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“‘I want to be the language that wishes him well’: Listening to the (silenced) voices in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *Jazz*”

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“She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It’s good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind.”

Morrison, *Beloved* 231

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1. Introduction

I want to dream a nice dream for him, and another of him. Lie down next to him, a wrinkle in the sheet, and contemplate his pain and by doing so ease it, diminish it. I want to be the language that wishes him well, speaks his name, wakes him when his eyes need to be open.

Morrison, *Jazz* 161

Language, without a doubt, assumes a pivotal role in our desire to gain knowledge of the world as well as to construct ourselves as self and other. It is, in other words, through language that we seek to find meaning and a sense of selfhood. However, precisely due to its epistemological and psychological significance for both the individual and the collective, language is utilized and, indeed, manipulated by the powerful to enforce and maintain prevalent social hierarchies. Clearly, for the subaltern subject, the struggle for a language with which to construct knowledge and a sense of self proves particularly difficult. It is, therefore, pertinent to investigate how language functions as a means of both power and resistance.

Hence, as the quote in the title and the epigraph to the present introduction already suggest, the aim of my thesis is to scrutinize how Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Jazz* seek to *become* a "language that wishes [...] well" (*Jazz* 161). This 'benevolent' language, then, not only creates a sense of selfhood through the process of naming but also constructs knowledge as it metaphorically opens our eyes. As the two novels under consideration explore the struggle for such a language in two decisive moments of recent American history from a feminist and African American perspective, they revolve around the desire to reify the African American presence in the American consciousness as well as to re-piece the fragmented Black¹ subjectivity. Read by a wide and heterogenous audience, *Beloved* and *Jazz*, therefore, constitute powerful feminist and African American discourses in the (American) literary canon and culture. In short, then, I will argue that at the heart of the two novels is the wish

¹ While being wary of both the lower-case and the upper-case spellings, I will make use of the capital *B* for Black to refer to the people of African descent. This choice is mainly motivated by the arguments put forward by Gourley as she writes, "[W]e are a people, not a color [...] I choose Black as both an affiliation and an identity" (181). The use of the lower-case *b*, in contrast, will solely denote skin color.

to give voice to the silenced experiences of African Americans as well as to mend the split Black subjectivity. My thesis, therefore, sets out to investigate how meaning and selfhood are constructed and shaped in and through language in *Beloved* and *Jazz*.

To this end, Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia, dialogism, and double-voicedness serve as a valuable theoretical basis as they, taken together, envisage language as the battleground of socio-ideological forces and, consequently, as a medium available to both the powerful and the disempowered. Generally speaking, Bakhtin's theory of language proposes that subjectivity as well as meaning, albeit inherently dynamic and open-ended, necessitate dialogized language between self and other. However, the discussion of the Bakhtinian notions in relation to feminist and African American critical theories will indicate potential conceptual limitations in their application to African American women's literature. Consequently, I will contend that the notions of silence, the semiotic, and music must be incorporated into the theoretical framework. Finally, theoretical considerations will deal with the question of readership or, to be more precise, with the tension between a Black text and a White reader.

In the second part of my thesis, a dialogic reading of Morrison's *Beloved* and *Jazz* seeks to accommodate Bakhtin's concepts as well as silence, the semiotic, and music. The analysis will thus yield insights into how the novels interweave these notions to form an enhanced mode of communication and expression. The overall organization of both analyses is tripartite. With regard to *Beloved*, the general chapters deal with language, silence, and the semiotic and music. The analysis of *Jazz*, in contrast, incorporates the notion of the semiotic in the second chapter, which is concerned with the idea of silence. Hence, the analysis of *Jazz* considers language, silence and the semiotic, and, finally, music.

Lastly, the comparative conclusion will provide a succinct résumé of the theoretical discussion as well as indicate similarities and differences between *Beloved* and *Jazz*. It shall become clear that both novels conceive of silence, the semiotic, and music as meaningful features of the code which empowers us to construct meaning and selfhood.

2. Theoretical Approach

The aim of the first part of my thesis is to outline the theoretical framework within which a dialogic reading of Morrison's novels can be developed. Bakhtin's theory of language serves as a useful point of departure as it, broadly speaking, envisages meaning and subjectivity to be dependent on the dialogic use of language. Especially the Bakhtinian concepts of heteroglossia, dialogism, and double-voicedness provide a valuable theoretical basis in order to understand the dynamics that determine the struggle for language and, for that matter, power. After outlining them in the first section, I will set them into dialogue, so to speak, with feminist and African American criticism. I will argue that Bakhtin's theory of language needs to be supplemented by concepts from both feminist and African American criticism in order to arrive at a theoretical approach that allows for a dialogic reading which also takes silences, music, and the semiotic in literary texts into account. In the section "Bakhtinian Concepts Extended" I will thus elaborate on the necessity to consider other non-verbal forms of communication as alternative means of expression. Finally, I will demonstrate how Bakhtin's theories open up space for a White reader to interact dialogically with an African American text in order to rise above culturally prevalent constructions of race.

2.1. Bakhtin's Dialogic Imagination

Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process.

Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 294

The works associated with the prolific Bakhtinian school have contributed to a variety of disciplines. Within literary theory, for instance, studies on intertextuality and genres have drawn extensively on Bakhtin's writings. For the purpose of my thesis I will pay particular attention to the concepts of heteroglossia, dialogism, and double-voicedness, which were most prominently developed in Voloshinov/Bakhtin's² *Marxism and the Philosophy of*

² In the light of the unresolved question of authorship I will follow the prevailing practice of referring to both thinkers, Voloshinov and Bakhtin (cf. Morris; Díaz-Diocaretz). As the present thesis deals

Language and Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*. The three notions under consideration are, however, not easily separated from one another, since they are conceptually closely interwoven. The following discussion, therefore, does not attempt to artificially pull apart heteroglossia, dialogism, and double-voicedness but rather seeks to illustrate how they complement and enrich one another as well as how they, seen together, constitute Bakhtin's overall theory of language.

At the core of Bakhtin's theoretical elaborations is the desire to make sense of the world through language. Bakhtin, whose theories were strongly influenced by a Marxist tradition, emphasized that language needs to be understood not so much as a linguistic system than as a bearer of ideologies. Language, for him, is perceived as "ideologically saturated, [...] as a world view, even as a concrete opinion" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 271). His notion of language is thus a social one, given that he envisages language as a social phenomenon that is inextricably connected to ideology. Moreover, in Bakhtin's imagination, it is the idea of heteroglossia that describes language as inherently stratified into various socio-ideological languages. These languages, and, for that matter, each utterance voiced in heteroglossia, is incessantly subjected to two opposing forces. On the one hand, the centripetal force within language counteracts the inherent stratification of language as it furthers unification and centralization. Hence, it seeks to impose not only an authoritarian and monologizing socio-ideological language, but also its concomitant monolithic and finite version of truth. The centrifugal force, on the other hand, encourages the internal differentiation of language and thus allows for pluralistic versions of truth (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 272). Importantly, the incessant struggle between the two forces of heteroglossia takes place on two interrelated levels. On the micro level, it is the individual consciousness that is the battleground of heteroglossia's forces, while on the macro level it is the wider social realm that sees the opposing forces working against each other. Hence, it is an internal, subjective contest as well as a social one:

One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse. This process is made more complex by the fact that a variety of alien voices enter into the struggle for influence within an individual's consciousness (just as they struggle with one another in surrounding social reality). (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 348)

with language, silence, and the dialogue between author, characters, and reader, it seems ironic that the authorship of core writings from the Bakhtinian circle remains unclear. For a succinct discussion of the unresolvable question of authorship see Morris 1-5.

As a Marxist thinker, Bakhtin was acutely aware of the interrelation of the individual consciousness and the socio-ideological meaning production determined by political, religious, and cultural institutions. Nevertheless, as indicated in the quotation above, he maintained an optimistic viewpoint, for he regarded one's emancipation from the dominant and alien voices not only as highly desirable but in fact also as possible. To what extent such an assertion may, however, rather be an unrealistic one remains open to debate. This question will be of importance in relation to the intersection of gender and race and its effect on language use in literature. In short, Bakhtin was aware of the interdependency of social reality and one's consciousness, while arguing that through dialogized language one is empowered to liberate oneself from a unifying and oppressive discourse. Thus, while bearing in mind the ideologically fueled dynamics of heteroglossia, we now turn to the concept of dialogism.

Dialogism, a coinage never used by Bakhtin himself (Holquist 15), describes an epistemology that conceives the dialogue between self and other as a central prerequisite so that new meaning can be made. In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Voloshinov/Bakhtin writes:

In essence, meaning belongs to a word in its position between speakers; that is, meaning is realized only in the process of active, responsive understanding. Meaning does not reside in the word or in the soul of the speaker or in the soul of the listener. Meaning is the *effect of interaction between speaker and listener produced via the material of a particular sound complex*. (102-103; emphasis in the original)

In other words, his theory of knowledge presupposes dialogue as an epistemological necessity, since new meaning is only produced through language that has been dialogized between self and other. Meaning is therefore open, dynamic, and provisional. The antagonism between the dialogic and the monologic is "vividly polemical: the monologic is final, locked second-hand, dead, unresponsive, silent, whereas the dialogic is characterised by openness, relationship, and becoming" (Womack 73). In short, only in dialogic relation to and with another speaking consciousness are we able to construct meaning as well as a sense of self.

It is worthwhile to examine Bakhtin's perception of self and other in some more detail, given that the struggle for subjectivity through the (dialogic) use of language will be of central concern in the subsequent discussion of Morrison's novels. For Bakhtin, the self is, like language, always dialogic in nature as it can never exist on its own terms, but is dependent

on the reciprocating interaction with other. Put differently, the self is fundamentally determined by the dialogic relation between one consciousness with another in a specific time and space (Holquist 19). Since dialogue can never be static, but is per definition a dynamic interaction, it is not a matter of being, but rather of *becoming* in and through language (Pearce 89). Thus, while perhaps sharing a sense of contingency with most other postmodern ideas of subjectivity, Bakhtin's notion of self is not necessarily fragmented, for it is constantly reconstituted through dialogue (Pearce 9). Importantly, given that language is innately fused with ideology, this process of perpetually becoming is a deeply ideological experience for Bakhtin (*Dialogic* 346). Another crucial distinction between other postmodern conceptions of subjectivity and the Bakhtinian one can be drawn in relation to the idea of difference. For example, much attention has been paid to the conceptual similarities and differences between Bakhtin's and Saussure's theories of language, and for that matter between their differing conceptions of the self/other dichotomy. Even though Saussure and Bakhtin viewed differences between two signifiers (such as self and other) as a crucial precondition so that we can find meaning in words, their conceptions diverge significantly. While the Saussurean binaries imply a rigid 'either/or' dichotomy, Bakhtin emphasizes the dialogic relation between differences. According to him, differences are thus rather understood as 'both/and', as they can be reconciled in the idea of simultaneity (Clark and Holquist 7). This, however, does not suggest that differences are overcome or erased, as it were, but that both "separateness and simultaneity are basic conditions of existence" (Holquist 20). Indeed, the notion of simultaneity imbues much of Bakhtin's thought as his theories need to be viewed in relation to the (relative) concepts of space and time. Hence, dialogism conceptualizes meaning and self to be dynamically constructed in the relation between two interacting subjects "occupying *simultaneous but different* space" (Holquist 20; emphasis in the original). This notion may become clearer if we juxtapose Derrida's concept of *différance* with Bakhtin's dialogism. For Derrida, it is differences as well as the eternal deferral of meaning from one signifier to the next that lead to what we accept as meaning, whereas for Bakhtin, differences are always in dialogic relation to one another due to the notion of simultaneity (Pearce 10). In other words, without differences between two speaking subjects *and* their relation to one another in a specific time and setting we would not be able to find meaning in the world nor construct a sense of self.

Having outlined Bakhtin's dialogic imagination in somewhat general terms, I will now examine its implications for his theories in the field of literary criticism in some more detail. In the early publication *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Voloshinov/Bakhtin

already stresses that dialogue is not to be restricted to verbal face-to-face interaction, since it can also be understood as communication in and through written language (95). It is in later essays, however, that Bakhtin applies a dialogic reading to literary works such as Dostoevsky's and Tolstoy's novels and thus engages fully in literary criticism.

In Bakhtin's thought, the genre that not only allows for but encourages dialogic communication in literature is first and foremost the novel. As such, it is fundamentally defined by its multiplicity of speech types, languages, and voices that are all consciously arranged by the author (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 262). The incorporation of these features renders the novel an inherently heteroglot genre. Moreover, it is also characterized by an openness which invites the reader to enter dialogic interaction with the author, narrators, and characters. The readers assume a decisive role in the construction of meaning as they "can participate actively-which is to say, non-vicariously, on an equal plane-in the narrative" (Emerson 128). A dialogic reading of a literary text must acknowledge and explore the crucial role of the reader as communication and, hence, meaning are not possible without an addressee. Even if it appears as though a specific text was not directed toward a 'real' reader or addressee, it is nonetheless always in dialogic relation to a reader (Voloshinov/Bakhtin, *Marxism* 85).

In his discussion of the language associated with the novel, Bakhtin posits prose in stark contrast to poetic genres and styles which tend to resist different and alien voices and whose language he describes as "authoritarian, dogmatic and conservative" (*Dialogic* 287). Language for a novelist, however, is inherently stratified and plural (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 332). Social heteroglossia, as discussed above, therefore, rather finds its literary expression in the novel, as this genre does not only exhibit the implied author's speech but is also pervaded by the narrators' and characters' voices as well as by a diversity of other genres and styles (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 263). The main function of novelistic heteroglossia, put simply, is to communicate the implied author's intentions through someone else's speech in a "refracted way". Hence, an utterance in a novel carries both the implied author's and, for instance, the character's intentions. Such a double-voiced discourse, Bakhtin contends, encompasses "two voices, two meanings and two expressions. And all the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated, they – as it were – know about each other [...]; it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other" (*Dialogic* 324). The novel as a whole is heteroglot, lending space to a diversity of languages and speeches, while every single discourse found in the novel is additionally "internally dialogized" since it holds, according

to Bakhtin, the implied author's and the character's intentions simultaneously (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 324).

Bakhtin delineates different types of representing double-voiced discourse in novelistic literature, namely stylization, parody, and *skaz*³. All three types essentially denote dialogized language as they describe utterances that simultaneously encompass two or more voices or, to be more precise, their concomitant socio-ideological languages. Stylization is, put simply, the “artistic representation of another’s linguistic style” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 362). Someone else’s consciousness as well as the speaker’s or, in the case of literary production, the implied author’s consciousness are simultaneously present in stylized language, being both represented and representing.

Stylization becomes parodic when the intentions of the represented discourse are in opposition to the intentions of the one that is representing. In Bakhtin’s words, the aim of parody is to “depict a real world of objects not by using the represented language as a productive point of view, but rather by using it as an exposé to destroy the represented language” (*Dialogic* 364). Hence, in parody the author seeks to destabilize someone else’s discourse. The represented discourse may be an authoritative or dominant one which in the speaker’s mouth, so to speak, becomes subtly parodied. Language becomes the battleground of two opposed voices, whereof the one that is representing undermines the represented one. Moreover, parody, for it to be effectual, often draws on humor. Indeed, for Bakhtin, humor and parody are two interrelated forces that potentially lead to resistance against the dominant unifying language and its monolithic version of truth. They are integral to Bakhtin’s idea of the carnival. It would be beyond the scope of this chapter to deal in detail with his elaborations on the carnivalesque, but what is important for the analysis of Morrison’s work is that Bakhtin recognized the subversive power of parody and laughter: “Carnivalistic laughter [...] is directed toward something higher – toward a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders” (*Problems* 127). A sub-type of Bakhtin’s conception of parody is the hidden polemic, a strategy of representing someone else’s speech in one’s own in utterances that only imply the represented discourse. In hidden polemic, another’s voice, intentionally opposed to the speaker’s, is not reproduced, but only indirectly implied by which a “polemical blow is struck at the other’s discourse on the same theme” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 195). In the subsequent discussion of an African American approach to Bakhtin’s theories I

³ *Skaz* is a narrative device which “emulate[s] the phonetic, grammatical and lexical patterns of actual speech and produce[s] the illusion of oral narration” (Ehrlich 206).

will revisit Bakhtin's notions of double-voiced parody and hidden polemic in somewhat more detail as they prove relevant to the understanding of H. L. Gates's, Jr. concept of Signifyin(g). *Skaz*, the final method of representing double-voicedness, is generally defined as a narrative strategy that is formally close to oral narration, since it is characterized by unmediated, direct, and improvisational elements (Marcialis 81). For Bakhtin, it is essential to recognize the inherent double-voicedness in *skaz* (Bakhtin, *Problems* 198).

The process of infusing someone else's discourse with one's own so that an internal dialogue between the two can arise is not an easy undertaking. As we have already seen, language can never be a neutral medium from which one can simply draw, but it is always already claimed by someone else who filled it with their intentions and purposes. Appropriating it thus requires the speaker to seize it and there always remains the danger that some words "stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 294). Very much like the incessant struggle between the forces of heteroglossia, this struggle for appropriation of the language is an ideological one through and through. Even though Bakhtin elaborates on this notion mainly in relation to literary works in which the novelist appropriates alien words so they serve their purpose, it is important to bear in mind that this process of (forceful) appropriation permeates not only literary works but is part of our daily lives, too.

As already indicated above, Bakhtin maintained that it is possible to liberate oneself from the dominant discourses as well as to appropriate someone else's words for one's own intentions. But even though he continuously emphasized the importance of viewing (novelistic) language within its social contexts (e.g. *Dialogic* 300), he has been criticized for underestimating and even ignoring oppressive power relations (Pearce 10). I concur with Morris (9), however, that Bakhtin was aware of coercive power dynamics, but chose not to foreground them, considering that the ideological struggle inherent in social and novelistic heteroglossia is central to his argumentation. Nevertheless, the various forms of oppression due to gender, race, class, sexuality, etc. and their effects on language use and dialogue are indeed not explicitly addressed by Bakhtin. These issues form conspicuous silences, so to speak, in Bakhtin's texts as the lack of address is quite striking for the contemporary reader. In connection with this observation one may challenge Bakhtin's view that the appropriation of the dominant language for one's own purposes is a real possibility for those who find themselves victims of sexism and racism, for instance. In the following two chapters I will interrogate in how far the dynamics of oppressive power relations potentially silence women

and African Americans and thus deny them full participation in dialogic communications, while also indicating how Bakhtin's dialogism offers potential loopholes. In other words, I will illustrate how Bakhtin's theories have been adopted and adapted by feminist and African American critics in order to show that they in fact provide a conception of language that allows for resistance and emancipation in and through language.

2.2. Bakhtinian Concepts Revisited: A Feminist Approach

Feminist dialogics both articulates women's position within the patriarchal power structure and opens up the possibility for modification of that structure.

G. M. Schwab 68

While stressing the importance of social contexts, Bakhtin's texts remain prominently silent with regard to the significance of prevailing patriarchal structures that relegate women to a detrimental position in the struggle for language and participation in social dialogue. Despite this lack of concern regarding the relationship between gender and language in Bakhtin's writings, the concept of dialogism has been widely applied in feminist criticism. According to Pearce, for instance, dialogism proves useful for a feminist approach to a variety of issues, because it "touches the heart of what it means to be a feminist: [it is] a concept evocative of sisterhood, of the perpetual negotiation of sameness and difference, of our dealings with men and patriarchal institutions, of our relationship to a language which simultaneously is, and is not, our own" (100). The aspect Pearce mentions last is the most relevant point for my study, since the relationship between language and the intersection of gender and race, for instance, seems to underlie and determine all other relations. In the present section I will therefore deal with the question of whether women, who are socially constructed as the other gender, can find a voice in heteroglossia that they can claim their own. To this end, I will first examine feminist approaches to dialogism, whereupon I will then argue that Kristeva's concept of the semiotic, even though never used by Kristeva in direct relation to Bakhtin's theories, points to conceptual limitations of Bakhtin's dialogism with regard to feminist criticism.

