibly, and responsively, commit to, or at least access, meanings more thoroughly. Syncrisis is understood as “the juxtaposition of various points of view on a specific subject.” In *Paradise*, Morrison achieves syncrisis by having her numerous characters reminisce and reverberate thoughts, actions, and objects of reflection in their own narratives. Anacrisis, on the other hand, is a “means for eliciting and provoking the words of one’s interlocutor.” It is used also as a device to “force him to express his opinion and express it thoroughly.”

A great master at syncrisis, Morrison juxtaposes various discursive viewpoints on subjects as crucial as the shaping of communal identities and the destruction or re-creation of the self. But she also uses syncrisis to delve into themes as crucial as believing—or not-- in altruism, or the construction of a viable community.

Morrison is also a skilful expert of anacrisis. In *Paradise*, she knows how to force her characters “to *speak*,” and “to clothe in discourse their dim but stubbornly

preconceived opinions.” She expertly also succeeds in “illuminating [her characters] by the word and in this way expose their falseness or incompleteness.” She certainly excels at “dragging the going truths out in the light of day.” Likewise, she thrives at “extirpating out of the notion of the dialogic nature of truth” a “response” or a “reflection” from her characters (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 110).

Pat, the teacher who gains insight into the collective histories, psyches and stories of the patriarchs of Ruby, is very instrumental in the process of anacrisis. She is one of the few characters who offers her own understandings of the motives underlying the massacre at the Convent. Besides giving her own reflection on what happened, however, Pat also mentions two divergent stories. These are the ones rendered by the perpetrators. As these two accounts start to emerge as the official stories, we read from the first version that

nine men had gone to talk to and persuade the Convent women to leave or mend their ways; there had been a fight; the women took other shapes and disappeared into thin air. And two (the Fleetwood-Jury version), that five men had gone to evict the women; that four others—the authors—had gone to restrain or stop them; these four were attacked by the women but had succeeded in driving them out, and they took off in their Cadillac; but unfortunately, some of the five had lost their heads and killed the old woman. Pat left Richard to choose for himself which rendition he preferred. (*Paradise* 296-97)

As Pat leaves Richard Misner to choose for himself “which rendition he preferred,” we sense that he is discerning enough to doubt either official version. As such, he adopts a useful engagement with history, which Morrison strongly encourages. While he scrutinizes, in the words of Peterson, the two “too neatly narrated” official stories, Richard is sensitive enough to be aware that these two versions are inadequate (*Against Amnesia* 95). While Pat resists disclosing her own version to him, we feel that it may be the one closest to what actually happened. We read,

What she withheld from [Richard] was her own: that nine 8-rock murdered five harmless women (a) because the women were impure (not 8-rock); (b) because the women were unholy (fornicators at the least, abortionists at most); and (c) because they *could*—which was what being an 8-rock meant to them and was also what the “deal” required. (*Paradise* 297)

Through Lone also, we learn about how the story of the massacre was being retold, and “how people were changing it to make themselves look good.” We also find out that “every one of the assaulting men had a different tale.” Also, “their families and friends (who had been nowhere near the Convent) supported them, enhancing, recasting, inventing misinformation” (297).

As we see the principle of anacrisis also at work through Dovey, Steward’s wife, we are also made aware that even though the murderous men attempted to silence the voices of the women, they may not have been able to do so completely. Besides, the men, revealed as having harmed their own community very profoundly, are exposed as having damaged their own selves as well. As such, they have made their women conscious of the process of destruction that they unwittingly directed at themselves, but perniciously at others. As Dovey ponders on her husband’s words and deeds, she claims that she has “watched her husband [Steward] destroy something in himself for thirty

years.” Also, she reflects that, “the more he gained, the less he became.” Soane makes a similar reflection about Deek, who, we find, is the one who shot Consolata. Denying the women, including his wife, a necessary relation of alterity, Deek has let himself be known mainly to Soane through his deeds, perceived as detached and bitter or aggressive and destructive. As she recalls their “intimate conversations,” she claims that, indeed, and so far, they “had been wordless . . . or brandishing ones.” After the massacre, Deek’s words are shown to be even more angry and intolerant. His “words” now “came out like ingots pulled from the fire by an apprentice blacksmith—hot, misshapen, resembling themselves only in their glow” (287).

