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## WRITING FICTION THROUGH THE CAMERA LENS: TONI MORRISON'S INTERMEDIAL POETICS

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**Abstract:** This paper analyzes the intermedial discourse in Morrison's novel *Beloved*. It brings to the fore the cinematic tropes with which Morrison's "politics of affect", to borrow from Massumi's syntagm, is interwoven. Drawing on Müller's concept of intermediality which shows the appropriations of art forms, this paper decodes Morrison's intermedial poetics. To engage with the trauma of history and the "Archive Fever," Morrison resorts to a visual medium, cinema, to weave a hybrid literary discourse that lies at the heart of the postcritical turn in cultural, literary and media studies. Filmic techniques such as "show, don't tell," "freeze framing," "close up," "dissolve," "off-stage" permeate Morrison's text. In *Beloved*, the infanticide is related through an "off-stage" strategy. Drawing on all these cinematic strategies, Morrison intertwines images, sounds, and words to relate the affective experience of the Sweet Home dwellers. For example, the strategy of one way communication of the cinematic language which leads to a closed communication enables Morrison to frame the marginality of her community.

**Keywords:** intermediality, affect theory, cinematic language, archive, memory, history, silence.

"What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence."

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*

Ludwig Wittgenstein's seventh proposition from his work *Tractatus* informs us that "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (translated by Pierre

Klossowski in 1961). Through this assertion, Wittgenstein invites us to read silence as a language, a language of the ineffable. Wittgenstein's claim is apt to capture the literary discourse of Toni Morrison. Indeed, "the wounded histories" (to use Nancy Peterson's term) that Morrison deals with are too extreme at times to be expressed in words. To give a big picture of Morrison's literary discourse, it would be more accurate to say, too, that what Morrison cannot speak about is sometimes passed over into songs or images. Morrison uses songs and images to engage with Derrida's "the archive fever", the silences, suppressions, and repressions of the national archives. The songs, images, silences, and the words go altogether to create a visual and aural narrative through which Morrison articulates the inarticulate. Morrison grounds the text on auditory cognition that is why the narrator contends in the exorcising scene that at the beginning there was nothing but a sound (305). Since the novel is not essentially a visual and aural form, Morrison turns to cinema/film to make whole her literary discourse. The cinematic discourse is grafted onto the text to overcome the inefficiency of the written discourse. In so doing, Morrison appropriates the cinema genre "to fuse it with her own intention" to paraphrase Mikhail Bakhtine. By borrowing from the cinema, Morrison implies that the cinematic discourse conveys certain ideas better than fiction. She admits, therefore, that the novelistic discourse has its own limitations that the visual image comes to complete. So, the purpose of the present essay is to show how the properties of the literary text intertwine with the aesthetic and cinematic tropes of Morrison's text. Drawing on Müller's intermediality, it analyzes the intermedial poetics of Morrison. It emphasizes the borrowings and appropriations of art forms that Morrison has recourse to craft her fiction.

This essay starts off with Morrison's cinematic treatment of sound, silence, and images. Images and silences are cinematic tropes that the novelistic discourse falls short in describing. But visually, within the framework of a cinematographic representation, the absence of sound is as meaningful as an image. There are many visual passages that both turn the text into a screen and position the reader as a viewer. Morrison was aware of the importance of silence as a message in human communication, as well as of the linguistic limitations of representing silence in a novel. The rest of the article continues with other cinematic techniques that Morrison uses in her treatment of time, space, silence, light/darkness, and other details. To emphasize the marginality, invisibility, and subjectivity of her community, Morrison

rejects the linearity of time. By using a discontinuous time, she deconstructs the received narrative of American history as progress by pointing up the price of that progress for African Americans. Through the use of cyclical time, Morrison relates the lack of agency and space of her community. They stand as either the “stranger within” or the incarcerated other. Morrison pays a great deal of attention to details, such as light/darkness, colors, rain, trees, and stones. These elements enhance her cinematic discourse. The light, for example, is a revealer in the corn scene since the scene takes place under the sunshine, which highlights the lack of privacy of Sethe and Halle. The sound of the corns and the rain turn this passage into a perfect cinematic frame.