In patriarchal societies, language is, without a doubt, utilized as a central tool to perpetuate and reinforce male hegemony. In the quote above, Pearce already alludes to the question in how far women can appropriate a language whose structures are historically determined by sexist ideologies. Linguistic determinism views women as systematically deprived of the possibility to make sense of the world through language, because patriarchy seeks to control language and, consequently, also meaning production. The dominant language in patriarchy, understood as fundamentally sexist, thus discriminates against women. This line of argumentation entails that the language, as it is essentially manipulated by male power, is beyond reach for women. Díaz-Diocaretz describes this experience as an alienation that arises due to the impossibility to grasp the world around us through language: “[W]hen we women speak or write we use a language which falsifies our female experience, a language whose codes and structures fail us, and this, in turn, alienates us, leaving us split between our own experience and the difficulties of articulation, provoking in us either ‘mutedness’ or silence” (124). In short, if we accept the viewpoint of linguistic determinism as valid, we are bound to regard women as perpetually silenced *in* the dominant language, given that language, for it is entirely subjected to male hegemony, operates as an independent sexist force that prevents women from constructing meaning.

In contrast to linguistic determinism, Bakhtin’s conception of language imagines a certain leeway for women as it affords them with the possibility of engaging in dialogue with other discourses as active participants as well as to utilize the ‘male’ word for their own purposes. In Bakhtinian terms, one could contend that the centripetal force of patriarchy seeks to impose a gender biased language that promotes male privilege. It is important to bear in mind that a feminist approach to Bakhtin’s dialogism does not necessarily envisage an overturn of the patriarchal language, but it is rather a new dialogic understanding of heteroglossia that recognizes prevalent power relations in patriarchy. To this end, the notion of feminist dialogics seeks not only to disrupt monologizing patriarchal discourses and to unearth marginalized voices but also to bring oppressive social contexts to the fore (Eigler 191). By implication, in heteroglossia, the unifying sexist language of male power can always only be one language among a multiplicity of other potentially subversive languages. Gender-sensitive language may not be the unmarked, default variant yet, but the tendency to demand non-sexist language in public discourses, for example, can be considered as an example of lived heteroglossia. The very existence of feminist discourses thus illustrates Bakhtin’s concepts of heteroglossia and dialogism. In the same vein, notions of feminism

itself as homogenous and unitary must yield to a pluralistic, inclusive, and differentiated conception of feminism (Eigler 192).

But not only such (pertinent) discussions on language policies demonstrate the ideological struggle of the various languages in heteroglossia. On a deeper level, the Bakhtinian notion of double-voicedness, discussed above, allows for every single utterance to become a bearer of a diversity of intentions and purposes. The word, for Bakhtin, is always open, non-finite and in dialogic relation to another word. Therefore, women may use the language of male hegemony, but since the word itself is predisposed to be filled with new intentions, women are empowered to appropriate it and make it 'their own' (Díaz-Diocaretz 130). In Bakhtinian terms, women's language may thus be understood as double-voiced, for women are faced with the task of appropriating masculinist discourses. In short, the crucial difference between (feminist) linguistic determinism and 'feminist dialogics' is that the former views language as essentially male-dominated, monolithic, and static, while the latter recognizes the possibility of populating masculinist language with a female voice. In that sense, in contrast to the monologizing language of male supremacy, women's language is perceived as inherently dialogic, polyphonic, and plural (Herndl 11).

There is, however, much contention as to whether feminist dialogics implies that women's speech is essentially an appropriation of masculinist discourses or whether there can be a language that is distinctly feminine. For example, woman tends to be understood by means of opposition to man as she is viewed in a subordinate position to man. Woman, in other words, tends to be defined in relation to man, as his Other. Hence, one might wonder whether there is another language, a truly 'feminine language', so to speak, which is *not* simultaneously the language of the Other. In the following I will illustrate three different approaches to this problem, all of which combine a feminist viewpoint with Bakhtin's dialogism. While all three of them are deeply concerned with the notion of otherness in relation to language, they differ significantly in their views with regard to the question of whether there can be a feminine language.

Herndl, for instance, deals with this dilemma at length and observes that women can never know whether the language they use for their purposes is truly their language or the language that patriarchy assigns to them. Drawing on Bakhtin's dialogism, she maintains that woman, defined as the Other, is limited to "speaking man's language [...] in a refracted, masculine-defined way" (16). This position intimates that women are unable to find a language truly

their own. The language they speak is always the one culture ascribes to them, even though they may succeed in appropriating it. In literature, she argues, the woman artist writes as “not-man” in a language that is not her own. Hence, caught in the language of the Other, the woman is bound to speak “for the man, reinforcing *his* ideas of her” (Herndl 16; emphasis in the original). In other words, woman may be enabled to appropriate the language of male hegemony, but the language she speaks will remain nonetheless the language of the other. A ‘feminine language’ as such cannot exist in patriarchy.

Díaz-Diocaretz, in her feminist response to Bakhtin’s dialogic imagination, in contrast, arrives at a fundamentally different conclusion. For her, Bakhtin’s dialogic conception of double-voicedness deconstructs the male/female dichotomy. As a consequence, the notion of woman’s language as necessarily the language of the other can no longer be upheld:

In Bakhtin the very nature of voice includes ‘other-voicedness.’ From this it follows that the construct ‘a woman’s voice’ is not dualistically formed by ‘male and female language,’ nor is woman’s voice the voice of ‘the other,’ or female because opposed to man’s voice as essentialist feminist axioms have established; nor is the ‘other-voiced-ness’ restricted to women’s, or ‘female’ language or women’s writing. (Díaz-Diocaretz 132-33)

Hence, for Díaz-Diocaretz, the question of a purely ‘feminine language’ is futile as she argues that it must logically follow from Bakhtin’s dialogic understanding of language that every language is inherently other-voiced. Her reading of Bakhtin radically undoes the gender-binary and unhinges the construction of otherness regarding women’s speech. Instead of viewing woman defined *as* the other she demands a shift toward investigating “woman and the other”, whereby differences are not resolved or ignored, but rather recognized and viewed within social contexts (Díaz-Diocaretz 136).

Yet another viewpoint is articulated by G. M. Schwab. She draws on Irigaray’s metaphor of the female body in order to communicate a sense (and sensuality, one may add) of the particularities of women’s writing. Notwithstanding the centrality of otherness, as she explicitly draws attention to sexual differences, she views woman’s speech in entirely positive terms:

The morphology of the female body, which has erogenous zones all over, anywhere from head to foot, and where eroticism is not centered, focalized in a single organ, becomes a metaphor through which to grasp a textuality which is diverse, plural, circular, centrifugal – in fact, multivoiced and dialogic. ‘Women’s writing’ is no more a ‘representation’ of the female body than phallogocentric discourse is a ‘representation’ of the penis. Women’s writing is a textual strategy in precisely the

same way as phallogocentric discourse is a textual strategy: the one is open dialogism, the other that closed off dialogism we have called monologism. (G. M. Schwab 65)

The image of the female body and the concomitant emphasis on corporeal differences evident in G. M. Schwab's quotation clearly posits woman as the other. Nevertheless, this position grants woman with the privilege of dialogic speech, while ascribing monologic language to man. According to Irigaray, language is the site where women's oppression is materialized as well as where it must be encountered and fought. In her metaphor of the female body, Irigaray thus consciously articulates woman's otherness and simultaneously challenges the prevalent construction of female sexuality as absent (G. M. Schwab 66). Hence, Irigaray and G. M. Schwab share the opinion with Herndl, for instance, that feminine language is the language of the other, but, importantly, for them, it is a dialogic language that enables women to articulate their otherness and at the same time defy it, as it reveals male hegemony as monologic. In other words, the dialogic and multivoiced nature of woman's language, as it is reflected in the female body, has the power to articulate woman's otherness as well as to deconstruct male monologism.

Having investigated three different feminist approaches to dialogism, I will now turn to Kristeva's concept of the semiotic as it proves relevant to Morrison's writings. Viewing it in relation to Bakhtin's theories, I will demonstrate that Kristeva's semiotic can be conceptualized as a feminine form of subversion in patriarchal heteroglossia. This exploration should thus be considered yet another attempt to read Bakhtin's dialogism through a feminist lens with the aim of bringing a new perspective to the discussion on the relation between gender and language. Even though Kristeva deals extensively with Bakhtin's writings in her elaborations on intertextuality, she does not relate dialogism and heteroglossia directly to her notion of the semiotic.

Her semiotic theory of language is heavily influenced by Lacan's psychoanalytic concept of the Symbolic. Given that Lacan's theories are to be located within psychoanalytic thought, it is not surprising that sexual differences are central to his notion of the Symbolic and, consequently, to Kristeva's semiotic. One may thus keep G. M. Schwab's quote on sexual differences cited above in mind since it curiously reflects much of what constitutes Kristeva's semiotic. Lacan's Symbolic order describes the paternal law which demands the split of the pre-Oedipal mother/child dyad and the child's subsequent acculturation. Lacan's Father, or *le Nom du Père*, is the "representative of language and society" whose presence compels the break-up of the mother/child fusion (Jones 57). The Symbolic is the paternal

language that essentially defines culture and represses the pre-Oedipal libidinal drives between mother and child. The Symbolic order is another way to describe and analyze patriarchal structures. In her search for potential forms of subversion in communication, Kristeva conducted research on early-childhood language acquisition, focusing on the close relation between mother and child. She chose to call the various forms through which mother and child enter non-verbal dialogue “semiotic”, including, for example, “rhythmic, playful nonsense” (Jones 59). This pre-Oedipal phase is crucially characterized by the symbiotic bond between mother and child as well as the child’s oral and anal drives. The semiotic is therefore, for instance, expressed by the child’s echolalia, the “gurgling and babbling noises of babies that resemble a musical, rhythmic sound and that lack sense, meaning and structure” as well as in glossolalia, a form of chaotic and psychotic speech (Schippers 26). The transition from the semiotic to the Symbolic is for both Lacan and Kristeva a process engendered by the psychoanalytic notions of the mirror stage and castration (Kristeva, “Revolution” 100-101). The intervention of the father, represented by the phallus, in the pre-Oedipal symbiosis of mother and child leads to the child’s entrance into the Symbolic.

It is crucial to bear in mind that for Kristeva it is the perpetual interplay of *both* realms that constitutes the essence of language. The Symbolic and the semiotic are two inseparable modalities of language, since without the Symbolic, the semiotic would not be intelligible (Kristeva, “Revolution” 92). In Morrison’s writings, for instance, this dependency on both aspects of language is clearly visible. Considering that Kristeva’s theories are deeply indebted to psychoanalytic thought, it is pertinent to reiterate that the Symbolic is related to the patriarchal culture, whereas the semiotic describes the pre-Oedipal mother/child relation. In other words, the two modalities are gendered, as the Symbolic and the language associated with it are perceived as masculine, while the semiotic is a feminine way of expression (Schippers 26). As already indicated, the Symbolic order seeks to repress the sounds and rhythms that constitute the semiotic, while enforcing and perpetuating the paternal language. In Bakhtinian terms, one could thus contend that this language which is imposed by the Symbolic is indeed the unitary, monologic, and dominant language in patriarchal culture. Interestingly, in Butler’s critical response to Kristeva’s notion of the semiotic, her description of the function of the paternal language echoes the centripetal function of Bakhtin’s unitary language: “This language, in turn, structures the world by *suppressing multiple meanings* (which always recall the libidinal multiplicity which characterized the primary relation to the maternal body) and *instating univocal and discrete meanings* in their place” (101; emphasis added). In other words, the language of the father seeks to repress the

diversity of meanings that surface in the relation between mother and child as well as to situate itself as the dominant, monologic language in patriarchy. It is a language of logic, linearity, and formality, while the semiotic is characterized by sounds, repetition, and rhythm. It is the semiotic which is for Kristeva a site of resistance as it constantly interferes with and subverts the paternal language. As the recurrence to the pre-Oedipal phase is, however, prevented by the Symbolic, Kristeva identifies subversive forms of communication in art that display features characteristic of the semiotic.

For example, a concrete form of reifying the semiotic relation with the maternal is poetic language (Kristeva, *Desire* 136). Kristeva visualizes poetic practice as a manifestation of the semiotic which expresses the child's echolalia as well as the rhythmic and musical dialogue between mother and child. Poetic language therefore constitutes a semiotic and subversive language in heteroglossia. Another "signifying practice" of the semiotic is found in music (Kristeva, *Desire* 134). As a non-verbal expression of the semiotic, music can also be understood as yet another semiotic 'language' in heteroglossia. In short, semiotic features such as rhythm, repetition, and glossolalia, expressed specifically in poetic language and music, are feminine forms of subversion of the patriarchal language. This, of course, challenges Bakhtin's theory of language in so far as he envisions the poetic genre as necessarily monologic in nature as its rhythm, for Bakhtin, constitutes a univocal discourse that represses dialogization. Music and other signifying practices of the semiotic, however, should be recognized as alternative, feminine forms of resistance against the unifying force of the paternal language. I will therefore argue below that Bakhtin's theory of language must be revised so it incorporates rhythm and music as feminine forms of subversion in heteroglossia.

So far, I have dealt with a number of feminist responses to Bakhtin's work. Although all of them approach dialogism from different feminist perspectives, none of them acknowledges explicitly that feminism itself must be conceptualized as multivoiced. I have already alluded to the necessity of discarding a monolithic conception of feminism in the light of dialogism and heteroglossia. In view of this and since my literary analysis will investigate two novels that deal with African American women, it is pertinent to examine African American feminist criticism of Bakhtin's work, whereupon I will then turn to a more detailed discussion of an African American approach to Bakhtin's theories.

If the search for and appropriation of a language is difficult for White women, it is an even harder endeavor for women who belong to ethnic minorities or other groups that suffer from discrimination. For Black women, the task of finding a means of expression is complicated by the fact that they are doubly-othered due to White male hegemony. In feminist discourse, it must thus be recognized that Black female subjectivity is in a positionality that is fundamentally determined by both sexism and racism. The intersection of gender and race is for some critics, however, seen rather as a condition that liberates Black women from the dominant language, as O'Connor, for instance, argues that "the more discourses that a woman can find herself an intersection of, the freer she is from one dominating voice, from one stereotypical and sexist position" (202). Furthermore, Morrison herself states that the intersection of race and gender gives "access to a range of emotions and perceptions that [are] unavailable to people who [are neither black nor female]" (in Caldwell 243). Moreover, according to Henderson, Black women are enabled to "speak in dialogically racial and gendered voices to the other(s) both within and without" (259). In her view, Black women can enter a dialogue both with others (without giving up their own differences) and with the 'other' that constitutes their own subjectivity. Drawing on both Kristeva and Bakhtin, Henderson further argues that Black women inevitably find themselves "speaking in tongues" as they are bound to "speak in a plurality of voices as well as in a multiplicity of discourses" (262). For her, Black women's speech is always found in Kristeva's glossolalia as well as in Bakhtin's heteroglossia, since "speaking in tongues", she continues, "connotes both the semiotic, presymbolic babble (baby talk), as between mother and child – which Julia Kristeva postulates as the 'mother tongue' – as well as the diversity of voices, discourses and languages described by Mikhail Bakhtin" (Henderson 262). Indeed, Henderson is not alone in postulating otherness as a linguistic and, consequently, epistemological privilege. Rigney (2) and Hale, too, view the intersection of gender and race in positive and liberating terms. In their opinion, it indeed grants the Black woman with the capacity to speak dialogically.

Bakhtin's theories lend themselves to a variety of feminist approaches that grant women the power of expression and resistance in language and the semiotic. Nonetheless, there are undoubtedly also patriarchal forces and dynamics that succeed in rendering women speechless and mute. Women's silence in real life as well as in literature must be recognized so the silenced voices can be unearthed. Before dealing with this notion, however, a theoretical dialogue between Bakhtin's theories and African American criticism will

demonstrate in how far Bakhtin's writings lend themselves to African American literary criticism.

2.3. Bakhtinian Concepts Revisited: An African American Critical Approach

I am a black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive 'othering' of people and language which are by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable in my work.

Morrison, *Playing x-xi*

Since Bakhtin's theories conceptualize language as the battlefield of social and ideological forces, they trigger discussions of the significance and role of language for the individual subject in the context of racial discrimination. In African American criticism, Bakhtin's notion of double-voicedness, for instance, proves not only useful to the understanding of Du Bois's famous notion of double-consciousness, but also serves as a basis for a fundamental re-interpretation of the Du Boisian concept. Moreover, Bakhtin's conception of parody as double-voiced discourse also underlies H. L. Gates's, Jr. concept of Signifyin(g).

During and after slavery the power over language inevitably came to stand for freedom and emancipation for African Americans. Slave masters consciously enforced a language policy whose major aim was to render the slaves inarticulate as well as illiterate and unable to communicate. Slave masters saw to it that slaves from the same African tribes and geographical areas were separated, so that slaves whose dialects and languages were not mutually intelligible were brought together. This eventually led to the loss of the African languages and the slaves' acquisition of the masters' language in order to communicate (Cataliotti xiii). This historical background clearly has a bearing on African American literature and on how writers self-consciously deal with language and the question of an 'authentic' Black voice. African American quests for voice are regarded as one of the most important tropes in the African American literary tradition (Gates, *Signifying* 239). In slave narratives, for example, one of the genre's central features is the slaves' claim of a voice in which they are empowered to speak about the horrors of slavery (Step 3). Similarly, the predominant theme in Z. N. Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is the protagonist's emancipation through the acquisition of a voice. Unsurprisingly, African American writers

tend to be self-conscious in their language use. Audre Lorde asserts that “it is necessary to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak, but the truth of that language by which we speak it” (43) and Morrison, famous for her many reflections on language, engages throughout her work, both fiction and non-fiction, critically with the question of how she as a Black woman writer can utilize a language that is historically intertwined with White cultural hegemony (e.g. *Playing x-xi*). Language, for them, can never be a mere medium of expression: “The Black creative writer understands that it is not yet time – and it might not ever be possible – for a people with hundreds of years of disenfranchisement and who since slavery have venerated the intellect and the written word to view language as merely a system of codes or as mere play” (Joyce 341). From this it should become clear that language, for many African Americans, is historically burdened with the weight of institutionalized racial discrimination and its consequences.

Du Bois, the pre-eminent modern intellectual, critic, civil rights activist, and author, discussed the effects of racism on the subjectivity of the self-conscious individual. For him, the “color line” (19), that is, the continuing racial segregation and discrimination, posed the greatest problem for twentieth century America. It is Du Bois’s much quoted elaboration on double-consciousness in his essay “Of Our Spiritual Strivings”, published in *The Souls of Black Folk*, that forcefully introduces and describes the African American’s precariously split subjectivity:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois 3)

The notion of double-consciousness refers to the split identity caused by the painful internalization of racist White stereotypes in the African American psyche as well as to the internal conflict stemming from being both and simultaneously neither African and American. In the passage above, Du Bois thus evokes an image of the African American’s soul as violently broken in two. Racism, for Du Bois synonymous with the American experience, causes this irreversible split in the Black subject between their true self and the self that is inflicted on them by White hegemony. The true self, for Du Bois, is hidden behind a veil that White society imposes on the Black subject as early as at their birth. Neither the African American nor the Whites can see the true Black subject, since it is irretrievably

concealed by the veil (3). The self that is seen is a falsified one, distorted by racism, which the White society mistakes as the African American. The veil, in other words, casts an invisibility onto the true Black self, erasing them also from history (Hale 450). Nevertheless, the African American is, for Du Bois, “gifted with second-sight” (3) which allows them to become aware of the veil and the hidden true self, although never really experiencing it. The identity of the African American, locked away behind racism and its veil, resists reification in language (Hale 454). In short, the African American knows that their inner self is hidden by the veil of White supremacy, even though they fail to see it and cannot render it visible in language.