Yet, beneficial rememories will keep haunting the living in *Paradise*. The women of the novel make these rememories, in the words of Peterson, “powerful” and “vital” enough, as to keep the spirit of the Convent alive. The women and their voices “will remain,” no matter “how strong the efforts to deny or forget them.” The memories and traces left by them ensure that their “disruptive, inventive, creative life forces” will not be forgotten or erased entirely. Despite the violent attempts of the “fraudulent official story” to silence the women’s truths, for Peterson, that story will never be entirely successful in “sanitizing” the historical process of denial at work in *Paradise* (*Against Amnesia* 96-97). The constructive working through in which the women engaged, and the inspiration around it will account for that. They, as such, make it possible to read, at the end of the novel, a message not solely of despair, but of expectation for the future also. They enable to form not an image of total destruction, but a melody of soothing undertones, tenuously promising of life and, possibly, renewal. These promises are held in a vision of earthly haven or paradise, and are sung in a ballad by Piedade along the sea. Correlating

Morrison's own idea of what earthly paradise could have been, but failed to be in

Paradise, we read,

There is nothing to beat this solace which is what Piedade's song is about, although the words evoke memories neither one has ever had: of reaching age in the company of the other; of speech shared and divided bread smoking from the fire; the unambivalent bliss of going home to be at home—the ease of coming back to love begun. (318)

An ethics that calls one to a responsibility for and to the other is thus what Morrison asks us to consider. Despite the challenging reality of exclusion and potential silencing of some others, Morrison affirms that communal acts of sharing and growing together are, however, possible. *Paradise*, as a repository of heteroglossia, testifies to that. With the novel, we may be reminded of life's potentials, along with its perils, especially if indifference takes control, or if ethical vigilance leaves us. But as the realist prose of *Paradise*, an “unquestionably political” and “irrevocably beautiful” work makes clear, it is promising to grapple with different forms of discourses (“Rootedness” 345). To quote Bakhtin one more time, and conclude the chapter with his insight, we can be reminded that,

All languages of heteroglossia . . . are specific points of view on the world, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically. As such they encounter one another and co-exist in the consciousness of real people—first and foremost, in the creative consciousness of people who write novels. (“The Dialogic Imagination” 348)

It is up to us to remain attentive to what every discourse entails, and be open enough to discern how reductive or enhancing of the future they propose themselves to be.

Conclusion: Some Kind of Future Community

Delbo's *Auschwitz and After* and the trilogy of Morrison are complex, yet intimate, works based in individual but also collective concerns. Even though their trilogies can indeed be said to be personal testimonial works by postmodern and postcolonial witnesses and artists, they are vital in manifesting an underlying, deeply grounded preoccupation for forms of community as well. Also, Delbo and Morrison are those types of artists who do not claim their own voice as an authority, unique and absolute. They call for "affective and participatory relationships" between "the speaker and the audience" ("Rootedness" 341). Their works avoid a type of mono-vocality as a literary mode because of the one-sidedness of the insights these works may produce. They also decline a discourse of authority and truth in favor of one of multi-vocality and truthfulness. With the former, there lies the danger, indeed, that "they might be impoverishing, limiting, closing down the possible meanings that their writing might produce" (Lodge, *After Bakhtin* 145). This is obviously not what Delbo and Morrison had in mind for their trilogies.

The tale of the wise old story-teller in Morrison's Parable, "Bird in the Hand," delivered during her Noble Prize Lecture, marks the responsibility of the reader in a very evident manner. In the parable, the story-teller addresses a question posed by two inquiring children. But she gives them no definitive answer as to whether the bird that they are holding in their hands is dead or alive. Instead, she invites the children, the audience, but also all readers, to consider and figure out the answer for themselves. Through Cheryl Lester's "Meditations on a Bird in the Hand," we learn that Morrison assumes the position of the wise storyteller, and that the bird is a metaphor for language and its vitality. As we read,

The old woman's silence is long, the young people have trouble holding their laughter. Finally, she speaks, and her voice is soft but stern. "I don't know," she says. "I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands." (128)

As David Lodge states, "it is the nature of texts, especially fictional ones," but, I would add, those of a testimonial character also, "that they have gaps and indeterminacies which may be filled in by different readers in different ways" (*After Bakhtin* 159). As the old woman wants her audience to know, "vital language does not fix meaning." Also, "it does not even point toward meaning," rather, she believes, "it *arcs toward the places where meaning may lie*" ("Meditations" 132).