Morrison ends Part II of *Beloved* with this sentence: “Almost. Mixed in with the voices surrounding the house, recognizable but undecipherable to Stamp Paid, *were the thoughts of the women of 124, unspeakable thoughts, unspoken*” (235) (Emphasis added). To narrate the silence or the unspoken thought of the women of 124, Morrison resorts to a cinematic device: silence. The unspeakable and unspoken thoughts of the women of 124 are an affective silence that binds the women of sweet home together. It is an affective silence that narrates the unspeakable trauma of slavery. It is part of the overarching muted experience that narrates the silences around the history of slavery. The reader can easily identify the voices surrounding the house as the songs that the newly freed- slaves sing to themselves and among them to recover from their psychiatric conditions (mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders). But the silent and unspeakable thoughts are so engraved in the inner minds of the characters that only a cinematic approach that focuses on a psychological reading of the text can point out. In this respect, Jamie Ann Rogers in analyzing the affective power of the ghost in Morrison’s *Beloved* writes: “The ghostly hauntings in Morrison’s *Beloved*, as well, insist on the materiality of affective forces across space and time...” (205). Through the affective power of the ghost, *Beloved*, along with the suppressed thought of the sweet home women, Morrison creates what Rogers calls “a politics of affect” (207); a term she borrows from Massumi’s syntagm. Through this “politics of affect,” the characters feel each other, so to speak, enabling even the reader to subcutaneously have the same affective experience. This shared affective experience engenders a collective memory since the affective experience of each character moves from its individual and private realm to become part and parcel of the collective realm. Also, the affect of the ghost binds together the displaced

bodies of the African subject. That is why Rogers argues that *Beloved* draws a lot from affect theory. To illustrate her claim, she writes:

Through physical haunting in the form the ghost Beloved, as well as through the theorizing of “rememory” throughout the novel, *Beloved* ties personal histories of the protagonists to a mythical “we” of African diasporic peoples, suggesting that memory functions affectively, moving from body to body across time and space. (210-211)

Rogers’ claim that Morrison theorizes “rememory” in the novel is evidenced by the fact that rememory functions textually as an extended metaphor throughout the text, meaning a metaphor introduced and then further developed throughout all or part of a literary work. Lynda Koolish in analyzing the predominance of memory in the text writes: “The narrative of the novel is structured as some aspects of memory are structured: disjointed, circular, insistent, urgent” (422). The recurrence of memory is necessary for Morrison to connect, on the one hand, the past and the present of her characters and, on the other hand, to picture the shuffling movement of space and time that her characters were exposed to. The disjointed and circular dimensions of memory allow Morrison to reject cohesion, logic, and linearity. In the same vein, Morrison endows memory with a property of urgency and insistence, which enables her to articulate the untamable and iterative aspect of her characters’ memory. Morrison strives to give a fifth attribute to memory: its ability to register and pass along silence. The affective silence with which the women of 124 commune builds on this fifth attribute of memory. Ella is able to communicate intimately with Sethe about her own infanticide through this affective silence (I will elaborate on this point in the next paragraphs). Also, textually Morrison has structured the narrative on silence and omissions. The omissions and silences in the text are rendered through an off-stage technique, and they give to the text its cinematic undertone since they create room that the reader has to fill in. Much information is hidden from the reader. For example, little does the reader know about Baby Suggs’ runaway children. Sethe’s infanticide is set off-stage. Much the same is true with Ella’s. All these crucial pieces of information buried in the text add themselves up to the bundle of silences. Also, as already mentioned, the unspoken words of the women of 124 are an affective silence that binds them together. Yet among this uniting affective silence, the one that connects Sethe and Ella stands out. Indeed, by the end of the novel, the narrator

relates Ella's ordeal at the hands of the "lowest yet." (301) The narrator further reveals to the reader that Ella: "had delivered, but would not nurse, a hairy white thing, fathered by the 'lowest yet.' It lived for five days never making a sound. The idea of that pup coming back to whip her too set her jaw working, and then Ella hollered" (305).