This unavoidable split in the African American consciousness is naturally also evidenced on the level of language use, as Du Bois continues explicating in “Of the Faith of the Fathers” that “[s]uch a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to *double words* and double ideals” (96; emphasis added). The notion that African Americans are, due to their social, cultural, and historical positionality, bound to speak “double words” invites, of course, comparison with Bakhtin’s theories. On the one hand, it is clearly reminiscent of his idea of double-voicedness, according to which a word or an utterance is always to some extent or another filled with two or more voices. Double-voiced discourse, it is important to bear in mind, does not only hold two voices, but also their concomitant meanings and intentions in dialogic relation (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 324). On the other hand, the concept of double-consciousness and its linguistic manifestation in “double words” (Du Bois 96) call to mind Bakhtin’s assertion that “[c]onsciousness finds itself inevitably facing the necessity of *having to choose a language*” (*Dialogic* 295; emphasis in the original). In Bakhtin’s epistemology, it is only in and through dialogized language that one can gain consciousness as well as (momentarily) make sense of the world. Bakhtin’s concept of double-voicedness thus affords the African American with the possibility to articulate their double-consciousness. Double voice, in other words, essentially makes up the languages that, in turn, constitute double-consciousness (Hale 447). While Du Bois envisages the African American as deprived of the means to restore and make visible their racial identity, Bakhtin’s theory of language provides African Americans with a model of language with which they are empowered to articulate their hidden self. Such a reading recognizes double-voicedness as a fundamental constituent of an African American discourse.

This approach imagines the African American's positionality as a vantage point from which they gain an epistemological advantage over Whites as well as the linguistic means to reveal the limits of White hegemony. At this point it is necessary to briefly return to Du Bois's notion of double-sight in order to illuminate more clearly how Bakhtin's idea of double-voiced discourse turns the "Du Boisian crisis of subaltern invisibility into a Bakhtinian triumph of self-articulation" (Hale 448). The privilege of double-sight grants the African American with the ability to not only become aware of the veil and of what is beneath it but also with the knowledge that the true Black self is beyond the control of White vision, too. The African American subject, in other words, becomes conscious of the limited view of White hegemony, as they know of the existence of the hidden self, whereas White society perpetually confuses what they see with the true African American. This knowledge together with Bakhtin's view that language constitutes consciousness and thus social identity pave the way for the Black subject to articulate the existence of their subaltern identity. Such a view point affords the African American subject with the power to make use of language and to articulate the limits of White hegemony. Hale's argumentation for this interpretation of Du Bois's and Bakhtin's theories fittingly conjures up an image of colonization: "Bakhtin's description of language as a container for multiple social identities means that the invasion of the African American's physical body can be countered by the African American's own invasion of the hegemonic linguistic body" (460). This invasion and mastery of language is, in Bakhtinian terms, the appropriation of (double-voiced) words that are already serving someone else's intentions (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 294). Such an appropriation demonstrates the constructedness of hegemonic language as well as the limitations of White oppression (Hale 461). In short, Du Bois's African American becomes aware of the limits of White control and through the appropriation of Bakhtin's necessarily double-voiced language, they are empowered to reveal the limits of and undermine White hegemonic rule.

The notion of resisting the dominant discourse via the use of "double words" (Du Bois 96), or for that matter through "double-voiced discourse" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 324), also fundamentally defines the function of Gates's concept of Signifyin(g). Gates draws on the topos of the Signifying Monkey as well as on Bakhtin's double-voicedness in order to describe the discursive phenomenon he terms Signifyin(g). Having its origins in the trickster figure of African mythology, the Signifying Monkey has established itself as a central theme in Black oral traditions of New World Pan-African cultures (Gates, *Signifying* 4-5). The oxymoron Signifying Monkey denotes "the ironic reversal of a received racist image in the Western imagination of the black as simianlike". As a subversive form of discourse, the

Signifying Monkey both repeats and revises language in “one deft discursive act” by which it makes fun of the White suppressors (Gates, *Figures* 236). But the Whites who are the object of the jokes and puns miss the hidden meanings of the Signifying Monkey, because it is Signifyin(g): Speaking and acting in innuendos, gestures, and implications. In other words, in the context of Black expression, Signifyin(g) opens up an array of hidden meanings. Gates chose therefore to distinguish the Black signifier from the White one with the use of the upper case as well as with the bracketed final g which is also redolent of the African oral tradition (Gates, *Signifying* 46). He also clearly delineates the conceptual similarities between the notion of Signifyin(g) and Bakhtin’s double-voicedness, indicating that in Black oral traditions parody and the hidden polemic in particular are fundamental discursive strategies (Gates, *Signifying* 110-11). Bakhtin’s ideas of parody and the hidden polemic designate the utilization of someone else’s hostile words for one’s own intentions that are in direct opposition to the intentions of the other. Indeed, Signifyin(g) constitutes an African American discursive strategy of Bakhtin’s hidden polemic, because it is, too, defined by the use of allusions and implications with the aim of subtly undermining the other’s discourse (Bakhtin, *Problems* 195).

During slavery, for example, Signifyin(g) enabled slaves to publicly poke fun at their White masters even while they were still in earshot (Peterson 765). Another manifestation of Signifyin(g) is, according to Gates, located in jazz music. In jazz, improvisation with its organizational pattern of repetition and revision of phrases, or so called riffs, instantiates the double-voicedness of Signifyin(g) (*Signifying* 63). Munton, however, adds that it is rather the repetition and revision of not only phrases but also of melody, harmony, and structure that constitute jazz and, consequently, Signifyin(g): “Gates seems to be unaware that every jazz performance is a ‘signification’ upon, or revision of, something already in existence, whether the melody or theme, or the chord sequence. If all jazz is Signifyin(g), then the term becomes redundant” (248). Jazz will be of further relevance in relation to the question in how far (African American) music functions as a subversive form in heteroglossia and constitutes a means of overcoming imposed silences. For the present discussion, it shall suffice to emphasize that (jazz) music plays a crucial role in African American art and expression. Much like a myriad of other creative forms of double-voiced Signifyin(g), music thus constitutes what might be called an African American discourse.

Since the concept of Signifyin(g), however, entails that the meanings of such double-voiced discourses are necessarily closed to those who belong to the dominant, oppressive group, it

poses the danger “that African American discourse may easily become a music unheard unless it is finally and fully appreciated as a mode of sounding reality and for signifyin(g) [sic.] resistance to authorized associations” (Peterson 766). Signifyin(g), as a form of “black double-voicedness” (Gates, *Signifying* 51), is only meaningful to those who are privy to its double-voiced quality. However, while this may mean that it empowers the oppressed African American to utilize the dominant language and inscribe their voice onto it, it also implies that they can only do so surreptitiously without raising their voice so that it is truly heard in social heteroglossia. Signifyin(g) can thus be understood as speaking in a secret double-voiced code.

Bakhtin’s thought is useful to a discussion of African American concepts such as the Du Boisian double-consciousness and Gates’s Signifyin(g). His notion of double-voicedness assigns the power of resistance and subversion to the subaltern subject. Nonetheless, considering the long and painful history of institutionalized racial oppression, segregation, and imposed illiteracy it is not surprising that language may not always be an adequate tool for resistance. It is therefore necessary to investigate the significance of alternative means of expression in African American discourse.

2.4. Bakhtinian Concepts Extended: Silences, the semiotic, and Music

We can agree, I think, that invisible things are not necessarily ‘not-there’; that a void may be empty but not a vacuum.

Morrison, “Unspeakable” 136

It is the way words are put together, the metaphors, the rhythm, the music—that’s the part of language that is distinctly black to me when I hear it.

Morrison, in Ruas 96

So far, the discussions have illustrated that Bakhtin’s notions of dialogism, heteroglossia, and double-voicedness offer a vision of language that permits the appropriation and utilization of language as a means of subversion and resistance. However, his conception of language fails to take into account contexts where language either proves an insufficient tool to grasp the world around us or where prevalent power relations systematically mute

minorities. Despite the absence of language, the silences that are caused in such circumstances are replete with (suppressed) meanings. In addition to overlooking the potential meanings of silences, Bakhtin's theory of language tends to disregard alternatives to language such as music, via which meaning can also be constructed. With regard to literature, silences are, paradoxically, represented through language, whereas music is incorporated in prose, for instance, through references to music as well as through the use of analogies. I will therefore argue that Bakhtin's evaluation of language as the *non plus ultra* needs to be challenged so silences and the use of analogies and references to music in literary works become analyzable.

Enforced silence tends to be, unsurprisingly, gendered and racialized. In Western societies, the ideal woman is generally constructed as passive and silent. The notion of hysteria, for instance, perpetuated the opinion that due to their anatomy women were not able to think rationally and logically. Consequently, they were hindered in their attempts to express themselves. During slavery as well as its aftermath, African Americans were both metaphorically and physically silenced. The loss of the African languages, illiteracy, and torture practices such as the bit silenced them (Rigney 21). The experience of being silenced in language due to American racism is therefore a persistent topic in African American literature. Indeed, African American (women) writers often deal with oppression and marginalization as a "discursive dilemma". Silences are in their works central elements which express the difficult relationship of African American women with power and its language (Henderson 263). In short, silences in literature may be symptoms of experienced oppression.

Silence, however, must not necessarily be enforced, but, quite contrarily, it can also be chosen. Remaining silent by choice may have the aim of exerting power over someone else, or, in the case of the oppressed one, silence may constitute a form of resistance. In other words, silence can be consciously employed as a tool of both power and resistance: "[N]either language and silence nor power and oppression are dichotomously distinct; both language and silence may be tools of the Master or tools of rebellion against patriarchal determination of meaning" (Miller 139). The notion of chosen silence as an instrument of subversion and resistance is also of relevance to the analysis of Morrison's *Beloved*.

Viewed from yet another perspective, silences may also occur due to more internal, that is psychic, reasons. In psychoanalytic theory, trauma is understood as a psychic wound, a

“breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world” (Caruth 4). This rupture is caused by events that due to their unexpectedness and violence defy comprehension. Indeed, although such wounds cry out in a voice that seeks to direct us to the truth of the traumatic event, the voice will always fail to make the trauma completely known. Traumatic experiences, put simply, elude articulation and cause silences. For Caruth, for instance, trauma is located in the space between knowing and not-knowing (3). It is, crucially, a silent space as it is determined by what is experienced but not fully knowable; it is unspeakable. Trauma thus produces in language a “discernible scar – a certain silence that indicates the untimeliness of the psychical breach that causes the wound” (Seshadri 67). When coping with personal or collective trauma, language is thus often perceived as inadequate. One becomes aware of the limits of language as it proves insufficient a tool for rendering traumatic events visible and knowable. This notion of speechlessness, of course, is highly relevant in literature that deals with marginalized groups that suffer from institutionalized violence and oppression. In her novels, Morrison, for example, is acutely aware of the hermeneutic limits of language in relation to traumatizing experiences: “Language can never ‘pin down’ slavery, genocide, war. Nor should it yearn for the arrogance to be able to do so. Its force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable” (“Nobel Lecture”). Writers, who are like Morrison concerned with the “ineffable” in human experience, therefore work with both language and silence. In short, certain (literary) forms of silence may point to the unknowable, and thus unspeakable.

By implication, the paradox ‘silence speaks’ holds some truth value: Silences may point to muted voices, traumatic wounds, or, if chosen freely, to resistance or power. Lock, therefore, rightly speaks of modernity’s silence as a “discursive silence” which is “buzzing with voices, for it exists in the space of muted, unvocalized discourse” (75). This clearly demonstrates that absence of language should not be equaled with lack of meaning. Silences, be it in everyday communication or in literary works, signify. Hence, the use of the plural ‘silences’ reflects the multiplicity of instances of silence and the manifold meanings potentially conveyed by the absence of speech (cf. Grabher and Jessner xi). In the light of these considerations it seems pertinent to challenge Bakhtin’s theory of language as it runs the risk of overemphasizing the power of language and of failing to take silences into account. In his literary criticism, Bakhtin seems unwilling to acknowledge instances of silence and their potential meanings. In fact, he has been criticized for overestimating the role of language and, consequently, for turning a deaf ear to the silences in literature (e.g. Clark and Holquist 62; Emerson 132; Cieply). Emerson, for instance, finds Bakhtin unable to comment on the

many silent characters in Dostoevsky's work that either cannot or simply do not talk (132). For Bakhtin, for a literary text to be considered a novel it essentially requires speaking characters (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 332). He does not recognize silences in literary texts as meaningful and does not consider them in relation to dialogic language use. However, applying a Bakhtinian reading must not necessarily rule out an investigation into the meanings of silences. For instance, in her reading of Olsen's *Tell Me a Riddle*, Coiner reconciles a dialogic reading of novelistic heteroglossia with a focus on silences. In short, when reading literary texts from a Bakhtinian perspective it is indispensable to not only listen to the many voices of heteroglossia but also to the silent ones.

This, however, does not imply that oppressed groups that are hindered in their use of language necessarily remain silent. Quite contrarily, they often find new subversive means in order to communicate and encode their experiences. Music, for example, can fill silences that arise due to the limits inherent in language, or it can constitute a form of resistance that helps overcome imposed silences. With regard to Bakhtin's theories, it is striking that even though he attributed signification to musical expression he did not relate the "signifying sound" of music to his theory of language. He distinguished between the sound produced by the human (vocal) organs, that is, the "organic" sounds, and the sound produced by instruments (*Art* 314). In the following, I will briefly reiterate Kristeva's conception of music as a fundamentally semiotic, and thus feminine, form of expression as well as sketch out possible functions and meanings of African American music. Musical expression, in my view, must be regarded as an alternative, potentially subversive, means to language that enables oppressed groups to overcome silences.

It is worthwhile to recall that according to Kristeva music is a signifying system that is entirely constituted by the semiotic ("Revolution" 93). As already discussed above, music and poetic language are subversive and essentially feminine signifying practices that are defined by the semiotic. Even though Kristeva does not relate the concept of the semiotic directly to the theories of the Bakhtinian school, she is heavily influenced by them in her discussion of music and poetic language, because her conception of the two notions "points to the heterogeneity of language and to the existence of a form of language in the margins of the symbolic" (Schippers 27). Her semiotic theory is, in other words, similar to the Bakhtinian notion of language to the extent that both imagine language as inherently heterogeneous. This heterogeneity of language is for Bakhtin the inherent stratification into a multiplicity of socio-ideological languages. Comparably, for Kristeva, it is evidenced in

semiotic expressions such as music and poetic language as they constitute alternative 'languages' to the Symbolic. However, with regard to rhythm in particular, Kristeva's conception departs significantly from Bakhtin's. While Kristeva views music and poetic language as forms of resistance against the monologic language of the Symbolic and therefore as a form of dialogization, Bakhtin regards rhythmic expressions as necessarily rigid and closed to dialogism:

The very rhythm of poetic genres does not promote any appreciable degree of stratification. *Rhythm, by creating an unmediated involvement between every aspect of the accentual system of the whole* (via the most immediate rhythmic unities), destroys in embryo those social worlds of speech and of persons that are potentially embedded in the word: in any case, rhythm puts definite limits on them, does not let them unfold or materialize. Rhythm serves to strengthen and concentrate even further the unity and hermetic quality of the surface of poetic style, and of the unitary language that this style posits. (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 298; emphasis in the original)

He essentially maintains that poetic work can never be heteroglot, but due to its rhythm must always remain univocal. For Kristeva, on the other hand, the semiotic is fundamentally designed by rhythm, (musical) sounds, and repetition which carry multiple, and I would add dialogic, meanings. It is due to these considerations that I propose to amplify Bakhtin's conception of language (and his idea of rhythm and music, for that matter) with Kristeva's notion of the semiotic, as it opens up new ways of viewing music and poetic language in the context of language and gender. Such an approach ascribes new significance to different aspects, such as rhythm, non-verbal features, and glossolalia and changes our understanding of Bakhtin's heteroglossia as well as of the language(s) women need to appropriate in order to find feminine ways of expression. In short, from a feminist psychoanalytic perspective, music can be understood as a powerful feminine means of expression that not only undermines the prevalent use of the paternal language but also potentially break gendered silences.

Moreover, music may also defy speechlessness that arises due to violent experiences as well as institutionalized oppression. Enslaved Africans communicated and expressed themselves predominantly through music as they were silenced in language via the loss of their African tongues and the rigorous imposition of illiteracy. Music thus constituted an alternative medium that potentially undermined the position of language as the principal means to communicate and construct meaning. Gilroy, for instance, indicates that the "topos of unsayability", found in slave music, "can be used to challenge the privileged conception of both language and writing as preeminent expressions of human consciousness" (*Atlantic* 74).

Viewing musical expression as a powerful alternative to language, of course, challenges Bakhtin's epistemology which defines (dialogized) language as the medium through which meaning is constructed. Moreover, in trauma therapy, music can be utilized for therapeutic purposes, given that it "enables direct access to an affective and corporeal aspect of the human psyche" which would quite likely be inaccessible through language. In such settings, music provides the medium by which the therapist and the patient can "resonate" with each other (Sutton and De Backer 75). The image of two interactants "resonating" with each other is clearly reminiscent of Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, because music is also perceived as dialogized. The crucial difference, however, is that the medium is not conventional language use, but rather music. In short, music may be understood as a dialogic alternative to language which can be accessed even in contexts where language may fail us.

Furthermore, music and other forms of sound such as field hollers, work songs and spirituals aimed at providing the enslaved Africans with new strength and hope. Music in its broadest sense helped the slaves to get through and survive both physically and psychically. The "insider codes and double entendres" contained in many lyrics made not only secret communication among the enslaved Africans possible but indeed rendered the songs highly subversive (Cataliotti xi). Songs thus functioned as a secret code that enabled the singers and listeners who were privy to its semantic ambiguity to communicate as well as find solidarity in an economy that systematically repressed them. Clearly, the notion of "double entendre" (Cataliotti xi) echoes both Bakhtin's double-voicedness and Gates's Signifyin(g).

Another feature of African American music that can be related to Bakhtin's theories is antiphony, or call and response. It denotes, in rather general terms, a dialogue between the musicians and the audience as well as among the musicians. However, despite the apparent similarity of dialogism and antiphony, the two notions differ significantly in relation to the construction of self and other. For Bakhtin, dialogue is a crucial prerequisite for the self to come into being. To this end, self and other must remain separate, that is different from one another, and must not merge. According to Gilroy, on the other hand, the African American, whose self is necessarily fragmented due to their double-consciousness, blends with the other in antiphony: "Lines between self and other are blurred and special forms of pleasure are created as a result of the meetings and conversations that are established between one fractured, incomplete, and unfinished racial self and others" (*Atlantic* 79). What is striking about this is certainly that the blurred line between self and other is depicted in entirely positive terms. The pleasure Gilroy mentions is an essentially democratizing experience that

engenders egalitarian relationships among the musicians as well as between the musicians and the audience (*Atlantic* 79). Ralph Ellison, for example, observes that antiphony in jazz strengthens the sense of collectivity and identity (234, cited in Gilroy, *Atlantic* 79). In other words, while from a Bakhtinian perspective the indistinct line between self and other would thwart the construction of meaning in dialogic communication, antiphony in African American music is understood as a supportive and positive force which enhances the sense of community through the (momentary) blending of the self with the other.

African American music, whereof jazz is undoubtedly one of the most important music genres, tends to be regarded as the most powerful expression of Black identity and experience. For Langston Hughes, for instance, jazz was a symbol not only of racial pride and identity but also of resistance as he wrote in his manifesto “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” that “jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America; the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul – the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world” (30). It is not surprising that he foregrounded the rhythm of jazz, given that it can be traced back to African influences. Moreover, the “tom-tom beating” alludes to the drums the slave masters had forbidden (Cataliotti xii). Once silenced, these symbols of African heritage are, for Langston Hughes and many other African American artists and thinkers, again heard in jazz music.