As works that embody a complex sense of reality charged with traumatic traces of painful past histories, Delbo's and Morrison's trilogies do not fix meaning. They also resist proposing a definite closure, and not only in the sense that the protagonists of the trilogies are unable to reach closure as most remain obsessed with the trauma of their pasts, but also in relation to the readers who, confronting the tragic (hi)stories of Delbo's and Morrison's characters, are denied a sense of closure. This inability by both protagonists and readers to let go is not only constructed through the aesthetic and ethical practices that Delbo and Morrison assign to their works. It is also hinted at in the idea that Delbo's and Morrison's narratives are meant to be open-ended. As Gary Morson has it, in another context, but that I will apply here, in Delbo's and Morrison's works, "truth" may be revealed, not by "a proposition," but "only by an unfinalizable conversation" ("Extracts from a Heteroglossary" 258). Willing to be truthful, rather than true, Delbo's and Morrison's literature of testimonials opens thus unfinalizable discussions, not only because they are inscribed in a continued need for working through stories marked with excessive trauma, but also because a constructive approach to healing must necessarily

involve some form of social exchange and communal embrace. This may explain why the trilogies have (hi)stories spelled, not by one individual, but by numerous authors and witnesses. Delbo and Morrison ascribe then, not only to themselves and their vital language, but also to witnesses, companions, or fictional characters involved in an irremediably disastrous past, the power to mean directly. Further on, Delbo's traumatized imagination and Morrison's dialogic one, more than fixing meaning, invite readers to move "*toward the places where meaning may lie*" ("Meditations" 132).

Delbo raises in her trilogy the question of a paradoxical quasi-impossibility, yet obligation, to testify to a traumatic event of genocidal death. In her work, she uses a suffocated, fragmented, and figural language. It does not only reveal an indispensable lucidity at remembering and transmitting her experience. It also exposes the dilemma around a deeply-felt necessity to remember—coincident with a profound desire to forget—the experiences that she, her companions, but also thousands of others for whom she speaks, survived—or not. In *Aucun*, Delbo engages in acts of retrieving ghostly and ghastly memories by transmuting their details into testimonial narrative. She also brings to light the intensity and incommensurability of the destruction. Not by undermining the memory of a tragically imposed deprivation of life and voice, but by inviting readers to explore the necessary silences of her text and having them respond to the partial mutedness of destruction, *Aucun* not only encourages memory. It also enables readers to sensitively connect to the spaces in which Delbo reveals the torment of the inmates tortured by cold, thirst, hunger. *Aucun* likewise has us draw on our own senses, and our emphatic perceptions, to recognize the anguish of the prisoners having to witness scenes of brutal death. By opening her narrative to her readers for them to identify, engage, and

respond to this fracture between the familiar and the extreme, life and death, she also asks them to ethically respond to the nature of what she experienced. *Une connaissance inutile* certainly addresses the uselessness of the knowledge she gathered. Excessive, the teachings of the camp undeniably remain engraved in her deep memory, that of the senses. Unable to shed the memories, she can recollect those sensations immediately. Delbo can feel, over and over again, exactly how Auschwitz was. She can acutely remember what lack of sleep or thirst really felt like. But by being so extreme and intense, will the readers, who are asked to perceive these afflictions in their own, familiar context, be ready to believe? Will they even care? Even though it is Delbo's deepest concern and wish, will the knowledge she gathered at such painful cost be instructive? While the meaning of her experience is not to be "given" through her words, but "produced" by an interaction between the readers and her text, the crucial character of her and her companions' testimonies is thus this: will her readers, people, the world hear her plea? Will they act upon it? The collective testimonies of *Mesure de nos jours* presume that the world did not hear, care or act after World War II about the fate of the prisoners. Mado, then, does not only remember "cette volonté qui nous tenait comme un délire de supporter, d'endurer, de persister, de sortir pour être la voix qui reviendrait et qui dirait." She does not only think of the voice "qui ferait le compte final." She is aware that that voice asks also, in "un vide glacé:" "pourquoi revenir si je suis la seule qui revienne?" Puzzled by the necessity to consider, however, and along with Charlotte and others of their companions, that their voices may not be heard, she declares, "Et me voilà, moi, mais morte aussi. Ma voix se perd. Qui l'entend? Qui sait l'entendre? Elles aussi elles voulaient rentrer pour dire. Et moi, je serais vivante ? Alors que je ne peux rien dire.