Ella's experience at the hands of the "lowest yet" is set off-stage as well; and even the name that Morrison gives to the plantation "124" suggests omission, erasure, silencing since the number 3 is left out, which alludes to the suppression and repression of the archives. Only the affective force enabling the women of 124 to feel each other allows them to pass on their respective stories in silence. It is through this affective force that Ella grafts her infanticide onto Sethe's. That's why in the exorcising scene, Ella is the first lady to holler so as to chase the ghost Beloved and her own ghost. These silences and omissions that the literary discourse deliberately leaves out gives to Morrison's text a cinematic feel. Morrison buries all the traumatic scenes in the text, which coheres with Wittgenstein's assumption that the ineffable must be passed over into silence. Also, Lynda Koolish elaborates on this rationale of Morrison's use of the cinematic trope of silence in these terms:

Absences, the things we as readers – and the characters themselves – do not know, figure strongly in the text, another reason why the novel has a cinematic feel. The camera works on missing information, on what's not there, on what the viewer must supply. The meaning of one scene, one frame is defined by the next. Morrison's omissions extract from her readers the maximum involvement in much the same way. (422-423)

As Koolish aptly articulates Morrison's literary discourse is like "a camera working on missing information." Thereby, it drives the reader/viewer to look for the omissions and silences and to make sense of them. To grasp these silences and omissions, Koolish uses the cinematic device of "relational editing". She draws on "relational editing" to analyze the affective force that makes possible the communion of the Sweet Home women. Yet their silences also separate them, inasmuch as hostility is also wrapped in silence. A good example is the hostile silence between Sethe and Beloved, and Beloved and Paul D. Beloved can't reconcile herself with the fact that Paul D is preventing her from having her mother's undivided love.

Koolish describes “relational editing” as: “a process which relate[s] separate scenes and even separate shots of the scenes to one another, thus, as it were, forcing the spectator to compare the two actions all the time, one strengthening the other” (424). Koolish points out three interesting passages of “relational editing” in the novel, two of which are worth analyzing. Sixo’s interrogation for allegedly stealing the shoat engages with Sethe’s theft from Sawyer’s restaurant. And Koolish makes the following reading of these two complementary scenes:

His (Sixo’s) theft is a stay against physical hunger; her theft is a stay against emotional hunger. Without any overt commentary from the narrator or characters about the interconnectedness of these two events, we as readers see not only the relationship each of these events has to one another, but the compelling social contexts which link an event during slavery to an event during its aftermath. (424)

Another instance of “relational editing” is the passage in which Denver and Beloved sit down together, and Denver feeding, nursing, Beloved with stories. Koolish reads this scene as “a healing reinscription of the primal scene of the theft of Sethe’s breast milk in the loving use of the verb ‘to nurse’” (424). All these instances of “relational editing” enable Morrison to reject linearity and chronology. The first instance emphasizes the lack of agency, space, and freedom. The restraints under which Sethe were under slavery still linger in her present life. Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization* can help us better grasp Sethe’s “emotional hunger” or invisible restraint. Foucault argues that the discipline of the asylum on the madman (the marginalized other) is so subtle that it makes fear reign “under the seals of conscience” (247). Foucault further explains: “Everything was organized so that the madman would recognize himself in a world of judgment that enveloped him on all sides; he must know that he is judged, watched, condemned; from transgression to punishment, the transgression must be evident as a guilt recognized by all (267)”

The fear that reigns under the “seal of conscience” is a carceral trope that recalls David Lyon’s concept of panopticon. The panopticon, as Lyon reminds us, “is an architectural design that was proposed by Jeremy Bentham in the late eighteenth century to facilitate the supervision of prisoners from a centralized location” (231). The inspection tower of the panopticon allows only the unidirectional gaze of the inspector. Schoolteacher can be considered as the “Sweet Home” panopticon inspector. The unidirectional gaze of the inspector of the panopticon engenders a