Nonetheless, while viewing jazz as a pre-eminent form of African American expression is certainly justifiable to some extent, it is indispensable to recognize that jazz, historically speaking, has not only been refined and played by African American musicians: “Jazz originated in Black experience, but from the outset was played by mixed-race and White musicians. It is today an international ‘language’. [...] Any search for authenticity or roots will be in vain” (Munton 251). Jazz has indeed always been a heterogeneous and hybrid music genre that combines both African and European influences. Moreover, during the Harlem Renaissance, many African Americans felt that jazz had been deprived of its authenticity as it was reserved to exclusively White audiences in certain Harlem night clubs (Tally 67). It is doubtful whether jazz could be considered to signify in such a setting where the audience presumably were not able to grasp its double-voicedness. Munton cautions against utilizing jazz for a “narrow Africentric argument” which would fail to acknowledge the many European influences such as harmony and melody (251). In short, although jazz definitely constitutes a central form of genuine African American expression (that has the potential to fill imposed silences), its multiplicity of influences as well as its history as an art form

reserved to a White audience in some Harlem night clubs may point to its heterogeneity and fluidity both in form and signification.

These considerations bear the question in how far the legacy of Black music and particularly of jazz music has influenced African American literature. Naturally, music and language are two distinct media. Morrison, for instance, nonetheless recognizes the influence music exerts on her work:

The power of the word is not music, but in terms of aesthetics, the music is the mirror that gives me the necessary clarity. [...] I don't have the resources of a musician but I thought that if it was truly black literature, it would not be black because I was, it would not even be black because of its subject matter. It would be something intrinsic, indigenous, something in the way it was put together – the sentences, the structure, texture and tone – so that anyone who read it would realize. [...] I don't imitate it, but I am informed by it. (Morrison, cited in Gilroy, *Small* 181)

Given that jazz is generally considered to be one of the most characteristically Black art forms, much critical attention has been paid to the question in how far jazz has been 'translated' into a narrative method in African American literature. Drawing on Gates's concept of Signifyin(g) and its relation to jazz music, repetition and revision tend to be considered as indicators of jazz-like and thus characteristically African American language use in literature. In his lucid critique of readings that view Morrison's novels as literary equivalents of jazz music, Munton, however, convincingly demonstrates that critics who base their comparisons on Gates's Signifyin(g) erroneously equal musical expression with language use. According to Munton, such readings inevitably ignore various aspects that are specific to music, such as melody and harmony. Importantly, they cannot be expressed via the medium of language: "Language and music do not 'signify' in the same way. The substantive error lies in thinking of jazz as a language similar in kind to spoken human language" (250). In other words, according to Munton, melody and harmony, two central elements of jazz music, are inevitably lost in the 'translation' from one medium to the other. It is therefore too restricted a view to consider repetitions and revisions of phrases and words, or so called riffs, as evidence for jazz music that has been incorporated in literature. Put differently, Munton rightly draws attention to the fact that prose, operating via an entirely different medium, cannot represent certain elements that are constitutive of music. When dealing with African American literature it is therefore necessary to be cognizant of the fact that jazz-like language use in literature can always only be an analogy.

For the purpose of my subsequent analyses of Morrison's *Beloved* and *Jazz*, I propose to extend Bakhtin's theory of language with the notions of silence, Kristeva's semiotic, and music. Such a Bakhtinian approach to a literary text would thus be a dialogic reading that not only pays attention to the multiplicity of voices, speech genres, and styles in a heteroglot novel, but also to silences, semiotic elements such as glossolalia, echolalia, and, of course, to analogies to music.

2.5. In Dialogue: When the (White) Reader Listens to the (Black) Text

There is no such thing as an abstract addressee, a man unto himself,
so to speak.

Voloshinov/Bakhtin, *MPL* 85

And where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must
each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to
read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to
our lives. That we not hide behind the mockeries of separations that
have been imposed upon us and which so often we accept as our
own.

Lorde 43

Meaning, for Bakhtin, cannot unfold in a vacuum, but always necessitates language that has been dialogized between two interactants. It is thus the reciprocating interaction that is an essential prerequisite for his epistemology. With regard to literature, the heteroglot novel enables the reader to engage dialogically with the voices incorporated in the text. The reader, indeed, assumes a central role in the construction of the novel as they are invited to cooperate actively in the dialogue between author, narrator(s) and characters. It is therefore pertinent to examine the reader's capacity in some more detail. Since Morrison's work is received and read by an international and heterogenous audience, one may wonder how a White reader who might only be familiar with the dominant, that is White, discourse relates to a text that is written from and about an African American perspective.

The pervasive influence of the African oral tradition as well as of African American musical expressions such as jazz on African American literature naturally affects the reader of the text. It is literature that is "intentionally written to be read aloud" (Ludigkeit 166), enticing

the reader to give 'physical' voice to the story and characters. For Kristeva, for instance, reading aloud is a form of "semiotic articulation" which ultimately "gives 'music' to literature" (Kristeva, "Revolution" 113). Reading aloud thus fills written language with aurality which, in Kristeva's view, is not only an essentially feminine form of expression but also potentially subversive. Historically, silent reading was associated with secrecy and conspicuous conduct, while it is nowadays the normal mode of reading. Reading aloud, in contrast, has become transgressive (Lock 75). Vocalization of prose appears nowadays to be unconventional and disruptive. In the case of minority literature in particular, the reader, when reading aloud, assumes the role of a 'mouthpiece' of silenced voices and histories. It is thus not necessarily a matter of reading (about) silenced voices, but rather of actively voicing and listening to them.

Furthermore, the aurality of African American literature also contributes to and enhances the dialogue between author, narrator(s), characters, and reader. Morrison, for instance, seeks to infuse her writings with a sense of musicality that for her essentially constitutes Black art and that renders her novels "truly aural novel[s], in which there are so many places and spaces for the reader to work and participate" (Morrison, in Ruas 108). It shall encourage the reader to respond and participate actively in the production of meaning "[i]n the same way that a musician's music is enhanced when there is a response from the audience" ("Rootedness" 341). The text's invitation to respond and become involved ultimately serves, of course, a political agenda: It shall stir the reader to be part in societal change. In fact, the reader's participation in the construction of the novel shall lead them to transform prevalent societal relations. The function of the African American novel's aurality, and for that matter the novel's function in general, is political.

In connection with the assertion that literature must be political, one may wonder who the ideal reader of African American literature might be. In other words, since the agenda of many African American writers is, without doubt, political in nature, one may wonder what kind of reader is truly capable of grasping the deeper signification of their fiction. Can someone who does not share similar experiences of sexism and racism or who is not familiar with African American art and culture comprehend the intricacies of such literature and their political meanings? This concern clearly evokes Gates's notion of Signifyin(g) and the concomitant problem of meaning that is only accessible to those who are cognizant of the double-voicedness inherent in some forms of African American art. Peterson, for instance, rightly warns that African American discourse runs the risk of becoming "a music unheard"

as readers and listeners easily miss its double meanings conveyed through Signifyin(g) (766). As far as Morrison's literature is concerned, and this is certainly consistent with a large body of other African American writings, it is indeed clear that it will remain, at least to a certain extent, closed to readers who are not acquainted with certain African American practices or expressions. Interestingly enough, in an interview Morrison refers to jazz when reflecting on the use of 'insider' language: "The analogy that occurs to me is jazz: it is open on the one hand and both complicated and inaccessible on the other" (Morrison, in LeClair 124). The notion that readers fail to understand 'closed' meanings is obviously not restricted to literature written by and dealing with ethnic minorities, but rather constitutes the natural (dialogic) relationship between reader and text. It may be, however, intensified in the case of literature that is concerned with experiences of the 'other'. The White reader is thus faced with a dilemma, given that they are 'let in', while simultaneously they are "condemned to misread essential features that are insistently hermetic" (Nowlin 155). The notion of Signifyin(g) as well as Morrison's reference to jazz should leave the (White) reader alert and self-conscious with regard to their readings of African American literary texts.

In the context of African American literary criticism some scholars therefore consider readings by White critics as highly problematic given that, in their view, critics who do not share similar experiences inevitably fail to comprehend the full extent of African American lived realities. Smith, for instance, argues that White (feminist) critics are "ill equipped to deal with the subtleties of racial politics. A Black feminist approach to literature that embodies the realization that the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of Black women writers is an absolute necessity" (134). Moreover, White critics are not only said to be unable to recognize the many shades and effects of racism and the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, etc., but also to be liable to force their own imagination of Whiteness and Blackness onto the interpretation of an African American text. White critics, as they are working within institutions that often perpetuate social power relations, are said to tend to impose monologic readings on African American texts which powerfully reinforce culturally prevalent constructions of race. In her cogent discussion of Morrison's short story "Recitatif", Abel, for instance, demonstrates how the critics' imagination of Blackness, Whiteness and of the relation between race and class determines their individual readings of a text that is intentionally stripped of all racial codes. She clearly illustrates not only the central role of the reader but also, more importantly, the crucial influence their construction of race exerts on the text. The fear that

White critics misread Black texts is therefore certainly valid, considering also that academia is still a White stronghold.

Nonetheless, a Bakhtinian approach affords the White critic with the possibility to engage dialogically with African American texts and, consequently, reflect upon and challenge their own imagination of Blackness. Nowlin resorts to the image of a collision to describe this dialogic confrontation with another representation of Blackness in Morrison's fiction:

The 'originality' of Morrison's texts [...] cannot be located exclusively in a blackness alien to outside (predominantly white) readers but rather in the collision she stages between this blackness and the blackness familiar to the white literary imagination. That is, the blackness Morrison would recover for her own fiction should be located within the ambiguous invitation that jazz extends to white listeners: to participate in something at once familiar and alien, and to transcend race through the encounter with a racially marked text. (Nowlin 156)

Jazz music functions again as an analogy to illustrate the tension between what is available to a White reader and what is likely to elude them. Nowlin also draws attention to the potential of literature to expose the constructedness of the racial divide. In other words, reading African American literature, just like listening to jazz, should ultimately unmask race as a social construct. As shall become clear from Nowlin's quote as well as from Lorde's epigraph to this chapter, listening to the voices of heteroglossia enables us to deconstruct race and to find similarities and establish relations. In Bakhtinian terms, then, the White reader and critic is challenged to question their construction of race when engaging in a dialogue with an African American text and its representation of Blackness.

3. Analysis of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

I saw more clearly than ever the brutalizing effects of slavery upon both slave and slaveholder. After the evaluation, then came the division. I have no language to express the high excitement and deep anxiety, which were felt among us poor slaves during this time. Our fate for life was now to be decided. We had no more voice in that decision than the brutes among which we were ranked. A single word from the white men was enough – against all our wishes, prayers, and entreaties – to sunder forever the dearest friends, dearest kindred, and strongest ties known to human beings.
Douglass 55

Chattel slavery with its systematic coercion, exploitation, and dehumanization of people of African descent constitutes the historical backdrop of Morrison's *Beloved*. Indeed, the overbearing power of the White slave master as well as the slaves' powerlessness and speechlessness, as also described by Douglass in his autobiographical memoir, are pervasive themes in the novel. In the following, I wish to outline how *Beloved* draws on language, silence, Kristeva's semiotic, and music to represent an unspeakable past as well as to mend the violent fragmentation of the Black subject.

3.1. *Beloved*, a Heteroglot Novel

Without a doubt, *Beloved*, hailed as the "Neo-Slave Narrative" (Bell 166), forcefully summons both characters and reader to face themselves with an episode of American history over which many would rather cast a veil. Morrison considers it to be her responsibility as a female Black writer to "rip that veil drawn over 'proceedings too terrible to relate'" as well as to actively participate in a discourse from which African Americans were historically excluded ("Memory" 91). In *Beloved*, the suppression of the White patriarchal narrative voice enables the narrator to investigate and recuperate the unheard stories and voices of slavery. The novel thus gives voice to the victims of slavery and its aftermath as, for instance, the insertion of multiple narrators allows the characters to speak for themselves. Furthermore, through the character of Beloved the text reifies the uncountable,

undocumented, and forgotten Africans that were killed during the Middle Passage and slavery.

3.1.1. Resisting the White Master Discourse

Unfolding its story in 1873 and 1874 in post-bellum Cincinnati, *Beloved* recounts the characters' memories of their gruesome past as slaves in Kentucky eighteen years earlier. Institutionalized slavery and its violent consequences thus constitute the historical context within which the characters confront themselves and try to cope with their individual as well as collective traumata. Language in such a fully racialized and gendered economy is possessed and controlled by White male hegemony. The master discourse is, unsurprisingly, the language of White men who utilize language as a tool to reinforce their power and suppress the subaltern subjects.

Even though set in this context, *Beloved*, on the level of narration, resists the imposition and dominance of the authoritative White language to a great degree. This is certainly motivated by Morrison's desire to retrieve and restore the many silenced and unrecorded voices of Black Americans in mainstream history in her novels (Wisker 80). *Beloved*, therefore, seeks to testify to the uncountable lives of African Americans during and after slavery that go widely undocumented in the White discourse. It is, in other words, a profoundly heteroglot novel that lends its space to a multiplicity of oppressed voices. Nonetheless, the dominant discourse of White hegemony is menacingly looming in the margins of the narrative, only seizing its narration once. *Beloved* thus displays the tension between the oppressed Black voices and the dominant White voice, which, in Bakhtinian terms, aims at imposing a unitary and single version of truth in the struggle of heteroglossia. This tension becomes apparent in the fact that it is halfway in the novel that the events are suddenly narrated by a White narrative voice. Indeed, it violently disrupts the predominantly democratic and multivoiced 'Black narrative' almost precisely in the middle of the novel as the scene of Sethe's infanticide is the only moment that the narrator permits to be briefly told from a White perspective (174-79). To be more precise, the polyphonic voices of the Black characters are interrupted by a linear account of the events delivered mostly through free indirect discourse from the viewpoints of the White slave catcher, schoolteacher, and finally of the nephew. The chronological accounts, indirectly vocalized through the three representatives of White supremacy, remain static in their succession as they do not complement each other

dialogically on the same theme, but rather represent the events in a linear, monologic manner.

The White hegemonic discourse is, unsurprisingly, loaded with racist language as the fugitive slaves are compared to bulls and indeed considered to be of even less value than animals: “Unlike a snake or a bear, a dead nigger could not be skinned for profit and was not worth his own dead weight in coins” (174-75). Moreover, the White patriarchal language is also apparent in the use of overtly racist insults such as “pickaninies” (175), “damnest bunch of coons” (177), and “crazy old nigger” (175) as well as in the overall self-righteous and superior tone, most noticeable in the final moral evaluation of Sethe’s infanticide: “All testimony to the results of a little so-called freedom imposed on people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred” (177). As Liscio rightly asserts, this powerful disruption of the Black narrative voices indicates that the responsibility for Sethe’s action falls on the Whites, too (38). *Beloved*, in other words, opens up its narration to encompass the hegemonic discourse in order to make explicit the overbearing power of White supremacy in the economy of slavery, within which Sethe finds herself deprived of any choice. Importantly, the narrator keeps this passage short as though the White discourse would otherwise threaten to take over the entire narration. The narrative break caused by the abrupt shift to a White narrative voice is, therefore, exemplary of Bakhtin’s struggle of heteroglossia. In contrast to that, as will be of relevance in relation to double-voiced discourses in *Beloved*, the narrator appropriates the White patriarchal discourse at some other points in the narrative. These disruptions, however, are always restricted to the length of a sentence and are, importantly, not voiced directly through White characters.

Although the dominant White discourse is for the most part successfully defied on the level of narration, its function as a powerful tool of White supremacy is undeniably felt by the slaves and ex-slaves. Indeed, in *Beloved*, the “ownership of body and authorship of language are shown to be insidiously linked” (Lawrence 232) as White supremacy constantly manipulates language to reinforce prevalent power relations. Representing White hegemony and its vindication under the guise of science, schoolteacher wields the ultimate power over language. From a Bakhtinian perspective, this, of course, is to be expected as the dominant discourse is always “indissolubly fused with its authority – with political power, an institution, a person – and it stands and falls together with that authority” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 343). His name, schoolteacher, is indicative of his decisive role in the fabrication and

transmission of racist ‘truths’. The authoritative White language schoolteacher comes to stand for is inherently univocal and monologic as he makes Sixo and the other slaves of Sweet Home understand that “definitions belong to the definers – not the defined” (225). The meaning of the hegemonic language in the context of White supremacy, in other words, is necessarily singular, disallowing double-voicedness or, for that matter, Signifyin(g). This becomes painfully apparent when Sixo is beaten by schoolteacher after having killed and eaten a shoat. Sixo, who Signifys on the meaning of stealing, arguing that eating the shoat would enhance his work force and thus schoolteacher’s capital, is powerless in the face of schoolteacher’s control over language. For Bakhtin, the “semantic structure [of the authoritative discourse] is static and dead, for it is fully complete, it has but a single meaning, the letter is fully sufficient to the sense and calcifies it” (*Dialogic* 343). Hence, schoolteacher does not permit Sixo’s (alternative) notion of stealing but renders language and its meaning unyielding and univocal.

Along with the authority over definitions, the White slave owner exerts the power to name and classify his slaves, which not only fragments the slaves’ subjectivities but also functions as a moral justification of slavery. The slaves are indeed physically inscribed as commodities by the master discourse, for their bodies bear the marks of slavery. Sethe’s mother, for instance, had “a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin” (72), whose significance Sethe did not understand “till [she] had a mark of [her] own” (73). Similarly, Baby Suggs had been called Jenny by Mr. and Mrs. Garner for years and Sweet Home “wasn’t sweet and it sure wasn’t home” (16). Moreover, Paul D aches to know whether he can assert his manhood and self without Mr. Garner’s word on which he obviously cannot rely: “Garner called and announced them men – but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave. Was he naming what he saw or creating what he did not? [...] Did a whiteman saying it make it so? Suppose Garner woke up one morning and changed his mind? Took the word away” (260). Paul D’s manhood depends on Garner’s will to attribute it to him. The whiteman’s word has the power to either bestow manhood on the slaves or deprive them of it and, by implication, to affect their individual selves profoundly. Hence, the slaves are at the mercy of the whiteman’s capricious word that can create a discourse that ultimately legitimatizes racial discrimination and violence. This notion is most obvious in the White discourse of pseudoscientific research, embodied by schoolteacher and his “measuring string” (226) and notebook, which function as an apparatus to justify the institutionalized subjugation of people of African descent. Within this discourse, the slaves are systematically dehumanized as schoolteacher orders his pupils to “put [Sethe’s] human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right” (228).

The notion of powerlessness is even more intensified in schoolteacher's use of the ink Sethe produces as he makes her complicit in the act of ascribing animalistic traits to her and the other slaves (McDermott 82).

The written word, then, emblematic as it is of White power and privilege, does not hold any meaning for the slaves and ex-slaves. Paul D, unable to read, can only relate to the photography of the newspaper clipping because the text, for him, is devoid of any meaning. He also knows that the slaves are effaced in the dominant discourse of the written word because it "could hardly qualify as news in a newspaper" when a Black person "had been killed, or maimed or caught or burned or jailed or whipped or evicted or stomped or raped or cheated" (183). The power over language clearly lies in the hands of the White man, while the slaves are likened to animals that lack a means of expression that would enable them to empower themselves in the economy of slavery: "One step off that ground [Sweet Home] and they were trespassers among the human race. Watchdogs without teeth; steer bulls without horns; gelded workhorses *whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible humans spoke*" (148; emphasis added). Paul D's questioning of his manhood and, I would argue, his humaneness is, therefore, understandable as the dominant discourse turns him and the other slaves into savage animals without language. The internalization of the White imagination or, put differently, the Black subject's double-consciousness that arises out of the politics of slavery is described by Stamp Paid as a jungle that threatens to grow and devour both the Whites and Blacks:

Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle [...] In a way, he thought, they were right. The more coloredpeople spent their strength trying to convince them how gentle they were, how clever and loving, how human, the more they used themselves up to persuade whites of something Negroes believed could not be questioned, the deeper and more tangled the jungle grew inside. But it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it. (234)

In other words, racism distorts the slaves' selves so deeply that, even though they know due to the Du Boisian double-sight that it is not up to question whether this is the true self or not, they seek to persuade White society of their humaneness. The attempt to respond to this distortion is, however, much like the assertion "Black is Beautiful", a "reaction to a white idea, which means it is a white idea turned inside out; and a white idea turned inside out is still a white idea" (Clark 51). Their desire to prove that the jungle inside of them is not their true self is, therefore, destined to fail. The White hegemonic discourse is per definition

monologic, suppressing any interaction with another discourse. In Bakhtinian terms, it will always resist dialogization and consequently seek to reinforce the imposition of the jungle on the slaves' psyches. Hence, the authoritative White language distorts the Black subject's sense of self as it powerfully turns them into animals and mere commodities. As such, they are, in effect, obliterated from the public (and necessarily White) discourse and imposed illiteracy prevents them from (re-) inscribing them into it.