Vivante, alors que ma voix s'étouffe? Que nous soyons là pour le dire est un démenti à ce que nous disons" (48). As the indifference of a world that remained deaf to the horror of the camps inspired Jean Cayrol to write the following commentary after his release from Mauthausen, it is also implied, as in Delbo's, that the following question be faced by us. Namely, that even though the generation of those who survived the camps were indifferent to the inmates' pleas, does it mean that we, over half a century later, need to remain deaf as well? The concluding commentary of *Nuit et brouillard* has us wonder, as we read

Les déportés regardent sans comprendre.
Sont-ils délivrés ?
La vie quotidienne va-t-elle les reconnaître ?
- "Je ne suis pas responsable," dit le kapo.
- "Je ne suis pas responsable," dit l'officier.
- "Je ne suis pas responsable."
Alors qui est responsable ?

Au moment où je vous parle, l'eau froide des marais et des ruines reluit sur les collines décharnées,
Une eau froide et opaque comme notre mauvaise mémoire.
La guerre s'est assoupie, un œil toujours ouvert.
L'herbe fidèle est venue à nouveau sur les *Appelplatz*, autour des blocs, dans un village abandonné encore plein de menaces.
Le crématoire est hors d'usage.
Les ruses nazies sont démodées.
Neuf millions de morts hantent ce paysage.
Qui de nous veille de cet étrange observatoire pour nous avertir de la venue des nouveaux bourreaux ?
Ont-ils vraiment un autre visage que le nôtre ?
Quelque part parmi nous, il reste des kapos chanceux, des chefs récupérés, des dénonciateurs inconnus.
Il y a tous ceux qui n'y croyaient pas ou seulement de temps en temps.
Il y a nous qui regardons sincèrement ces ruines comme si le vieux monstre concentrationnaire était mort sous les décombres, nous qui feignons de reprendre espoir devant cette image qui s'éloigne
comme si on guérissait de la peste concentrationnaire,
nous qui feignons de croire que tout cela est d'un seul temps et d'un seul pays,
et qui ne pensons pas à regarder autour de nous et qui n'entendons pas
qu'on crie sans fin. (*Nuit et Brouillard*)

Along with the mutual and collective construction of the “stories” that Morrison proposes in *Paradise* comes also the possibility for constructing a legitimate and useful African-American story. Even though *Beloved* and *Jazz* leave little room for the reconstruction of a life and a future freed from pain and trauma, *Paradise* assumes another sort of instruction. It enables contesting and disabling hegemonic narratives that have shaped and threatened to fix as traumatic, not only an individual memory, but a cultural one as well. Even though the dislocations and traumas of a collective past cannot be undone for African-Americans, there is in Morrison’s work, the possibility for a new task at hand. It goes beyond reiterating the tragedies and the traumas of history that *Beloved* brings to light and in which Sethe remains captive. It also implies looking beyond the ghostly existence of rememories that are so impeding and threatening in *Beloved*. The rememories not only involve Denver in the trauma of an experience of slavery which she has never directly experienced, but also entangle Sethe in a cycle of guilt, similar to that of a survivor, for which there is no adequate reparation. Unable to regain a lost innocence, Sethe is thus physically and mentally consumed by the rememory, not only of slavery, but also of her killing of Beloved. While rememories haunt the living in *Beloved*, so do they in *Jazz*. With the second novel of the trilogy, Morrison likewise vividly dramatizes the cost of forgetfulness and historylessness. Not only do these come about because strong and nurturing family connections have been lost. They also exist in forms of failed parental involvement or support, as Violet and Joe have experienced. Likewise, they come across through the absence of an individual sense of life being worth living. And maybe also through too strong a shame or intense a

fear of confronting the self in order to build a future more promising. Unhinged by bereavement and lack of grounding, Violet's and Joe's lives remain at a dead end.