closed-communication. This closed-communication is a cinematic trope through which Morrison brings to the fore the marginality of her community. The panopticon induces in the prisoner a state of permanent visibility vis-à-vis the inspector, creating thereby a visual framework that assures the automatic functioning of power. Also, like statist language, the closed-communication censors the voice of the other since it negates the situation of a true interlocution and alterity. In this respect, Lyon writes: “the more stringent and rigorous the panoptic regime, the more it generates active resistance, whereas the more soft and subtle the panoptic strategies, the more it produces the desired docile bodies” (3-4). Sethe has become a “docile body” since she is now subject to the subtle discipline of the panoptic. She is physically free but the panopticon confines and conditions her life. In other words, the restraints during slavery are replaced by that of segregation and they demand confinement, invisibility, and silence. Sethe, as the marginalized other, is then very similar to the madman that Foucault talks about. By dint of complying with the panopticon, Sethe experiences self-repression and self-discipline. She is convinced that she is constantly under surveillance. In addition, in the light of David Lyon's panoptic theory, we can interpret the plantation “Sweet Home” as a physical representation of the panopticon. Koolish’s “relational editings” provide here a powerful device through which disjointed scenes of closed-communication can be pieced together and interpreted as one linear corpus. Through “relational editing”, the reader/viewer can discern the interconnectedness of some characters and some scenes despite the apparent inner incoherence of the narrative structure. Other passages of “relational editing” allow us to see how the panopticon can be set as a voyeurism paradigm that further strengthens the power relation between the watcher and the watched. For example, Sethe is beaten to death by Mr Buddy for looking at him straight in the eyes. As a subject, she is supposed to be watched. This passage where Sethe claims the right to look at Mr Buddy is in “relational editing” with the passage where Sixo after eating the shoat tries to reason Schoolteacher why eating the shoat improves his overall property, and yet he is beaten by Schoolteacher to teacher him that “definitions belong to the definers-not the defined” (225).

These “relational editing” stress, on the one hand, a sharing of common experience, and on the other hand, they are allusions to an untamable past that turns itself into a series of ongoing present. In other words, the panopticon that imposes a closed-communication in the plantation prevails in the post-abolition era. The

passages about Sethe and Mr Buddy and Sixo and Schoolteacher expose a unidirectional communication in which there is no voiced signifier. For example, the Mr Buddy and Sethe exchange results in a speech-silence interaction since Sethe relates that “I looked right at him one time and he hauled off and threw the poker at me. *Guess he knew what I was thinking*” (93) (Emphasis added). “Relational editing” becomes a sort of constant mediator between the past and the present life of a people for whom the inseverable past always metamorphizes and rearranges itself before them. Morrison uses the term “disremember” to articulate the inseverable past that dogs her characters. The flood of memories or rememories that runs into the mind of Sethe at every turn, despite her efforts to block it out, shows that she bears indelible emotional stigmas that record the unvoiced traumatic history of slavery. Much the same is true with the other characters, they do not delve into their past to excavate buried memories, but these surge on their own. Koolish admits that she borrows the term “relational editing” from Vsevolod Pudovkin. Pudovkin thinks of “relational editing” as a kind of montage through which different scenes carrying the same meaning and significance are pieced together. This “relational editing” is made possible through close-up. Close-up gets the reader into the inner mind of the characters. Close-up captures the thoughts, emotions, and rememories of the characters. The mind of the characters becomes a text or even a screen through which the reader rather watches a psychological film. Hugo Münsterberg defines close-up as a process that:

turns to detailed points in the outer world and ignores everything else: the photoplay is doing exactly this when the close-up detail is enlarged and everything else disappears. Memory breaks into present events by bringing up pictures of the past: the photoplay is doing this by its frequent cutbacks, when pictures of events long past flit [among] those of the present. (74)

As Münsterberg clarifies, close-up not only enlarges an incident but also it gives it precedence over all the other ones. Through “relational editing” and close-up devices, Morrison crafts a visual artistic space where cinema and literature dovetail and overlap. Morrison uses this visual artistic space to narrate the Paul D and his peers’ escape scene. A purely visual communication structures the escape scene. In the escape scene, there is a visual communication that sets the tone for the actions to come. The narrator writes, “the eyes had to tell what there was to tell: «Help me this



mornin's bad»"; "I'm a make it"; "New man"; "steady now steady" (127). The eyes express what Morrison's characters really feel rather than the verbal conversation they are having. Through this strategy of eye communication, Morrison creates suspense. The close-ups of faces, eyes, are an economical way for Morrison to show the emotions of her characters. Also, in this cinematic scene, the chain is introduced to the reader through a close-up technique. The chain becomes the instrument, the driving force, that pulls forward the narration. The sound that Paul D and his peers succeed in making with the chain, along with their personal songs, participate in creating the music of this very cinematic scene. In the escape scene then, Morrison drives the reader to work on the visual and aural narration of the text. A close-up, as Alfred Hitchcock reminds us in "The Rules of Visual Storytelling", is used to emphasize the significance that an object has or will have in a film. This captures the centrality of the chain in the escape scene since it invites the reader to work on the visual information. In other words, the chain becomes part of the plot. Part of the escape scene runs like this:

The chain that held them would save all or none, and Hi Man was the delivery. They talked through the chain like Sam Morse, Great God, they all came up. Like the unshriven dead, zombies on the loose, holding the chain in their hands, they trusted the rain and the dark, yes, but mostly Hi Man and each other. (130)

The chain is not only presented in close up, but also it is turned into an instrument of communication. That is why Morrison compares the chain to the single-wire telegraph system that the American inventor and painter Sam Morse created. Other cinematic elements worth pointing out in this passage are the darkness, the rain, and the sound that they succeed in making by garbling the "words so their syllables yielded up other meanings" (128). All these elements add crucial information to this cinematic passage. The music and the absence of light are conducive elements in the escape scene that Morrison expresses visually and aurally. Beloved's narration of the Middle Passage is also visually constructed. Morrison makes Beloved say "how can I say things that are images" (248). By making Beloved raise the question about the difficulty of relating things that are image based, Morrison endorses the limitations of literary discourse. That is why Morrison treats language as a picture to answer Beloved's question. Also, through her question, Beloved is saying that what

she sees reaches the limit of human language, which signifies, too, that she is at the limit of her thought.

To better render the slave experience in all its multivalent forms, Morrison refuses to use punctuation throughout *Beloved's* account of the Middle Passage, which stresses also the continuity in the experience of the African captured subject crossing the Middle Passage. The filmic narrative frame of the Middle Passage that draws on intermediality answers the question that Morrison let *Beloved* ask "how can I say things that are images" (248). *Beloved's* account of the Middle Passage draws on the cinematic technique of "show, don't tell." Alfred Hitchcock explains that cinema tells stories through images and sound. In this respect, he asserts: "If it's a good movie, the sound could go off, and the audience would still have a perfectly clear idea of what 's going on." In *Beloved's* account of the Middle Passage, the camera becomes the ink that writes part of the story. Besides, the monologues and the oral/aural aspect turn this particular sequence into a complete cinematic passage.

In other passages, Morrison uses the eyes of the characters as a camera. Baby Suggs' sermon in the Clearing is partly related through the eyes of the participants. The narrator writes: "The company watched her from the trees. They knew she was ready when she put her stick down. Then she shouted, «Let the children come!» and they ran from the trees toward her" (103). The company's eyes give a panoramic view of the scene; the eyes of the company are turned into a camera through which the reader observes the beginning of Baby Suggs' performance. This idea of seeing and being seen is recurrent in the text. Sethe's rape in the barn is not only set off-stage but also the only eye-witness of the incident, Halle, refuses to relate what he saw. The narrator just informs the reader that "But whatever he saw go on in that barn that day broke him like twig" (81). After watching Sethe raped, Halle disappears in the text. Through this technique of effacement, Morrison prevents Halle from giving his eyewitness-testimony. Like Sethe's murder of her baby, which is buried in the text, her rape is also buried. The only eyewitness of the scene has gone insane and has been erased from the narration. Halle is textually denied the possibility to articulate what he saw in the barn. This passage where Halle is denied the possibility to speak can be put in "relational editing" with the passage where Sethe bites off part of her tongue. Both passages body forth the silences of history. Also, this passage where Halle is the seer can be contrasted with the one where Halle and Sethe are being seen, watched in the corn scene. There is voyeurism in the Halle and Sethe corn scene. The

open-air scene, the sound, and the light enhance the visibility of this passage that is among the most cinematic frames in the novel. The passage runs like this:

Both Halle and Sethe were under the impression that they were hidden. Scrunched down among the stalks they couldn't see anything, including the corn tops waving over their heads and visible to everyone. Sethe smiled at her and Halle's stupidity. Even the crows knew and came to look. (31-32)

The light participates in the cinematic effect of this scene since it takes place at noon. In order to describe the effect of the scene on Sixo and the other Pauls, the narrator further writes: "It had been hard, hard, hard sitting there erect as dogs, watching corn stalks dance at noon" (32). Also, the effect of the water further enhances this cinematic frame. The narrator informs us that Sixo and all the Pauls "through their eyes streaming with well water, they watched the confusion of tassels in the field below" (32).