3.1.2. The Voices of Slavery

In such a deeply racialized and gendered economy as slavery, the authority over language clearly resides with White men. Their definitions and categorizations of the enslaved people have the power to distort and fragment the objects' selves. Constituting an alternative Black feminist discourse, Morrison's novel aims at redefining and thus re-piecing these vulnerable selves. For instance, the narrator's desire to resist and change the definitions imposed by White supremacy is already revealed in the epigraph to *Beloved*. It is taken from the Bible, Romans 9:25: "I will call them my people,/which were not my people;/and her beloved,/which was not beloved". Scarpa points out that the epigraph "hints at the power of language to change the essence of things by defining them. Implicit in this verse is also the power of the definer. In fact, if we identify the 'I' with the narrator's voice [...] the epigraph reminds us that the one who uses language has the power to change the essence of things by defining them" (94). In other words, the epigraph as well as *Beloved* as a whole withdraw the veil through the use of language, re-writing history as well as assigning language to the disenfranchised and silenced ones. The novel thus seeks to change the meaning of the past and, in consequence, our memory of it as it functions as a highly subversive discourse of resistance and re-definition.

In contrast to the nineteenth-century univocal slave narratives, *Beloved* is a text told by a multiplicity of narrators (Bell 169). It is, in Bakhtinian terms, a heteroglot novel as its narrative structure empowers its characters to become active narrators of their own stories. Indeed, *Beloved*'s narrative is an intricately woven web of different voices. The novel is both narrated by an unjudgmental omniscient narrator as well as by a multiplicity of characters whose voices are predominantly represented by direct, indirect, and free indirect discourse. Moreover, Bell discerns five different linguistic codes in the novel, each of which carries its own ideological meaning. The predominant ones are standard American English and Black

feminist discourse, while rural Black vernacular English, Black patriarchal discourse, and White male hegemonic discourse are less present in the text (Bell 173). The many narrative voices and their at times cacophonous and fragmentary quality render the overall narrative structure circuitous and confusing. Indeed, *Beloved* is “deliberately disorienting” (Ayer 192) as its fragmented narrative mirrors the fragmentation of self and language caused by slavery. The reader, confronted with a variety of different, and at times contradictory, narrative pieces, is challenged to put them together. In short, the narrative voices are, much like the many different fabrics of Sethe’s wedding gown, sewn into a whole whose fractured structure recreates slavery’s fragmentation.

In addition to the aforementioned types of representing discourse, two more narrative methods not only further plot development but also give insights into the characters’ innermost emotions and desires. Both the frequent invasions of rememories and the practice of storytelling structure the narrative on a deeper, second degree level (Scarpa 97). Rememories and storytelling enable the characters to explore the past as narrators, even if the events they are re-counting are not experienced by themselves. The idea of rememories, an invention of Sethe’s, expresses the slaves’ haunting memories of their traumatic past which is experienced as a perpetual present. Sethe, for instance, describes her rememory of Sweet Home to Denver as a picture that will always remain at the place where Sweet Home once was: “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 never was there – if you go there and stand in the place it was, it will happen again. [...] So, Denver, you can’t never go there. Never” (43-44). The characters’ rememories frequently invade the text, as though Sethe and the other ex-slaves have to relive the past over and over again. Moreover, Denver, even though telling a rememory of Sethe’s, begins to see and experience her own birth as she “stepped into the told story that lay before her” (36). The rememories, then, can even be experienced and re-narrated by characters who were not present in the events. In a similar manner, through storytelling, “a way to feed” *Beloved* (69), Sethe and Denver become the narrators of the past. Storytelling, emblematic of the oral African American tradition, requires a participatory audience. While *Beloved* is obviously the intradiegetic addressee, the reader assumes the role of the extradiegetic audience as they are also challenged to respond to the stories. Indeed, the stories told by Sethe and Denver, just like their rememories, Call the reader to Respond (Sale 180).

But it is not only on the level of narration that *Beloved* seeks to give voice to the victims of slavery. In the character of Beloved, the text reifies the unrecorded and forgotten lives of the “Sixty million and more” (dedication) that died during and after the Middle Passage and slavery. The baby ghost tormenting 124 Bluestone Road and the late appearance of the eponymous character haunt the novel. They point to the effort the traumatized slaves put into “beating back the past” (86) so that they must not listen to it. Beloved, however, makes clear that “All of it is now it is always now there will never be a time when I am not crouching and watching others who are crouching too I am always crouching” (248). The past, in other words, is always present in the psyches of the traumatized slaves and their descendants. In a sense, then, when Beloved speaks, she speaks for all the undocumented African slaves, forcing the reader as well as the characters to listen to the unspeakable. Hence, the ghost story, which can be regarded as a type of inserted genre in *Beloved*, is used to create a character that demands the confrontation with the many unspoken for and the collective traumata that arise due to their sufferings. Beloved’s soliloquies are, however, pervaded by gaps and “unspeakable thoughts, unspoken” (235). These silences are of course highly significant as they point to the impossibility to truly render slavery and its consequences visible in language.

Moreover, we are not only reminded of the gruesome past but also indirectly warned to cast the veil back over it. The narrator asks on the final pages of the novel how one could remember without having the language for it. Thus, by giving all the “disremembered and unaccounted for” (323) a name *Beloved* provides us with the means to remember. Even though “[b]y and by all trace is gone, and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water too and what it is down there” (324), the name, Beloved, and the language with it will remain with us. Although *Beloved* is “not a story to pass on” (324) as it is, in essence, unspeakable in its atrocity and horror, it is also not a story to pass *by*. Reading the second meaning of the ambiguous chant of the final pages, namely that it is not a story to pass by, we are reminded of our responsibility to confront the past and its overbearing effect on the present. Beloved’s many voices, in short, demand the reader to listen, remember, and remember.

Clearly, from a Bakhtinian perspective, re-mem-bering the fragmented selves and (hi)stories of slavery requires the reader and characters alike to engage dialogically with each other and the past. For Bakhtin, meaning and self are necessarily dialogic, for they can only come into being in a dialogue with the other. The voices and stories in *Beloved* are, therefore, not only

multiple, but indeed interacting with and dialogically complementing each other. In consequence, the dialogues that emerge between the characters signify an active reconfiguration of the past as well as of their fractured selves. In a way, then, the dialogues stimulate healing.

Beloved's insatiable hunger for stories is emblematic of the collective desire to reconstitute the past and its stories. Answering Beloved's questions, Sethe and Denver enter a dialogue that enables them to remember and explore the destructive experiences of slavery. At the beginning, their acceptance to indulge in storytelling has a healing character as Sethe, for instance, "found herself wanting to, liking it" (69). Denver, too, confronts herself through storytelling with the traumatic experiences of her mother and ancestors. Although they are not her own memories, she investigates with Beloved a past that also haunts her life in ways all too real. The two girls are deeply immersed in their dialogue to construct meaning of the past: "[Denver] anticipated the questions by giving blood to the scraps her mother and grandmother had told her – and a heartbeat. The monologue became, in fact, a duet as they lay down together" (92). Beloved's questions trigger Denver's storytelling which becomes a way of keeping Beloved close. For Denver, Beloved is someone with whom she can interact and communicate "for anything is better than the original hunger" for language (143). Many years earlier when Nelson Lord had asked Denver about Sethe's infanticide, Denver immediately went mute-deaf. Traumatized by her family history, Denver retreated to silence, but now Beloved's inquisitive questions enable her to articulate the story of her birth and thus to construct a sense of self. Indeed, Denver's self becomes dependent on Beloved and the many dialogues with her. When she believes Beloved to have left her, she consequently also feels the loss of her self: "Now she is crying because she has no self. Death is a skipped meal compared to this" (145). Moreover, in the end, the "duet" becomes a dangerous union that, in Bakhtinian terms, makes meaning construction impossible. The women of 124 Bluestone Road enter a symbiosis that annihilates their differences which are crucial prerequisites of real dialogue. Put simply, the dialogues with Beloved, albeit a way to face the traumatic experiences of the past and to construct a sense of self, become asymmetrical. Beloved refuses to answer questions herself and in the end the lines between self and other are dissolved, engendering a destructive fusion that hinders the possibility of a real dialogue.

Juxtaposed to the "circular mother-daughter dialectic between same and same" (Wyatt, "Body" 226), the dialogic (and heterosexual) relationship between Sethe and Paul D truly

empowers Sethe to speak about her traumatic experiences as well as to assert a sense of self. Paul D wishes to establish a relationship with Sethe that enables *both* to interact on an equal plane so they can find ways to cope with their individual and collective traumata together. He is determined to “put his story next to hers” (321) or, in Bakhtinian terms, to put his story into a dialogic relation with hers. Sharing memories of Sweet Home, both can not only relate to the experiences of the other but also fill in the blanks in their stories. Hence, Sethe feels optimistic and empowered to deal with her past thanks to Paul D as her “story was bearable because it was his as well – to tell, to refine and tell again. The things neither knew about the other – the things neither had word-shapes for – well, it would come in time” (116). Paul D even offers his support and explicitly encourages her to face her traumatic past, saying, “Go as far inside as you need to, I’ll hold your ankles. Make sure you get back out” (55). In addition to this, Paul D seeks to make Sethe discover and embrace herself as a valuable and autonomous person: “He leans over and takes her hand. With the other he touches her face. ‘You your best thing, Sethe. You are.’ His holding fingers are holding hers. ‘Me? Me?’” (322; emphasis added). In the dialogue with Paul D, Sethe manages to, even though hesitantly, assert a sense of self. Similarly, Sixo cherishes his relationship with the Thirty-Mile Woman because she helps him re-piece his fragmented self: “‘She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order’” (231). In other words, the relationships between Sethe and Paul D as well as between Sixo and the Thirty-Mile Woman demonstrate the power of dialogized language to counteract the violent fragmentation of the slaves’ subjectivities. Sethe’s insecure recognition of an independent selfhood is, however, threatened by the overbearing White male hegemony, as the overall narrative reminds us that “freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (111-12).

Another form of healing dialogues is represented through Call and Response. This improvisational communicative pattern strengthens the ties between self and other and establishes dialogic relations in the community as it “improvises on known, shared material” (Atkinson 251). In *Beloved*, the community both Calls and Responds in their search for and demand of self-love and justice. In the Clearing, Baby Suggs Calls for the community members to laugh, dance, and cry and they Respond. She tells them to consciously love every single part of their bodies that have been fractured and denigrated by slavery: They are Called to love their eyes, backs, hands, mouths, feet, necks, livers, hearts, lungs, “life-holding womb[s] and [their] life-giving private parts” (104). Her Call, as it seems, is not necessarily an attempt to mend these separate parts into a whole and healthy body and self

but rather to value them separately as fragments that cannot be re-assembled easily. Later in the novel, the women who come to exorcize the ghost that haunts Sethe and Denver Call and Respond in their prayer, too: “Denver saw lowered heads, but could not hear the lead prayer – only the earnest syllables of agreement that backed it: Yes, yes, yes, oh yes. Hear me. Hear me. Do it, Maker, do it. Yes” (304). Call and Response, then, constitutes a prevalent form of dialogic communication among the community members.

Moreover, the stories of the individual characters Call for the stories of the others. As already mentioned above, *Beloved* is told by a range of different narrators whose stories constitute a fragmented narrative. These stories are, of course, not loosely arranged, but indeed “artistically organized” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 262). They are dialogically related, intersecting with one another and enhancing each other. For instance, Stamp Paid’s account of Sethe’s infanticide Responds to Baby Suggs’s story (Atkinson 251). Both accounts begin with the blueberries Stamp Paid collected the day before the “Misery” (201), while offering different perspectives on the events. Yet another manifestation of Call and Response in *Beloved* is, for instance, evident in the bedroom scene. This scene, introducing the romance motif in *Beloved*, almost bursts with sensuality peaking in Sethe’s and Paul D’s “minds merg[ing] orgasmically” (Ayer 193-94). Lying next to each other, Sethe’s and Paul D’s private thoughts seem to be in dialogue as they are prompted by the memory of the corn field where Sethe and Halle, hidden and yet visible to everyone, had intercourse for the first time. Their unvoiced dialogue of memories revolves around the erotic image of the corn:

[Sethe] remembered that some of the corn stalks broke, folded down over Halle’s back, and among the things her fingers clutched were husk and cornsilk hair. How loose the silk. How jailed down the juice. [...] What [Paul D] did remember was parting the hair to get to the tip, the edge of his fingernail just under, so as not to graze a single kernel. The pulling down of the tight sheath, the ripping sound always convinced *her* it hurt. As soon as one strip of husk was down, the rest obeyed and the ear yielded up to *him* its shy rows, exposed at last. How loose the silk. How quick the jailed-up flavor ran free. No matter what all your teeth and wet fingers anticipated, there was no accounting for the way that simple joy could shake you. How loose the silk. How fine and loose and free. (32-33; emphasis added)

Hence, in *Beloved*, characters, narrative voices, stories, and even unarticulated thoughts and memories are in dialogue with one another. Additionally, according to Bakhtin, novelistic language is always internally dialogized. Examples of this type of double-voiced discourse are, according to him, the refracting discourse of the (implied) author as well as of a character, parodic discourse, and the incorporation of various genres (*Dialogic* 324). In the

case of African American literature, Gates's concept of Signifyin(g) also describes double-voiced discourse that is typical of the African oral tradition.

The narrator's appropriation of a hostile discourse and its subsequent double-voiced quality is most evident in the short and disruptive passages that are told in the White paternal language. As already discussed, this discourse is largely avoided and, when nonetheless let in, it is restricted to the length of a single sentence. The "polemical blow" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 195) that is struck at it is almost palpable as slavery's cruelty is clearly revealed. For instance, the narrative strategy called *skaz* is utilized in the sentence, "It was decided to lock everybody down in the boxes till it either stopped or lightened up so a whiteman could walk, damnit, without flooding his gun and the dogs could quit shivering" (129), as it ever so briefly imitates spoken language in the word "damnit". The double-voiced quality of this short sentence seeks to undermine the White master discourse.

The internal dialogization of a character's discourse is seen in the narrative strategy of storytelling. Denver, re-telling Sethe's story, can only refer to what she has been told herself. Consequently, her discourse constitutes an active infusion of her voice in Sethe's discourse, which leads to the voices' dialogization. The frequent repetition of "she said" alludes to the original discourse (90). Later, however, Denver stops explicitly referring to what Sethe said and begins appropriating her discourse more subtly. Bakhtin, too, deals with the phenomenon of referring to and appropriating someone else's discourse: "Were we to eavesdrop on snatches of raw dialogue in the street, in a crowd, in lines, in a foyer and so forth, we would hear how often the words 'he says,' 'people say,' 'he said...' are repeated, and in the conversational hurly-burly of people in a crowd, everything often fuses into one big 'he says... you say... I say...'" (*Dialogic* 338). In short, Denver double-voices Sethe's discourse in her attempt to make the (hi)story her own. Nonetheless, she, Beloved, and the reader are aware of the original voice with which her discourse is dialogized.

Parodic discourse, constituting another form of double-voiced discourse, is essentially subversive, given that it aims at making fun of the authoritative discourse. Bakhtin thus describes carnivalistic laughter to be "directed toward something higher – toward a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders" (*Problems* 127). For Bakhtin, carnival was indeed "a 'loophole' for the psyche" (Emerson 164) because it affords the people with new hope to resist and subvert prevalent oppressive power relations. However, his notion of carnival is in many aspects unrealistic because in real-life such spectacles can of course

never fully elude or subvert the ubiquitous and overpowering social structures (Emerson 164-67). This becomes painfully apparent in the carnival scene in *Beloved*. Even though it may temporarily destabilize White oppression, in the long run it serves “more as a safety valve to ensure the stability of the dominant order than contributing to its overthrow” (Adams 167). At the time when the story unfolds freak shows were indeed popular amusement festivals in the States. Along with the White pseudoscientific discourse of that time, freak shows also perpetuated and sought to justify institutionalized racial discrimination. The representation and staging of Africans as wild and inarticulate monsters who ate raw meat and bit the heads off live animals furthered slavery’s vindication (Adams 158). In Morrison’s novel, however, the audience is not White, but Black. Sethe, Denver, and Paul D along with 400 other Black people spend a day at a carnival which “was a lot less than mediocre (which is why it agreed to a Colored Thursday)” (58). Except for the “Wild African Savage” it shows White freaks. The Black audience, though spit at, insulted, and denied of the full show, relish the “spectacle of whitefolks making a spectacle of themselves” (58). It is thus a brief moment of relief for the Black audience as Otherness is ostensibly reversed. The carnival scene in *Beloved* with its momentary reversal of object and subject (given that the Black audience pay to look at White carnies), in short, is a form of (double-voiced) parody. Importantly, Paul D’s recognition of the inarticulate “Wild African Savage” who “shook his bars and said wa wa wa” as someone he knew from Roanoke marks a crucial deconstruction of the White discourse of freak shows as well as of racism itself (58-59). It is, in essence, a moment of unveiling the constructedness of racism, its stereotypes, and concomitant discourses. But, crucially, Paul D’s comment fails to deconstruct race itself (Adams 156). Ultimately, the carnival scene is only a short circuit as it cannot really subvert the ubiquitous power relations.

Since it is conceptually closely related to Bakhtin’s notions of parody and carnival, Gates’s Signifyin(g) also conceives of laughter and humor to be crucial aspects of subversion. In *Beloved*, Stamp Paid and Paul D “shake with laughter” (313) when Signifyin(g) on Sethe’s attempt to attack Mr. Bodwin who she mistook as another White man who would take her children back to slavery. They refer to the events by implication and humor, joking that Sethe would probably even attack a White postman who came to deliver the mail. Much like the carnival scene remains to be only a fugacious moment of subversion, Sethe’s attempt to protect her offspring would be, even if it was successful, pointless as it would not change anything on a wider scale. Stamp Paid and Paul D, laughing about the “seriousness and [...] embarrassment” (313) of Sethe’s actions, thus know that in the end she “would still be a

Black woman trying to survive in a White man's world" (Atkinson 254). Signifyin(g) on this devastating fact enables the two men to talk and at the same time not to talk about it.

Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia, dialogism, and double-voicedness clearly elucidate the complex narrative fabric of *Beloved*. The text's composition is indeed characterized by a multiplicity of voices that are dialogically related as well as by storytelling, the characters' rememories as well as Signifyin(g) which are all forms of double-voiced discourse. Moreover, a Bakhtinian framework illuminates how language functions as both a tool of suppression and resistance. While the White paternal discourse constitutes the unifying language, the slaves and ex-slaves, nonetheless, find ways to enter dialogic communication.

3.2. Silences in *Beloved*

Beloved is a novel that reverberates with a multitude of voices that complement, contradict, and respond to one another. However, it is also a text that is pervaded by, and at times even booming with, silences. I will thus argue that Morrison's determination to re-inscribe the slaves' voices and experiences into American history and consciousness through imaginative work also involves acknowledging and indicating certain silences that withstand the imposition of language. At the center of *Beloved*, in other words, is the tension between the desire to find a language to break the imposed silences of slavery and its legacy and the insufficiency of language to do so. Paradoxically, then, silences become meaningful features of the code, for they point to the fact that the atrocities of slavery and its aftermath cannot be truly articulated in language. Ella, for instance, "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). Similarly, when reading *Beloved*, we, like Ella, must listen to the silences and gaps in the text.