At the end of *Jazz*, Morrison extends, however, a new kind of invitation, which she reiterates in *Paradise*. Her powerful words of "Say make me, remake me" confirm the extent of her proposal (*Jazz* 229). Her request is to go beyond the entanglement of trauma, however profound and obsessive it has been. It asks us to consider what a dynamic relation to history might produce if there is an engaging in a communal, collective project of reconstruction. *Paradise*, indeed, offers a more affirmative position on rememory than does *Beloved*. It also presents more possibilities for actively taking charge of one's own and others' lives and futures than does *Jazz*. Remembering the past and retelling the history are only part of the solution, as revealed in *Beloved* and *Jazz*. They certainly are necessary steps in opening possibilities for mourning. But beyond that, Morrison also allows the readers to explore how a more communally active and immediate engagement with one's and others' lives and stories may, after all, have potential for growth. Because the stories of the women of the Convent are not erased easily, they continue to haunt the community of Ruby and the readers. But these, unlike in *Beloved*, are grounded in a constructive haunting. The dynamic, healing relationships and creative life forces that the women enacted can resonate in us. They can have a powerful and positive impact on our own lives. As Nancy Peterson puts it, as she discusses Morrison's trilogy:

Working through the history of slavery, of emancipation and Reconstruction, of great migration both north and west, Morrison's historical trilogy ultimately ends not by reiterating the tragedies and the traumas of history, but by trying to imagine shimmering possibilities, a new story of life "down here in Paradise."
(*Against Amnesia* 97)

While negative images of an upcoming future prevail in Delbo's and Morrison's, there nevertheless is a call in their works for upcoming possibilities. It requires that we remain attentive to being connected to not only our pasts, histories, ancestors, but also to our selves, and communities. Also, both Delbo's and Morrison's works gesture towards, rather than prescribe, the need for some kind of future community. By indicating what still remains excluded, their works signal the necessity for a future more responsible and a collectivity more inclusive. But rather than stipulating what forms these should take, both works guard against the disastrous consequences that some forms of denials or exclusions may produce. As a matter of fact, by pointing, in the words of Richard Misner, at the "Lack of words, . . . Lack of forgiveness. Lack of love," that may endanger future communities, Delbo and Morrison do not so much attempt to offer a resolution (*Paradise* 330). Nor do they attempt to provide a definite answer to the problem of the future, or to the question of the community. Their vision, in the words of Sam Durrant, is more like a "presentiment" or "promise," rather than a "fully realized representation" of what must be done. Their works, as such, come across as a reminder of a need that has to be infinitely renewed. As Durrant claims,

Like mourning, the attempt to redraw the boundaries of community must remain incomplete, unsuccessful; its success is measured precisely by its failure to complete itself, its capacity to remain perpetually open to the difference of the other, to the possibility of different others and not yet imagined modes of being. (*Postcolonial Narrative* 111)

Insofar as the postmodern and postcolonial testimonial works of Delbo and Morrison are addressed to communities of readers about future modes that are still in processes of becoming, they are thus meaningful. They are resonant in the infinite address that they can direct towards the here- and now-present generation, but also to the

future ones. As reminders of histories and pasts stories that have blatantly failed somewhere, Delbo's and Morrison's works not only make us ponder, as in the words of Richard Misner, on "how exquisitely human was the wish for permanent happiness, and how thin imagination became trying to achieve it" (*Paradise* 307). Their works also ask us to think of ourselves in terms of being endlessly yet definitely, responsible for a future and a community based not on a narrow definition of self-interested individualism grounded in reductive terms. But they call for bringing forward a future and a community that include the recognition of non-exclusionary forms of solidarity. This means grounding our selves and our future in values based on beliefs such as acceptance of the other, true companionship, and connection.

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Vita

Sylviane Finck is a doctoral candidate at Louisiana State University. She holds a Master of Arts degree in English from Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, Louisiana. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Germanic Philology--with a specialty in Dutch and English language and literature--at Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium. She taught English and Dutch in her country of origin before making Louisiana her home. An eagerness to explore the United States and expand her teaching experience brought her to Louisiana first as a Codofil teacher. She is currently teaching French classes at Brusly High School in West Baton Rouge Parish. She is a Louisiana and National Board certified teacher of World Language Other than English. Sylviane's general areas of interest are African-American, American, and Francophone literature and culture, critical theory, cultural studies, and philosophy. More specifically, her work focuses on postmodern and postcolonial literature and culture. The degree of Doctor of Philosophy which is conferred on her today at the Fall 2006 Commencement is the result of a lifelong commitment to learning. Present in the audience are her parents who came all the way from Belgium to honor her and share her joy. But the star of the day is Angelina, recently born to Sylviane. Whereas, for Sylviane, receiving a doctorate is a most rewarding experience, bringing a baby to this world is the most exciting one. Sylviane currently resides in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where she teaches and takes care of her daughter with her husband Oscar.