Another instance where Morrison uses voyeurism is the passage about Sethe and the engraver. The eyes of the engraver's son **become** the camera through which Morrison zooms in on the sexual favor that Sethe is giving to the engraver to have Beloved's name engraved in her tomb. Part of the passage runs like this:

Rutting among the headstones under the eyes of the engraver's son was not enough. Not only did she have to live out her years in a house palsied by the baby's fury at having its throat cut, but those ten minutes she spent pressed against dawn-colored stone studded with star chips, her knees wide open as the grave. (5-6)

This passage functions like a frame since the effect of the stars on the dawn-colored stone participate in the visual make-up of that ten-minute scene. Beloved's tomb is meant to materialize the affect of loss and absence. And at the same time, Beloved's tomb embodies paradoxically the thick love, guilt, and shame of Sethe. The tomb carries then a mixed and loaded affective force.

Paul D's kissing of Sethe's chokeberry tree mark is also rendered through a zoom in. The narrator describes here that passage: "When he saw the top of her dress was around her hips and he saw the sculpture her back had become, like the decorative work of an ironsmith too passionate for display, he could think but say, «Aw, Lord, girl»"(21). It is mid-way through the novel that the full story of Sethe's

scar is fleshed out to the reader. Mr. Buddy has inflicted the scar on Sethe for looking at him straight in the eyes. In Morrison's text, scar is a piece of writing on a voiceless body that engages with the silences of history.

Another technique that Morrison uses to allow her characters to retrieve their memories is the dissolve. Akin to a flashback, the dissolve is a cinematic process through which a character excavates his/her past experience. There is a magnificent dissolve triggered by the stone in the Clearing on which Baby Suggs gave her address about the primacy of the body over the spirit. Indeed when, years later after the death of Baby Suggs, Sethe comes to the Clearing, seeing the rock, she remembers the whole event as a stream of frames running before her very eyes. The passage runs like this: "In the Clearing, Sethe found Baby's old preaching rock and remembered the smell of leaves simmering in the sun, thunderous feet and the shouts that ripped pods off the limbs of the chestnuts. With Baby Suggs' heart in charge, the people let go" (111).

The old preaching rock is not only a symbol of memorabilia but also it has a magnet like affective force. That is why in contact with it, it makes Baby Suggs' sermon dissolve into a stream of true events unfolding in the here and now before the very eyes of Sethe. The dissolve reveals Sethe's emotional response to the affective force of the old preaching rock. The old preaching rock becomes vested with a human attribute typically reserved only for people and animals. Steven Connor's essay "Thinking Things" can explain not only the feeling and emotion that the old stone is endowed with but also the whole Clearing. Connor points out that things are "apt to embody thought" (1). The memory of Baby Suggs is always present in the Clearing; it falls into "the lack that is never missing." Indeed, as Connor points out quoting Derrida, "quelque-chose manque à sa place, mais le manque n'y manque jamais – some-thing is missing from its place, but the lack is never missing from it" (2). Also, the Clearing epitomizes unspoiled nature as illustrated by its ecocinematic portrayal. The ecocinematic portrayal of the Clearing is directly tied to the ideological underpinnings of Baby Suggs' sermon. Baby Suggs praises the most nature driven part of a human being in the most natural place nature can grant man. The Clearing is described as: "a wide-open place cut deep in the woods nobody knew for what at the end of a path known only to deer and whoever cleared the land in the first place" (102). Sethe's re-experiencing Baby Suggs' sermon in the Clearing can be put in 'relational editing' with the fact that she later recalls the sermon. The dissolve

reiterates the sermon, thereby squarely negating the fact that Baby Suggs has called it back. In other words, Baby Suggs' recalled sermon is still real and vivid in people's mind.

Elsewhere in the novel, Morrison makes a character bump into his or her memory or rememory through a dissolve. Through the dissolve, Morrison makes Paul D and Sethe's adult encounter overlap with their wedding night. The narrator writes: "Not quite in a hurry, but losing no time, Sethe and Paul D climbed the stairs. Overwhelmed as much by the downright luck of finding her house and her in it as by the certainty of giving her his sex, Paul D dropped twenty-five years from his recent memory" (24).