3.2.1. Silent Bodies

In *Beloved*, White control over the Black body is inextricably connected to the power over language. At Sweet Home, Sethe and the other slaves are systematically silenced by the White master discourse as it powerfully defines them as inarticulate animals "whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible humans spoke" (148). Hence,

the novel shows how language, and written language even more so, functions as the White masters' tool to reinforce their control over the body of the Other and to, in consequence, silence them. Prohibited by law to learn to read and write, the slaves are in effect denied to assert themselves as humans as well as to find a voice in public discourse. Owned and dealt with as commodities without language, the slaves are reduced to mere bodies whose exchange value is determined according to their work force and capacity to reproduce (Wyatt, *Identification* 75). White hegemony does not recognize them as human beings and thus also refuses to listen to them. Baby Suggs, for instance, is painfully aware that in the face of the ubiquitous White power Black people are forcefully silenced and, if nevertheless speaking, remain unheard by the master discourse: "And no, they ain't in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it they will not heed. What you scream from it they do not hear" (104). Moreover, the loss of the African languages severs the slaves' ties to their shared heritage and history: "Words Sethe understood then but could neither recall nor repeat now. She believed that must be why she remembered so little before Sweet Home [...] What Nan told her she had forgotten, along with the language she told it in" (75). Sethe cannot remember the past before Sweet Home because she forgot the language through which she would be able to recuperate and retain it. In short, slavery renders Sethe and the other slaves speechless as they are reduced to inarticulate bodies, unable to read and write, and without the language that would rejoin them with a shared past.

Moreover, in *Beloved*, the slaves' deprivation of language is closely connected to the systematic abuse and degradation of their bodies. The text demonstrates how the physical pain inflicted on the slaves' bodies silences the victims and ultimately wounds their sense of selfhood. Indeed, body and self as well as physical pain and silence are fundamentally connected in the novel. Torture thus not only damages the physical body but also severely mutilates the victims' sense of self and, consequently, silences them. In *The Body in Pain*, Scarry asserts that physical pain "does not simply resist language but actively destroys it" (4). She further describes the destructive effects of physical torture on the self and language:

What the process of torture does is to split the human being into two, to make emphatic the [...] latent distinction between a self and a body, between a 'me' and 'my body'. The 'self' or 'me' [...] is 'embodied' in the voice, in language. The goal of the torturer is to make the one, the body, emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, *absent* by destroying it. (48-49; emphasis in the original)

In *Beloved*, torture, forced labor, and rape scar the slaves' bodies as, for instance, "slave life had 'busted [Baby Suggs's] legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue'" (102). The rigorous infliction of physical pain, then, has a "pedagogical purpose", for it renders the slaves vulnerable and powerless as well as continuously reminds them of their status as mere bodies (Wyatt, *Identification* 75). The slaves' sense of self is thus not only denied and degraded by the White master discourse, but also violently wounded through unbearable labor conditions and torture practices. Importantly, the destruction of the self is marked by the absence of language, for the self is based on and expressed in language. Indeed, in *Beloved*, the slaves' and ex-slaves' "language, reasoning powers, even their sense of self have been dismantled by the process of torture" (Boudreau 453). In short, their wounded and silent bodies reflect their fragmented selves.

Hence, the insertion of the bit not only silences Paul D physically, but also causes the painful destruction of his self. He is, in effect, doubly-silenced, for his silence is both physically enforced through the bit and caused by the painful suppression and fragmentation of his self. The sight of the rooster, ironically called Mister, intensifies the humiliation and destruction of Paul D's self: "'Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn't allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him you'd be cooking a rooster named Mister. But wasn't no way I'd be Paul D again, living or dead. Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub'" (86). Paul D's sense of self and humanness is doubly subdued by the bit's imposed silence and physical pain. Comparably, Baby Suggs's self, after a life of physical hardship, is also violently crushed as it is indeed determined by absence. Her "desolated center where the self that was no self made its home" (165) is, in other words, a center filled with silence. Without the language to claim and articulate her selfhood, she "never had the map to discover what she was like" (165). The fractured bodies in *Beloved* thus point to the vulnerability of the slaves' selves. The violent fragmentation of their selves, then, causes and is marked by the dissolution of language.

3.2.2. Silent Centers

Much like the infliction of physical pain, traumata, collective as well as personal ones, pierce *Beloved* with seemingly unbreakable silences. Even though trauma may not always be physically inscribed in the victim's body, it also becomes paradoxically visible in the

absence of language, for traumatic events damage the victim's sense of self and, in consequence, resist articulation in language: "Insofar as trauma bears on language, this hole persists in signification as the unspeakable excess that refuses semantic organization. While this hole in representation may or may not carry bodily evidence it is however marked in language by a discernible scar – a certain silence that indicates the untimeliness of the psychical breach that causes the wound" (Seshadri 67). Indeed, in *Beloved*, the deeply traumatized slaves and ex-slaves persistently fall into silence as they perceive language as an insufficient medium to speak about their past. Baby Suggs and Sethe silently agree that the past is "unspeakable" because it is either too "painful or lost" (69). Bereft of the African languages (as well as history and heritage, for that matter), the slaves are deprived of the linguistic and cultural means to express the past in a coherent manner. Moreover, the trauma of the Middle Passage and slavery is essentially unknowable as its violence and sheer atrocity elude comprehension and thus defy articulation (cf. Caruth 3). The slaves and ex-slaves are, as it were, doubly-silenced due to the denigration and loss of their ancestral languages as well as due to the collective and personal traumata arising from slavery.

Consequently, their attempts to articulate and come to terms with the traumatic past are constantly thwarted. Sethe and Paul D, for instance, even though determined to tell their stories, lack "word-shapes" to express their experiences of slavery (116). Both yearn to find a language to speak about the past and how it violently affected their sense of self, but neither can they "[s]ay it right" nor are they prepared to hear it (85). Sethe, scared to hear about the bit and "how offended the tongue is" (84), stops Paul D in his telling when she touches him on his knee. Their conversation thus ends in silence as Paul D puts his memories of the past back into the tobacco tin "buried in his chest where a red heart used to be" (86). In a way, then, as they fall silent, he locks his trauma away in a tin box which is essentially a place of silence. In their psychoanalytic work on trauma and mourning, Abraham and Torok describe how trauma prevents mourning and thus constantly needs to be suppressed. It is, for them, buried and silenced in the sufferer's internal crypt (135). The crypt, and for that matter Paul D's tin box, "contains the secrets and silences formed in trauma. Accordingly, the secret conceals a trauma whose very occurrence and devastating emotional consequences become entombed and consigned to internal silence by the sufferers" (G. Schwab 99). Put differently, Paul D's trauma is locked away and contained in a metaphorical space of suppression and silence. Hence, even though Sethe and Paul D long to retrieve their traumatic experiences from silence, they find themselves unable to articulate as well as listen to them.

Moreover, their attempts to articulate the traumatic past together are even further frustrated by their “moral, sexual, and epistemological distances” (Bell 169). Although sharing certain memories of Sweet Home, the two ex-slaves perpetually fail to communicate their individual experiences to one another. A reason for their unsuccessful communication is clearly that due to their different genders Sethe and Paul D are bound to experience the coercion of slavery in fundamentally different ways. For Paul D, slavery systematically denies and subdues his manhood. As he is constantly submitted to Mister’s gaze and schoolteacher’s word, his narrative mainly revolves around the desire to reassert his masculinity. In contrast, slavery, for Sethe, first and foremost poses a threat to her as a *mother*. In an economy where women can neither exert control over their reproductive organs nor their offspring, motherhood as a nurturing and caring relationship becomes in effect an impossibility. While *Beloved* certainly problematizes the notions of motherhood and (excessive) motherlove in Sethe’s overly maternal subjectivity and her destructive pre-Oedipal symbiosis with Beloved, it also seeks to elucidate the violent effects slavery has on mother-child relations and, in consequence, on women’s sense of self. Sethe, for instance, after Paul D revealed his wish to have a child with her, thinks that “[u]nless carefree, motherlove was a killer” (155). *Beloved*, in other words, examines how the imminent danger of rape, separation, and death distorts and disrupts motherhood and, consequently, enslaved women’s subjectivities.

Since Sethe and Paul D inevitably experience slavery in gendered ways, the intersection of gender and race bears on and indeed thwarts their communication. This becomes obvious in Paul D’s inability to understand what the nephews’ assault on Sethe means to her as a mother. While he repeatedly foregrounds the physical punishment through the cowhide, Sethe insists on the preceding attack where her mother milk was forcefully taken from her:

‘After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. [...] Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still.’
‘They used cowhide on you?’
‘And they took my milk.’
‘They beat you and you was pregnant?’
‘And they took my milk!’ (19-20)

Sethe repeatedly defines herself solely through her relation to her children as she refers to herself as “her children’s mother” and “this baby’s ma’am” (36-37) and to Beloved as her “best thing” (321). Thus, the assault where the nursing milk is taken from her is indeed an assault on her sense of self. It deprives her of the possibility to nurture her children as the milk, the only life-sustaining means she has for them, comes to stand for mother love and

care. Importantly, Paul D fails to truly comprehend how the assault on Sethe affected her subjectivity as for him the infliction of physical pain is perceived as more damaging.

Similarly, Sethe finds herself incapable to put the infanticide into words as she realizes that the people who have to ask about the reasons will never be able to understand her: “Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn’t get it right off – she could never explain” (192). The reasons of the infanticide cannot be rendered knowable in language, but must be known *without* it. Sethe, in other words, circles a topic that demands silent understanding. Paul D’s need for an explanation, therefore, shows the “abyss between empirical ‘knowledge’ and emotional ‘knowing’” (Sommer 162). They must realize that their moral and epistemological division, arising to a certain extent due to their gendered experiences of slavery, cannot be overcome through language. In the end, after countless circles around a silent center, “a forest [springs] up between them; trackless and quiet” (194). The metaphorical silence evoked through the imagery of the forest separates Sethe and Paul D even further from one another.

But the trauma of the infanticide not only demands silence between Sethe and Paul D. Indeed its defiance of language constitutes the silent center of the overall narrative. Although many times re-told by various characters, the scene of the “Misery” (201) remains in essence untold. Baby Suggs’s, Stamp Paid’s, and Sethe’s fragmented and circuitous accounts dwell on the berries, the feast the day before, or on the cloth Sethe made for the baby, as though procrastinating and averting the articulation of what happened in the shed. Moreover, along with the community even the omniscient narrative voice falls into silence: “And then no words. Humming. No words at all” (179). The infanticide is unspeakable and unspoken. The reader, in consequence, cannot speak about it either for they have not truly witnessed it (McDermott 77). We are constrained to re-piece the fragmented narrations and fill in the gaps they leave with necessarily inadequate language. The trauma of the unspeakable scene thus scars the overall narrative as the infanticide is absent and concealed in silence.

Furthermore, Sethe’s infanticide is not only unspeakable, but also ‘unhearable’. Asked about her mother’s involvement in her sister’s death, Denver instantly goes mute-deaf. The question itself, dared to ask by Nelson Lord, belatedly surfaces in the narration, as though Denver, years after having heard the question, was still unable to re-articulate it. Four pages after we have learned about her deaf-mutism, the question is finally repeated in direct

quotation. It interrupts Denver's free indirect discourse as it is clearly set apart from it. In other words, Denver, still traumatized by her mother's past, seeks to suppress and silence Nelson Lord's question, which after a year of learning to read and write, pulled her into "a silence too solid for penetration" (121). When confronted with her mother's violent past, her body thus "reproduces the desire of her mother" (Wyatt, *Identification* 69). The unspeakable trauma of Sethe's infanticide is transmitted to the next generation, rendering Denver's body mute-deaf. She identifies with and internalizes Sethe's trauma to such an extent that her "body expresses what the voice cannot say" (Wyatt, *Identification* 66).

In addition to the silences revolving around Sethe's infanticide, *Beloved* is penetrated by silences that point to the ineffability of the Middle Passage and slavery. The text, in other words, shows that the search for a language with which to grasp the monstrosity of slavery is in effect in vain. The dedication, "Sixty Million and More", already refers to the uncountable victims of slavery, without, of course, truly representing them. In a way, then, it "reach[es] toward the ineffable" (Morrison, "Nobel Lecture"). Moreover, *Beloved* interweaves the individual and collective traumata of the enslaved Africans in the character of Beloved as she not only personifies Sethe's personal trauma of the infanticide but also, on a much larger scale, the collective and historical trauma of slavery. As she reifies the undocumented and unknowable slaves who were tortured and killed, Beloved's speech is necessarily pervaded by gaps and silences. Visually represented in the text, the holes and unfinished sentences thus "point to silenced history" (G. Schwab 108). Moreover, even though the text ostensibly provides us with Beloved's name to remember and speak about the traumatic past, it also asserts that Beloved will not be remembered: "It took longer for those who had spoken to her, lived with her, fallen in love with her, to forget, until they realized they couldn't remember or repeat a single thing she said, and began to believe that, other than what they themselves were thinking, she hadn't said anything at all. So, in the end, they forgot her too. Remembering seemed unwise" (323-24). The generic name, Beloved, does not guarantee a "position in the kinship network organized by the Name-of-the-Father" (Wyatt, *Identification* 83). Her speech, characterized as it is by semiotic features, cannot enter the Symbolic order and, consequently, will be forgotten. Beloved, the ghost of the traumatic past of slavery, will not be remembered as she herself is indeed a cacophonous and semiotic silence in the Symbolic. This notion will be of further relevance in the comparison between *Beloved* and *Jazz* because Wild's silence in *Jazz* is also a feminine, semiotic silence. The main difference, however, is that while Wild's semiotic speech is

rather absent than present, Beloved's semiotic language is represented in *Beloved*. It is only in the end of the novel that it is finally forgotten and, thus, in a way, silenced.

Beloved is, indeed, a text that is fundamentally determined by silences. The systematic abuse and degradation of the Black body as well as the loss of the ancestral languages, traumata, slavery's ineffability and the suppression of the semiotic cause and are marked by silences in *Beloved*. In order to represent slavery's fragmentation of the self, then, silences become central aspects of the code.

3.3. Beyond Language and Silence: Kristeva's semiotic, and Music in *Beloved*

In *Beloved*, the characters and the narrative voice alike perpetually experience the limits of language in their unsuccessful attempts to cope with and articulate the traumatic past. However, they defy the silences imposed by slavery and the traumata that arise from it through other communicative means which essentially rely on rhythm, sound, and music. Kristeva's concept of the semiotic as well as music are indeed both thematically and formally incorporated in the novel as they constitute alternative forms of communication and resistance.

3.3.1. Refuge in the semiotic

In their semiotic fusion, Sethe and Beloved elude the language of the Symbolic order as they become one through sound and rhythm. Since Beloved embodies the ghost of Sethe's dead baby daughter as well as the uncountable enslaved Africans who were killed during slavery, her bond with Sethe not only constitutes a pre-Oedipal stage between mother and daughter but also the destructive incorporation of a trauma that literally haunts the survivors' lives. In other words, the retreat into the semiotic is triggered by both Sethe's individual trauma of the infanticide as well as by the collective trauma of the Middle Passage and slavery. For her, the semiotic realm appears to constitute a safe refuge from the White paternal language and its suppressive law. However, the complete withdrawal from the Symbolic order not only proves to be highly destructive and dangerous but also futile as in the end Beloved along with what she said is forgotten in the Symbolic to which Sethe eventually must return.

Revolving around the intimate relationship between mother and daughter, *Beloved* demonstrates how slavery violently disrupts and kills family ties and, consequently, constructions of selfhood. In slavery, the White patriarchal law constitutes the Symbolic order which systematically disparages everyone who deviates from the White male norm. Within such an economy, White hegemony, in other words, is fundamentally intertwined with patriarchy. The White paternal language subjugates and deprives Sethe and the other ex-slaves of any agency within the Symbolic. For instance, Sixo cannot change the definitions of words, for Paul D the written letters do not hold any meaning and Sethe cannot read clock time (225; 183; 223). Moreover, literally inscribed as inarticulate animals through schoolteacher's ink, they are rendered speechless within the Symbolic language. It is, therefore, not surprising that Sethe and her daughters retreat into the maternal, semiotic realm of sounds and rhythm.

After Paul D left 124 Bluestone Road, the three women gradually enter a pre-linguistic realm which is indeed strongly reminiscent of Kristeva's concept of the semiotic. Notably, the entrance into the mother-daughter symbiosis is marked by a click, three notes, and finally a melody:

When the click came Sethe didn't know what it was. Afterward it was clear as daylight that *the click came at the very beginning – a beat, almost, before it started; before she heard three notes; before the melody was even clear.* Leaning forward a little, *Beloved* was humming softly. It was then, when *Beloved* finished humming, that Sethe recalled the click – the settling of pieces into places designed and made especially for them. (207; emphasis added)

Sethe and her daughters, in other words, eschew the formal and coherent language of the Symbolic order as they rely on semiotic features such as sounds and melody in order to find refuge in a pre-Oedipal fusion. In fact, the lines between self and other begin to dissolve and the mother and her daughters become one. Their speech reflects both echolalia and glossolalia which are central manifestations of Kristeva's semiotic (Schippers 26). This is seen in the incoherent and chaotic structure, the frequent insertion of visual gaps, as well as the echo-like repetition of certain phrases. Moreover, it is impossible to determine who is truly speaking as the women's speech becomes a clamor of their indiscernible voices:

Beloved
You are my sister
You are my daughter
You are my face; you are me
I have found you again; you have come back to me
You are my Beloved

You are mine
You are mine
You are mine. (255-56)

The pre-Symbolic stage to which Sethe and her daughters retreat is clearly a feminine realm. The semiotic as a feminine form of communication, as it is described by Kristeva, is, therefore, closed to Paul D and Stamp Paid. Sethe, for instance, realizes very soon after Beloved's arrival that she, Beloved, and Denver share a code that Paul D is unable to understand: "Hearing the three of them laughing at something he wasn't in on. The code they used among themselves that he could not break" (155). In a similar manner, Stamp Paid cannot decipher the sounds he hears in front of 124 Bluestone Road:

What [Stamp Paid] heard, as he moved toward the porch, he didn't understand. Out on Bluestone Road he thought he heard a conflagration of hasty voices – loud, urgent, all speaking at once so he could not make out what they were talking about or to whom. *The speech wasn't nonsensical, exactly, nor was it tongues.* But something was wrong with the order of the words and he couldn't describe or cipher it to save his life. (202; emphasis added)

Stamp Paid, in other words, fails to make sense of the pre-linguistic sounds he hears, for they are not intelligible within the Symbolic order (Schippers 26). Paul D and Stamp Paid, representing the paternal law, are excluded from the maternal, semiotic realm. In fact, in *Beloved*, the semiotic mother-daughter bond is, essentially, "erotic, beyond masculine 'law' and order, a wild zone" (Rigney 17). In short, the pre-Symbolic fusion to which Sethe and her daughters regress is impenetrable by the representatives of the paternal language and order. It proves to be, however, highly destructive as the women's selves dissolve.

Indeed, not only their voices, but also their selves fuse with one another. While the semiotic might constitute a form of defiance of the Symbolic as it grants the women a feminine means of expression, the symbiosis to which they withdraw themselves is, without a doubt, highly destructive. Due to Beloved's dominance, the semiotic fusion becomes in the end "a univocal tyranny silencing any attempt at dialogic communication" (Lawrence 240). Sethe's self in particular precariously disintegrates as she succumbs to the destructive fusion with the ghost of her dead daughter.