The silent thought that dawns upon Paul D, making him think about his first intimacy with Sethe illustrates that Morrison uses various cinematic approaches to introduce silence. Paul D's silent thought is represented here psychologically. When Ella attends to Sethe, the narrator reveals the silent thoughts running through Ella's mind: "Ella wrapped a cloth strip tight around the baby's navel as she listened for the holes - the things the fugitives did not say; the questions they did not ask. Listened too for the unnamed, unmentioned people left behind" (108).

These narratives grounded in silence are mainly intended to desperately bridge a gap and bring to the fore an overall experience of trauma that is not recorded in the archives. This passage where Ella attends to Sethe is significant, for it exemplifies the idea that some historical realities move beyond documentation. That is why Nancy Peterson argues: "some things are unspoken because reigning ideologies do not consider them worthy of notice. Other things are unspeakable because they are too traumatic to be remembered" (52). Because of this unspeakability of the wounds of the past, Morrison reduces them to silences archived only in the memory. Morrison sets rememory against memory so as to open a dialectic between forgetting and remembering. Memory embodies the constant experiences a character deliberately remembers while rememory represents the dormant experiences that a character represses but they come back against his or her own volition. Memory or rememory is therefore set as an alternative against the archives where the characters, lacking the agency of the historian or archivist, write down their own histories. Also, these instances of engraving their histories in their memory are cathartic since they allow the characters to safeguard and pass along their histories. In this respect, Rogers reads *Beloved* as a meditation on the reconstitution of a history which suffers from

the suppression and repression of the archives. Also, as we recall, Derrida in the *Archive fever: A Freudian impression* warns us about the selectivity and opacity of the archives. Another passage in the novel that builds on silence is when Paul D decides not to tell Sethe about her affair with Beloved, weighing his desire to tell the truth against the unbearable pain that truth would cause, he decides to silence himself. This passage runs like this: “He knew what she was thinking and even though she was wrong – he was not leaving her, wouldn’t ever – the thing he had in mind to tell her was going to be worse. So, when he saw the diminished expectation in her eyes, the melancholy without blame, he would not say it” (151). This passage is very cinematic since the real story is conveyed through the silence, the thought of the two characters. Much like the unspoken thought of the women of 124, the self-censored thought of Paul D drags the real narrative thread. Paul D’s silence becomes part of the narrative cognitive process in inviting the reader into the thought of the character.

Another cinematic technique that Morrison draws on is the visual cut. Morrison’s refusal to use a linear narrative is also articulated through the visual cut. A linear narrative suggests progress and continuity in the life of Morrison’s community. And yet it is obvious that a community that has been incarcerated and policed loses a sense of linearity. This non-linearity manifests itself in the cinematic texture of the novel via the visual cut. Visual cuts, as Lynda Koolish explains, allow Morrison to present a story from various perspectives. The visual cuts engender a defocalization as theorized in magic realism. Defocalization uses an indeterminate focalization and brings together two diverging perspectives. The constant blurring of realities along with the interweaving between different places in *Beloved* are rendered possible through the defocalization of magic-realism. Denver’s birth is a good example. It is told recursively and from different characters. In this respect, Koolish writes: “Each time she tells her history it is with a shade of difference that creates the cinematic sense of a series of still images, repeated with slight alteration to create the sixteen frames per second which constitute perceived motion” (423).

This recursive or visual cut technique allows Morrison to edit, so to speak, the narration of her characters. And since in *Beloved*, Morrison engages with the national archives by digging up the history of Margaret Garner, it becomes clear that symbolically Morrison revisits the national archives through the technique of visual cut. The visual cut becomes a process of making whole the archives. The

defocalization that causes indeterminacy and unlocatable perceptions intensify the clash in the archives since it lays emphasis on both the manipulation of time and perspectives. The visual cut goes also hand in hand with that of “jump-cut.” Koolish defines “jump cut” in these terms: “Throughout *Beloved*, but especially in the soliloquy chapters, Morrison employs the filmic technique of the «jump-cut» or discontinuous editing, to achieve a sense of discomfort, disorientation, disharmony, and confusion in her readers” (423).