From a Kristevian view point, Beloved's infantile desire to merge with her mother in a pre-Oedipal semiotic bond is not surprising. It is not only motivated by the wish to escape from the oppressive White paternal language, but also by the fact that Beloved was not even two years old when she died. The "crawling-already? baby" (110) had neither acquired the

language of the Symbolic nor had it discovered its separateness from Sethe. Beloved, therefore, longs for the semiotic reunion with her mother, even though she now returns in the guise of a young woman. In contrast, Denver, having entered the Symbolic on her very own before, is able to disentangle herself from the symbiosis and leave the porch of 124 Bluestone Road in order to seek help. Years earlier, at Lady Jones's, she immersed herself in the language of the Symbolic, cherishing the "chalk, the little *i* and all the rest that those afternoons held" (121). For Denver, the Symbolic language is indeed not as threatening as it is for Sethe and Beloved, for she finds a sense of self in it, albeit it is only a "*little i*" (121; emphasis added). The first address she goes to after having left the fusion is, therefore, Lady Jones's house where she experienced, thanks to the language of the Symbolic, her selfhood as an independent agent.

In the end, Sethe and her daughters are forced to separate from one another and return to the Symbolic order. Interestingly enough, this re-entry into the Symbolic is not provoked by the paternal law itself but by the women of the community who know that "[i]n the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like" (305). Led on by Ella, the neighborhood women unite their voices to a sound which is beyond the Symbolic word. It has an exorcizing effect as their voices "rise to a crescendo of pure sound. More than a speech act, it is a *mantralike* utterance that rises from the creative female depths of their self, an act of exorcism" (Rodrigues 161; emphasis in the original). Hence, it is not through the Symbolic language itself but through the "right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words" that Sethe "trembled like the baptized in its wash" (208). Paradoxically, then, her re-birth into the Symbolic order and language is engendered through the feminine power of sounds. The women recognize that the pre-Oedipal immersion in the semiotic can be harmful and that both the Symbolic and the semiotic must be balanced out for the construction of a healthy self.

In *Beloved*, the semiotic chaos between Sethe and Beloved not only marks their regression to an individual pre-Oedipal mother-daughter bond but also the survivors' collective psychotic state engendered by the haunting trauma of slavery and its legacy. Hence, evoking the numberless victims of the Middle Passage and slavery, Beloved forces Sethe to confront herself with the uncontainable and uncontrollable past. Beloved's speech is, therefore, as already intimated above, pervaded by gaps and silences that point to the inexpressibility of slavery. Additionally, its lack of coherence and defiance of grammatical rules reflect the semiotic structure characteristic of glossolalia. Importantly, Kristeva's concept of the

semiotic is not restricted to the pre-Symbolic babble between mother and child but it also encompasses other forms of pre- and trans-linguistic forms of expression as, for instance, psychotic discourse (Schippers 26). Beloved's semiotic speech, then, simultaneously represents the communication between mother and child and the fragmented, unintelligible discourse of psychosis.

Beloved's representation of the collective trauma is clearly seen in her fragmented speech when she conjures up the experiences of the enslaved Africans on the ship:

I cannot fall because there is no room to the men without skin are making loud
noises I am not dead the bread is sea-colored [...] those able to die are in a
pile [...] the little hill of dead people a hot thing the men without skin
push them through with poles the woman is there with the face I want
the face that is mine they fall into the sea which is the color of
bread she has nothing in her ears if I had teeth of the man who died on my face I
would bite the circle around her neck. (249)

Sethe is unable to truly mourn the victims of the Middle Passage and slavery. The semiotic merging of the women's indiscernible voices thus represents Sethe's incorporation of the "Sixty Million and More" (dedication) that are lost, but nonetheless present in the collective subconscious. Indeed, according to Freud's theories on mourning and melancholia, unresolved grief over a lost object leads to the violent incorporation of it. In his description of melancholia, Freud draws on the image of eating and devouring (Bradbury 216). In *Beloved*, Sethe's and Beloved's bodily fusion is also marked by this imagery: "I want the join [...] chewing and swallowing she touches me she knows I want to join
she chews and swallows me I am gone now I am her face my own face has left me" (251-52; emphasis added). Sethe, stuck in the phase of melancholic incorporation, bodily absorbs and eventually succumbs to the collective trauma. Her identification with the victims of slavery thus leads to the loss of language and, consequently, of her own self. It is only after the split with Beloved in the dialogue with Paul D that Sethe re-discovers her own selfhood.

Sethe's and Beloved's fusion thus marks their flight from the paternal language and order into a semiotic, essentially feminine, realm. As Beloved represents both Sethe's child and the countless victims of slavery, the women's destructive symbiosis portrays an individual mother-daughter bond as well as a symptom of psychosis caused by unsuccessful mourning.

3.3.2. Music as an Enhanced Mode of Expression

In addition to the fundamentally feminine voice, or rather sound, found in the semiotic, *Beloved* is also strongly influenced by the history and legacy of African American music. The novel incorporates, both thematically and formally, elements of work songs, the blues, and jazz. It is, for instance, pervaded by references to singing and dancing as well as by multiple insertions of lyrics. Moreover, the narration itself heavily draws on certain structural devices characteristic of the blues and jazz music.

Especially with regard to the formal incorporation of music in *Beloved*, it is pertinent to bear in mind that since fiction and music constitute different media, their relation can always only be one of analogy. While certain musical features lend themselves more readily to an adaptation into language, there is, of course, also a great number of aspects inherent in music that elude the translation into prose altogether (cf. Munton 241-42). For instance, melody and harmony are certainly lost, whereas the so-called riffs in jazz music tend to be formally represented through repetition in prose. In *Beloved*, then, literary analogies of constitutive organizational features of African American music, such as antiphony, improvisation as well as repetition and variation, underlie the narrative.

The Call and Response pattern is evident in the unfolding dialogues among the various narrative voices and their stories. Since the use of antiphony as a structural strategy has been analyzed above at quite some length, it should suffice to reiterate that, in *Beloved*, the characters' different perspectives, narrated mostly through free indirect discourse, are supplemented by the Responses provided by other characters. Antiphony in *Beloved*, in other words, functions as a central structural framework of the overall narrative. In contrast, the second feature of African American music that is discernible in *Beloved*, the notion of improvisation, is realized in a much subtler way. An analogy to improvisation, as it is found in the blues, is seen, for instance, in the progression from "one thousand feet of the best hand-forged chain" to "dance two-step to the music of hand-forged iron" and finally to "they chain-danced over the fields" (126-28). Over the stretch of only few paragraphs, the narrative voice seemingly improvises on the music-like sound of the chain that connects the prisoners. As the improvisational repetitions of the imagery of dancing and the chain's sound are indeed contained in a short passage, they create "brief moments in the text that are analogous to a single song" (Sale 181). Put differently, they tie together the narration and convey the impression of a separate song. Such repetitions, of course, only imitate the processes of

improvisation as they are in fact consciously arranged by the implied author. In a similar way, simple repetition and variation determine the entire narrative. Short phrases, such as “wear her out” and “wore out” (15; 35; 121; 209; 286), are repeated and, at times, slightly modified throughout the text. Put in ever new contexts, the words resonate with multiple meanings. Moreover, the jazz-like repetition and variation of a short phrase is also seen in Baby Suggs’s memories of Sweet Home. The phrase “and nobody, but nobody, knocked her down” is first repeated, “and nobody knocked her down”, whereupon it is later changed into “where nobody knocked her down (or up)” (164-65). Much like the improvisation-like elaboration revolving around the prisoners’ chain, the repetition and variation of the phrase “nobody knocked her down” demarcates Baby Suggs’s musings as a separate section which is analogous to a song or a song’s verse. The final repetition with its pungent variation, then, amplifies the phrase’s meanings.

Along with such narrative analogies to music, *Beloved* is pervaded by direct references to music and singing as the slaves and ex-slaves exploit music as a source of strength, resistance, and autonomy. Music empowers Baby Suggs and Paul D, for instance, to express traumatic experiences and memories which would otherwise remain unspoken in language. After her sermon, Baby Suggs seeks to communicate “what her heart had to say” (104) and which is, essentially, beyond language. To this end, she speaks to her congregation through dancing and music: “Saying no more, she stood up then and danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music. Long notes held until the four-part harmony was perfect enough for their deeply loved flesh” (104). In other words, the singing community and Baby Suggs’s dancing body enter a dialogue in which they can express their emotions without resorting to possibly inadequate language.

Similarly, singing enables Paul D to confront and process the past. When Sethe asks him about the bit, he responds, ““I never talked about it. Not to a soul. Sang it sometimes, but never told a soul”” (85). Importantly, singing for Paul D does not necessitate an external recipient, for he can sing for and to himself, too. In a way, then, it may not be dialogized communication between self and other, but rather an internal dialogue with his own self about the (internalized) trauma. Moreover, the songs themselves are internally dialogized as Paul D draws on and combines different songs. Before moving back to 124 Bluestone Road, for example, he brings together and modifies songs he learned at Sweet Home, where “yearning fashioned every note” (48), and during his time as a prisoner in Alberta, Georgia.

He creates a new text with these sources as well as with verses he himself invents (Wolfe 272). Evoking different songs of slavery and piecing them together into a new narrative, Paul D thus uses the (hi)stories of music to put his experiences of slavery into dialogue with one another. Put differently, this interplay of different sources and, for that matter, memories, creates a new text in which Paul D not only explores and recognizes but also succeeds in giving voice to his traumatic past. Consequently, the verses he adapts reverberate with both old and new meanings as well as with both collective and individual experiences. This is, for instance, seen in his transformation of the verse “Lay my head on the railroad line,/ Train come along, pacify my mind” (48), which is originally part of a railroad holler called “Sis Joe”, into “Lay my head on a potato sack,/ Devil sneak up behind my back” (311). In these two verses, Paul D remembers and processes not only the conditions of forced labor in Alberta, Georgia, but also the painful confrontation with his traumata in the cold house, the devil being his suppressed trauma in the shape of Beloved. The songs that were passed down to him by other enslaved Africans thus provide him with a means to express his traumatic past, which he perpetually fails to articulate otherwise.

Paul D learned the prison lyrics, which he now remembers and modifies, in Alberta, Georgia where he and forty-five other men sang in order to survive and at the same time kill “the flirt whom folks called Life” (128). Forced to unbearable physical labor, the prisoners sing railroad hollers which are like “flat-headed nails for pounding and pounding and pounding” (48). The songs not only serve as a tool to keep them in the same rhythm with their sledgehammers, but also to reassert some form of agency. Indeed, the imitation of the sounds and rhythms of the hammering unites the prisoners and grants them an active part in their labor (Kitts 506). The code itself is necessarily rendered unintelligible for the guards: “They sang it out and beat it up, garbling the words so they could not be understood; tricking the words so their syllables yielded up other meanings” (128). The reader, too, except for the few lines Paul D hums again at 124 Bluestone Road, does not learn the songs he and the other prisoners sing. The lyrics, as it were, form a secret code amongst the prisoners from which both the guards and the reader are excluded. Their songs become vehicles through which the prisoners signify as they metaphorically “killed a boss so often and so completely they had to bring him back to life to pulp him one more time” (128). Instead of the exact lyrics, what is conveyed, therefore, is the songs’ “psychological value for coping with the situation at hand” (Kitts 502). In short, music for Paul D and the other men functions as a means to gain strength to survive and endure torture, rape, and forced labor a little longer.

Moreover, the intertextual reference to the railroad holler “Sis Joe” forcefully reminds the reader that modern America is founded on the violent exploitation and subjugation of Black Americans. Paul D’s singing, in other words, points to the violent coercion of African Americans who were forced to build the railroads which played a crucial role in America’s economic advancement and development. Furthermore, the song, though having its origin among Black railroaders, was adapted by Aaron Copland in his ballet *Rodeo* in 1942. It has thus become an example of numberless “products of black culture that have been whitewashed in the process of becoming American” (Kitts 496-97). *Beloved*, incorporating the lyrics Copland omitted in his adaptation, thus recovers and re-appropriates the song, indicating that in American history “there was nothing white that was not also black” (Kitts 497). Music, in other words, re-writes American history as it powerfully reifies the African American presence.

But *Beloved* not only retrieves and re-locates Black music in the American consciousness; it also acknowledges the significance of distinctly European music in American history and heritage. In her version of her birth story, Denver, for instance, carefully recites Amy’s ballad “Lady Button Eyes” which is replete with Old World imageries of fairies. Hence, Denver’s origin story shows, much like the railroad holler, how America’s cultural heritage is determined by a multiplicity of traditions (Wolfe 269). Amy’s interruption of the song to explain that her mother taught it to her is likely to have inspired Sethe to sing songs to her children, too. Later she recognizes a song Beloved is humming as one of the songs she invented and along with it Beloved herself as her daughter. Amy’s ballad, which she learned from her mother, is thus not only an integral part of Denver’s birth narrative but also of the musical heritage she and Beloved inherit from Sethe. The railroad holler as well as Amy’s ballad indicate the interdependency of Black and White traditions and their shared role in the construction of American history and identity. As Wolfe (270) points out, when Sethe tells Paul D about the “whitegirl” that helped her get to the Ohio River, his response is, therefore, quite indicative as he says, ““Then she helped herself too, God bless her”” (9).

In *Beloved*, the slaves and ex-slaves draw on music in order to express the traumatic past for which they lack “word-shapes” (114), to experience some sense of agency, and to find strength to endure the gruesome conditions of slavery. Additionally, music functions as a form of resistance as Sixo, who “stopped speaking English because there was no future in it” (30), turns his silence into music and, finally, laughter. After the slaves’ thwarted escape, he begins to sing a song that stops the slave catchers and schoolteacher in their tracks. Much

later, Paul D thinks that “he should have sung along. Loud, something loud and rolling to go with Sixo’s tune, but the words put him off – he didn’t understand the words. Although it shouldn’t have mattered because he understood the sound: hatred so loose it was juba” (268). Even though Paul D does not understand the words, for Sixo probably sings in his native language, he, just like the White men, fathom the song’s meaning which lies in its sound. Juba, originating in the Black English oral tradition, signifies “a holiday mood, a joyous occasion” (Atkinson 259). Sixo’s hatred, then, is so loose and “unbound it was like a joyous occasion” (Atkinson 259). Although schoolteacher originally wanted the fugitives back alive, he decides to kill Sixo because “[t]he song must have convinced him” (266) that Sixo can never be truly silenced. Indeed, his silence was not enforced, but chosen by himself as an act of resistance and now they have to “shoot him to shut him up” (267). After his song, Sixo laughs: “A rippling sound [...] he laughs. Something is funny. Paul D guesses what it is when Sixo interrupts his laughter to call out, ‘Seven-O! Seven-O!’” (267). Knowing that the “Thirty-Mile woman got away with his blossoming seed” (270), Sixo laughs at schoolteacher and the slave catchers. In short, his silence, song, and laughter are all forms of resistance and defiance against schoolteacher and everything he represents. In the end, he may overpower and kill Sixo, but he fails to capture and coerce the Thirty-Mile woman and Sixo’s unborn child; the joke, then, is on him.

To conclude, *Beloved* interweaves language, silence, semiotic as well as musical features into a code that powerfully constitutes an alternative, essentially feminine and African American discourse. As such, it seeks to re-configure and re-member American history and the African American subjectivity.

4. Analysis of Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

[S]lavery was indeed the sum of all villainies, the cause of all sorrow, the root of all prejudice; Emancipation was the key to a promised land of sweeter beauty than ever stretched before the eyes of wearied Israelites. In song and exhortation swelled one refrain-Liberty; in his tears and curses the God he implored had Freedom in his right hand. At last it came, – suddenly, fearfully, like a dream.

Du Bois 4

Jazz-boys, jazz-boys,–
Play, plAY, PLAY!
Tomorrow....is darkness.
Joy today!

Langston Hughes “Harlem Night Club”

After the abolition of slavery, the Jazz Age, finally, promises liberty. The music of a new era, of emancipation, and of freedom reverberates through *Jazz*. However, Morrison's novel, much like Hughes's poem, subtly implies that the sound of this time, while certainly a resource of hope, optimism, and strength, also seeks to drown out the reality of pervasive racial discrimination and violence. The following analysis of *Jazz*, therefore, examines how language, silence, and music coalesce to form a code which, while echoing the music of the Harlem Renaissance, constructs (self-) knowledge as well as re-pieces the subjectivities of the free, but nonetheless wounded, African American.

4.1. *Jazz*, a Heteroglot Novel

Jazz, set in Harlem during the 1920s, is loaded with a sense of agitation and excitement. The text echoes the vibrant bustle of the Harlem Renaissance as the City is filled with music,

voices, and gossip. The enigmatic narrative voice⁴ intently observes, describes, and comments on the City and its inhabitants' activities, while also yielding its narrative space to the characters themselves. Burdened with the experience of loss, racism, and dislocation, the characters as well as the narrator search, amid an atmosphere of change and incitement, for someone to talk to in order to make sense of the world and themselves. *Jazz* is thus a heteroglot novel in which the struggle for one's voice and for dialogic communication determines the characters' and the narrator's discoveries and constructions of their selves.

4.1.1. Dialogized Language and *Gnosis*

At the heart of the novel is the desire to gain knowledge and a better understanding of the world and oneself through dialogic interaction. Indeed, the desire to gain (self-) knowledge through language determines the entire narrative of *Jazz*. The narrative voice, for instance, even wishes to *become* the language with which knowledge can be constructed: "I want to be the language that wishes him well, speaks his name, wakes him when his eyes need to be open" (161). The novel as a whole can thus be read as an attempt to find a 'benevolent' language in heteroglossia that speaks truth and in doing so metaphorically opens our eyes as we gain knowledge about ourselves and, consequently, a sense of self. Hence, *Jazz*, much like *Beloved*, revolves around the strong wish to bear a language that powerfully evokes and constructs (self-) knowledge which would otherwise remain 'unseen'. Yet, the text suggests that the struggle for such a language is tiresome and difficult as the narrative voice says at some later point, "I am uneasy now. Feeling a bit false. What, I wonder, what would I be [...] [w]ithout aching words that set, then miss, the mark?" (219). Moreover, in a very much Bakhtinian sense, *Jazz* assigns a pivotal role to dialogized language in the characters' and the narrator's attempts to make sense of the world and to re-construct a sense of selfhood. It can, therefore, be understood as a literary reflection on the interdependency of dialogized language, knowledge, and subjectivity.

⁴ The narrative voice is highly ambiguous. It has been suggested, among many other things, that *Jazz*'s narrator may be the book itself (Leonard 49), jazz music (Eckhard 11), or Isis, the Egyptian goddess (Grewal 121; cited in Tally 25-26). For the present discussion, I will regard it as a bodiless, abstract entity whose desire to gain a better understanding of the world drives the narrative. With regard to its gender, various critics have referred to the narrator as a female entity, for its gossipy tone, according to them, suggests a female gender. However, I prefer to refer to the narrator as an 'it' because the attribution of any gender seems to be necessarily based on stereotypes and clichés.

As Tally convincingly argues, the enigmatic epigraph to *Jazz*, “I am the name of the sound/ and the sound of the name./ I am the sign of the letter/ And the designation of the division”, already alludes to the main preoccupation of the novel, namely the fundamental desire to gain knowledge about oneself and the world through language (21). The epigraph is taken from a mythic text entitled “Thunder, Perfect Mind” which belongs to a corpus of gnostic manuscripts called *The Nag Hammadi*. Buried around 367 CE and re-discovered in 1945 in a cave close to the town of Nag Hammadi in Egypt, the texts display the influence of multiple philosophical and religious sources (Tally 20). As they blend various traditions and resist the dominance of Christian doctrines, they were condemned as heretical writings by the Christian church. Nowadays, however, the texts are attributed to Gnosticism as they draw not only on Christian thought but on philosophical schools both before and during the Christian era as well as due to their overall philosophical concern with knowledge. Deriving from the Greek word *gnosis*, i.e. knowledge, Gnosticism views (self-) knowledge being as dependent on higher, spiritual, and essentially internal apprehension rather than on external, mundane teachings (Tally 20).