Through this confusion and incoherence that the “jump cut” technique causes, Morrison mimics the constant displacement of the slaves. The latter feel either hemmed in their space or constantly moved around against their will. The visual scope of cinema is transposed onto the literary text, making more palpable that which would be barely noticeable. In so doing, Morrison creates an alterity between the two genres. They enrich each other. In the escape scene, for instance, the music becomes the soundtrack of the fictional action that Paul D and his peers are undertaking. Based on all these crossings of borders of all genres, *Beloved* is per se an intermedial text since intermediality is a metanarrative that legitimizes the blending and crossing of all art forms as Henk Oosterling suggests in “Sens(a)ble Intermediality and *Interesse*: Towards an Ontology of the In-Between.” *Beloved* allegorizes, too, the crossing of physical borders.

In conclusion, we contend that Morrison’s text is replete with cinematic tropes. Silences, images, and sounds are cinematic properties that Morrison plays with. Silence in Morrison’s text results from the limit of human communication and announces another alternative means of communication. Silence is then not nothingness but a subtle means to communicate the unknowable, the profound, and the inexpressible. Silence is part of Morrison’s soundscape. Each silence begets another that the character is incapable of breaking. These silences that beget silences that cannot be broken signal moments of drama and tragedy. These voids that can only be filled by silences speak to the archival gaps, the silences of history, and the opacity of the archives. In the face of language deficiencies and the ineffable trauma, Morrison lets silence speak. Yet by letting silence beget only silence, Morrison increases the opacity around the causes of the silence. This silence can also be a dissonance. To capture the ineffable trauma of her characters, Morrison resorts to ‘rememory’, a sort of “thought picture” (43), to describe the visualized world of her

characters' thoughts. Rememory is a visual medium through which Morrison tries to reify the unspoken thought of her characters.

*Beloved* emphasizes not only the power of memory but also of sound. Sound is multivalent in the text. In the escape scene, sound carries an ontological meaning. The soundscape is what Morrison invites the reader to hear, which echoes Robert Frost's maxim "ear is the only true writer and the only true reader" as he articulates in *The Letters of Robert Frost*. Sound is cathartic too. In the exorcising scene, the women use sound in their attempt to heal Beloved. The narrator writes: "In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like" (305). Morrison flips around here the genesis chapter to give anteriority and agency to the sound over the word. To Morrison, sound is life-giving. For a community that was legally denied literacy, the sound (orality) becomes a vital instrument for survival.

Another possible reading of Morrison's reference to the Genesis chapter is that the word is logos, meaning reason or rational discourse. When Morrison says at the beginning was the sound, she sets another epistemic paradigm based on auditory cognition. Since cognition designates the conditions through which human beings can develop and access knowledge, then by letting the sound supersede the word, Morrison presents the sound not only as a source of epistemology but also of affect theory. The sound conveys cognitive information that is outside of the framework of apprehension of the logos. The sound in the escape scene fulfills duly that role so do the sound in the communal healing of Beloved.

Overall, Morrison's text is transmodal since it always builds on other art forms. Also, in *Beloved*, by digging into the repressed and suppressed archives to retrieve the history of Margaret Garner, Morrison acts both like a film director and an archivist. Like each frame in a cinema that goes through a process of selection, editing and organization, each piece of the archives is exposed to the same sifting-through. This means that each order in the cinematic narrative is but the creation of the director. Much the same is true with the archives and the archivist. In other words, behind every cinematic text is embedded the ideology of the director. Similarly, any archivization carries the predetermined ideology of the archivist. But when all else seems edited or lost, memory or rememory is all that Morrison's characters have left; it is a cognitive and archival reservoir.



Reading *Beloved*, then, in the light of intermediality proves that Morrison is a great fiction writer with a deep historian and director feel. The latter dimensions are necessary for Morrison to lift aside the veils of those “memories within”<sup>1</sup> that make her community and its various diasporas. By the term “diasporas,” I refer to both historical displacement and geographical displacement of bodies of the African subject and the forces that drew them out, which engenders a dissonance among them.

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<sup>1</sup> I am referring here to Zora Neale Hurston’s *Dust Tracks on a Road* where she writes: “Like the dead-seeming cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went to make me.”

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