With regard to the use of “Thunder, Perfect Mind” as an epigraph to *Jazz*, it is, therefore, this “‘free-thinking’-nature of Gnosticism” (Tally 20), evident in the *The Nag Hammadi*, which points to the novel’s heteroglossia as well as to the novel’s obsession with self-awareness and knowledge. Importantly, this striving for internal (self-) knowledge necessitates language, for the speaking I of the epigraph can be read as language/*logos* itself (Tally 26). The first two lines, “I am the name of the sound/ and the sound of the name”, clearly prompt such a reading. The following lines, “I am the sign of the letter/ And the designation of the division”, then, can be understood in connection with the notion of the “sign as double-sided; signifier and signified” (Tally 26). Moreover, they allude to the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified (Eckhard 146). Hence, the epigraph points to the division between language and reality which, according to Eckhard, may be experienced as liberating as it affords us with “endless possibilities of storytelling” (146). The epigraph and, by extension, *Jazz* thus acknowledge the discrepancy between language and reality and suggest that language is consequently open to ever new usages and interpretations. Clearly, the inherent openness and ambiguity of language seen in the epigraph is in accordance with Bakhtin’s notions of heteroglossia and double-voicedness. The provenance of the enigmatic epigraph, in short, foreshadows the novel’s heteroglot composition as well as its concern with *gnosis* as the characters and the narrator alike gain (self-) knowledge through their dialogues with one another and the reader.

Moreover, the epigraph's final line, "And the designation of the division", not only indicates the division between signifier and signified but also the power of language itself to *divide*. As language creates knowledge of the world and of oneself, it is not surprising that it can be (and indeed is) utilized to also construct reality. By implication, *Jazz*'s epigraph calls attention to "the power of language/logos/discourse to classify and structure reality, credibly extended to language that has stipulated a hierarchy of peoples into empowered and powerless" (Tally 27). Much like *Beloved*, *Jazz* thus addresses the inherent property of language to 'make reality' to reinforce prevalent power relations. In the novel, the optimism of the Harlem Renaissance indeed seduces the new arrivals in the City to regard language as a tool of theirs to form and change their own lives: They felt "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*" (32-33; emphasis added). Their hopes, however, echo Lorde's assertion that the instruments of the powerful cannot be truly appropriated by the disempowered: "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. *They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game*, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (112; emphasis added). Language is, after all, a powerful tool of subjugation and its appropriation, as Bakhtin emphasized, is a difficult task (*Dialogic* 294). The characters' and the narrator's desire for a language "designed for their play" (33) with which they can create a sense of belonging in a hostile surrounding propels the narrative. Indeed, they seek to forge the world and themselves through language and imagination as Violet, for instance, asks, "'What's the world for if you can't make it up the way you want it?'" (208). In short, Morrison's novel investigates the struggle of heteroglossia as well as the power of language to construct a sense of self and to transform the world around us.

On the level of narration, for instance, the hustle and bustle of heteroglossia (as well as of the City in the 1920s) is seen in the incorporation of the characters' voices. The novel's narrative structure indeed resembles the ideological struggle of heteroglossia as the narrator, while claiming ultimate narrative authority and knowledge, nonetheless repeatedly hands over the narration to the characters. It is the tension between the narrator's frequent judgments and the characters' own views and evaluations which deconstructs the notion of a singular, monologic truth. *Jazz*'s polyphonic narrative, in other words, creates a democratic dialogue of not only voices but also, importantly, of ideologies. The multiplicity of voices is represented through *skaz*, free direct and free indirect discourse as well as through long passages of the characters' direct speech signaled by quotation marks. These narrative

devices can, however, almost imperceptibly blend within one sentence. *Skaz* in *Jazz* is, for example, evident in the mimetic use of typically oral sounds, such as “[s]th” (3) and “[u]h huh” (78). Such imitations, as will be of further relevance below, allude to the narrator’s gossip tone. The transition from the narrator’s perspective to a character’s view point in free indirect discourse can be seen in the subtle movement from the narrator’s voice to the double-voicing of Alice’s thoughts: “Alice Manfred knew the kind of Negro that couple was: the kind she trained Dorcas away from. The embarrassing kind. More than unappealing, they were dangerous. The husband shot; the wife stabbed. Nothing. Nothing her niece did or tried could equal the violence done to her. And where there was violence wasn’t there also vice? Gambling. Cursing [...]” (79). After the first sentence, the narrator reproduces Alice’s unarticulated thoughts in free indirect discourse. The short, one-word sentences signal her deep consternation and bewilderment in the face of what she considers to be immoral behavior. Violet’s pondering, in contrast, is narrated in free direct discourse. The long, run-on sentences are interspersed with numerous questions as she frantically pictures Joe and Dorcas’s relation: “[...] and he bought her underwear with stitching done to look like rosebuds and violets, VIOLETS, don’t you know, and she wore it for him [...] while I was where?” (95). Violet’s agitation and anger are clearly reflected, for example, in the use of capital letters and oral phrases such as “don’t you know” (95). Moreover, the long sentences that seemingly cannot find a halt suggest her restlessness. Her despair, in other words, is clearly represented in free direct discourse as well as through the use of typography. In short, in *Jazz*, *skaz*, free direct discourse, and free indirect discourse represent to varying degrees of immediacy the narrator’s and the characters’ voices.

In contrast, Joe’s account of his hunt (121-35), Dorcas’s thoughts at the party (189-193), and Felice’s voice (198-216) are given in direct speech. These sections are clearly demarcated by quotation marks. Although they may, therefore, appear to be rather monologic discourses, they are in fact in dialogue with other elements of the text. Dorcas’s thoughts, for instance, are in dialogue with the narrator’s lyrical description of the music and the dancing and Joe’s section presupposes a (female) addressee as it begins as follows: “‘It’s not a thing you tell to another man [...]’” (121) and at a later point, he says, “‘Don’t get me wrong. This wasn’t Violet’s fault [...]’” (129). In his dialogue with the implied addressee, he seeks to give an explanation of the adultery and the homicide without, however, trying to justify them. Hence, it is his (ostensibly) unmediated voice and his desire to lay bare the reasons of his actions that clearly show the novel’s heteroglossia. He, whilst arguably an easy scapegoat, is not denied narrative space to articulate his history and perspective in his own voice. The

admission that his voice must also be heard emphasizes that there cannot be a simple, monologic truth. In brief, the text clearly grants narrative authority to the characters, for their voices and discourses are represented through various techniques. Giving thus voice to the various individual histories, experiences, and perspectives, *Jazz* deconstructs the notion of a single truth and demands the reader as well as the characters and the narrator to construct a dynamic sense of knowledge through the voices' dialogues.

In addition to these narrative techniques of representing discourse, the narrator also reproduces, and thus double-voices, rumors and hearsay. Throughout the novel, it maintains a gossipy tone as is evident, for instance, in the sentence, "It never happened again as far as I know – the street sitting – but quiet as it's kept she did try to steal that baby although there is no way to prove it" (17). The phrase "quiet as it's kept" clearly indicates that the information is known but not openly shared and "that baby" presupposes that the addressee may already have some (limited) shared knowledge. The gossip which the narrator, whose anonymity is a "key element of gossip" (Williams 278), shares with its addressee is necessarily double-voiced discourse, for Bakhtin indicates that gossip is an every-day phenomenon of double-voicedness (*Dialogic* 338). Moreover, he emphasizes that such discourses have a profound impact on our own subjectivities: "Reflect how enormous is the weight of 'everyone says' and 'it is said' in public opinion, public rumor, gossip, slander and so forth. One must also consider the psychological importance in our lives of what others say about us, *and the importance, for us, of understanding and interpreting these words of others*" (*Dialogic* 338; emphasis added).

In *Jazz*, it is indeed the narrator's compulsion to make sense of the rumors which drives its storytelling as it constantly makes predictions, which prove, however, wrong, as well as comments on and interprets its observations. For instance, the narrative voice predicts another shooting at the beginning of *Jazz*: "What turned out differently was who shot whom" (6). As the story unfolds, however, no one else gets shot. Instead, the narrator realizes that it has misinterpreted the gossip. Importantly, the narrative entity not only picks up and reproduces gossip but also adds its own imagination. While claiming to be "well-informed" (137), it admits that it is "not hard to imagine what it must have been like" (137). The narrator's "pretense of knowledge" (Mayberry 205), then, crumbles at the end of the novel as it has to concede that it is unable to truly make sense of the gossip and, by consequence, of itself: "[Felice] makes me nervous. [...] Now she is disturbing me, making me doubt my own self" (198). In the end, it is, therefore, not the gossip that enables the narrator to gain a

better understanding of the world and itself, but its close relation to the reader. Clearly, the narrator's willingness to share privileged information shapes the relation between the narrator and the reader. It is as though the narrative entity leans in closer to the reader to confide a secret when it says right at the beginning of *Jazz*, "Sth, I know that woman" (3). The sound of "Sth" establishes an intimate relation between the narrative entity and its addressee as it indicates that the information which is to follow is secret. In short, while the narrator's attempt to gain knowledge through double-voicing and interpreting gossip is constantly thwarted, it nonetheless manages to establish a close relation to the reader which, in the end, leads to the narrator's greater self-awareness.

In fact, the novel's deep concern with *gnosis* is evident in the narrator's dialogue with the reader. Whilst being consistently entangled in contradictions, the narrative entity nonetheless claims to be omniscient which, clearly, renders it highly unreliable. In the end, however, it admits that "[s]omething is missing there. Something rogue. Something else you have to figure in before you can figure it out" (228). The novel, in other words, refers to the insufficiency of 'bare', i.e. non-dialogized, language to truly grasp the world and gain *gnosis*. Evidently, as the narrative entity is constantly forced to admit errors and to re-evaluate matters, it must eventually acknowledge its inability to acquire definite knowledge and, for that matter, to construct a static sense of self and other. Consequently, *Jazz* demonstrates that knowledge and subjectivity are necessarily dynamic and, in a Bakhtinian manner, perpetually constructed in the interaction with other (cf. Pearce 89). It clearly suggests that the addressee or, for that matter, the reader is crucial in the narrator's endeavor to *become* as well as gain *gnosis*: "*Talking to you and hearing you answer – that's the kick*. 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; emphasis in the original). The narrator's dependency on the reader demonstrates that it is only through dialogized language, as described by Bakhtin, that meaning and self can perpetually be constructed. Its request to be *made* and *remade* by the reader through their active interaction with the text undoubtedly shows that self cannot be static but always necessitates an other with which it can enter a dialogue. In short, even though the narrative entity must realize that it cannot gain knowledge on its own, it gains self-awareness and self-knowledge in its interaction with the reader. The final two paragraphs of the novel, then, written much like a love letter to the reader, emphasize the importance of dialogic interaction to become a self as well as to gain *gnosis*.

Similarly, the characters construct a sense of self in their dialogues with one another. Violet, for instance, mends her split self in her internal confrontation with “*that* Violet” (95; emphasis in the original) as well as in the dialogues with Felice and Alice. Violet’s “grandmother fed [her] stories about a little blond child” (208) when she was a child herself. The internalization of these stories signifies for Violet, much like racism for Du Bois’s Black subject, a severe splitting of her subjectivity. As Hardack asserts, since double-consciousness tends to be related to male characters, *Jazz*’s representation of Violet’s fragmentation calls attention to the fact that Du Bois’s double-consciousness is also experienced by Black women (455). Her grandmother’s stories about Golden Gray constitute and imply a certain form of racism, namely colorism, i.e. the “prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color” (Walker 290). Violet, whose skin color is described as dark black, therefore, envies Dorcas who “didn’t need to straighten her hair” and who had “creamy” (5) skin without having used skin bleach (201). Humiliated and hurt by the adultery as well as by the lighter skin color of her husband’s affair, Violet loses control over her second self, “*that* Violet” (95; emphasis in the original), and becomes violent. Violet’s double-consciousness, in other words, becomes dangerous as she is driven by another self who “knew that the knife was in the parrot’s cage and not in the kitchen drawer” (90). Indeed, “[t]he ushers saw the knife before she did” (90), for her real self has lost command of her body. Violet experiences herself as a “spectral observer [...]” (Hardack 453) of the other in her body, who acts without her volition. However, she manages to reconcile “*that* Violet” (95) within her self: “NO! *that* Violet is not somebody walking round town, up and down the streets wearing my skin and using my eyes shit no *that* Violet is me! The me that hauled hay in Virginia and handled a four-mule team in the brace” (95-96; emphasis in the original).

However, her self remains incomplete as long as the dialogue remains an internal one (Tally 114). It is in her conversations with Alice and Felice that she is finally empowered to re-piece her selfhood. Her interactions with Alice will be discussed in more detail with regard to the feminine space the two women create in order to engage in a healing process. During Felice’s visits, Violet finally re-claims her selfhood as she rejects the other which has been implanted in her subjectivity by racism and colorism:

‘I saw myself as somebody I’d seen in a picture show or a magazine. Then it would work, If I pictured myself the way I am it seemed wrong.
‘How did you get rid of her?’
‘Killed her. Then I killed the me that killed her.’

‘Who’s left?’

‘Me.’

[Felice] didn’t say anything. [She] started thinking maybe the hairdresser was right again because of the way she looked when she said ‘me.’ Like it was the first she heard of the word. (209)

Echoing Sethe’s recognition of her selfhood in *Beloved*, Violet discovers her complete ‘me’ in the conversation with Felice. In the end, however, *Jazz* suggests that Violet’s whole self, which she claims and names in the conversation above, inevitably remains under the Du Boisian veil. After their reconciliation, Violet and Joe converse in the darkness of the bed covers which, like the Du Boisian veil, conceal their true selves. The dialogue with Felice, then, enables Violet to become aware of her true self as it grants her with Du Bois’s “second-sight” (3). She thus gains *gnosis* of her self, even though it remains hidden under the veil.

In short, the fundamentally human desire to find and claim a language which ‘opens our eyes’ so we can gain a better understanding of ourselves and the world propels the narrative of *Jazz*. The epigraph, the novel’s overall polyphonic composition, as well as the multiple dialogues point to the necessity of language to gain *gnosis*. For the dialogues to be truly ‘eye-opening’, however, a safe space must first be created. Indeed, the text shows that the notion of space has a direct bearing on the dialogues.

4.1.2. Dialogues and Safe Spaces

The City of *Jazz* acquires an almost anthropomorphized quality in the novel as its “street plans, all laid out” (8) determine the lives of the characters. The alienation experienced in the City leads to the characters’ retreat to the private sphere of their homes where they feel empowered to enter a dialogue with one another and to re-construct their fragmented selves. The notion of space is, therefore, significant in relation to the novel’s depiction of the characters’ dialogues.

As the novel unfolds in an era of political and demographic instability, the experience of dislocation and uprooting shapes the characters’ selves as well as their relations to one another. Train-dancing into the City, Joe and Violet are eager to build a new life and leave the rural South with its back-breaking labor and Jim Crowism behind them: “Like the others, they were country people, but how soon country people forget. When they fall in love with the city, it is for forever, and it is like forever” (33). The optimism of the time and the music

of the City “pump desire” (34) in the new arrivals, seducing them to “feel more like themselves, more like the people they always believed they were” (35). However, having severed the ties to their past in the South, the immigrants now struggle to find a true sense of belonging in a place that turns out to be also violent and hostile: “Daylight slants like razor cutting the buildings in half. In the top half I see looking faces and it’s not easy to tell which are people, which are the work of stonemasons. Below is shadow [...]” (7). Sky scrapers, unattainable symbols of White power and hegemony, dominate the city-landscape as they are only seen from below by the Black citizens and fear of racism has become a constant companion for women like Alice Manfred: “Recently she had begun to feel safe nowhere south of 110th Street, and Fifth Avenue was for her the most fearful of all. That was where whitemen leaned out of motor cars with folded dollar bills peeping from their palms. [...] It was where she, a woman of fifty and independent means, had no surname” (54). Moreover, Harlem, the newly emerging Black neighborhood, does not have any high schools or banks, institutions of social and political importance (10). The dislocation and alienation experienced in the City with its “thrilling, wasteful street lamps” (34) and its racism, then, distorts the Black subjectivity. Hence, the Great Migration is for the Black immigrants, rather than solely a geographical phenomenon, a psychological one (Eckhard 140). The subjects’ fragmentation caused by the Northern City is indeed contrasted to the South where Violet and Joe experienced a sense of wholeness as Violet, for instance, laments that “[b]efore I came North I made sense and so did the world” (207). Furthermore, the characters are deeply affected by personal loss, for the absence of parents marks the lives of Joe, Violet, Dorcas, and Golden Gray. As a consequence, Joe’s self must perpetually be remade (123-29), Violet’s is precariously split, Dorcas’s is determined by an “inside nothing[ness]” (37), and Golden Gray’s fragmented self is reflected in his metaphorically amputated limb. In short, *Jazz* investigates how the experience of displacement, racism, and parental absence renders the Black subjectivity vulnerable and, indeed, injured.

Clearly, the novel does not only depict the fragmentation of the self but also the reconfiguration of self and other through the dialogic interaction with one another. The dialogues that empower the characters and the narrator to re-constitute and re-claim a sense of selfhood are closely connected to the physical spaces which they have to create before commencing the healing process. In a sense, then, to counteract the severe destruction of the self caused by dislocation, the characters must first create safe spaces where they can tell their stories and enter a dialogue with each other and the reader.

Indeed, domestic space, as opposed to the public space of the City, enables the characters to engage in dialogues with one another as the novel is interspersed with intimate conversations whispered under bedcovers and in the safety of Alice Manfred's kitchen. Joe and Dorcas, for instance, surreptitiously meet in the apartment he rents out from his neighbor. Hidden in the private space of the bed, they confide their innermost pains and desires to one another. Their pillow conversations, though teasing and sexually loaded at times, turn again and again to their painful experiences of loss. As both suffer from their 'motherlessness,' Joe finds in Dorcas someone to whom he can finally talk about "that inside nothing" (38) that his mother's absence left in him. Indeed, Dorcas "filled it for him, just as he filled it for her, because she had it too" (38). In the private and safe space provided by the bed, in other words, they are empowered to articulate their painful losses and, even though only momentarily, experience themselves as whole and complete selves.

While the lovers' conversations are clearly connected to the (heterosexual) space of the bed, the dialogues between Violet and Alice Manfred take place in an essentially feminine realm. Driven by the desire to find out more about her husband's dead lover, Violet re-traces several places which Dorcas frequented and finally also visits the girl's aunt. There seems to be, however, yet another reason for Violet's visits. What she really longs for is a place to sit down and escape the City's chaos and alienation as she, when let in for the first time, says, "Oh, right now I just want to sit down on your chair" (80). Violet experiences the City with its "crevices" and "ill-glued cracks and weak places beyond which is anything" (23) as hostile and threatening. Even long before Joe's affair, she therefore longed for a place to rest as she "instead of putting her left heel forward, [...] stepped back and folded her legs in order to sit in the street" (23). Moreover, her wish to sit down in a place where she feels safe and protected from outside harm is intensified by her childhood memory of seeing her mother, Rose Dear, being tipped out of the chair she was sitting on by the men who came to collect her debts: "[T]hey came inside the house [...] and tipped the chair [Rose Dear] 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" (98). Violet thus recreates her mother's wish to sit in peace as she finally finds some rest and a sense of safety in Alice Manfred's kitchen. In this gendered space, the women feel free to engage in a dialogue where "[n]o apology or courtesy seemed required or necessary" and where, consequently, "something opened up" (83) between them. Despite their differences in terms of class, personal values, and life experiences, Alice and Violet can relate to one another as women. Indeed, Violet seeks advice from Alice by explicitly referring to them as women: "'We women, me and you. Tell

me something real''' (110). Moreover, both long for maternal guidance. Violet, for instance, exclaims:

‘Oh shoot! Where the grown people? Is it us?’

‘Oh, Mama.’ Alice Manfred blurted it out and then covered her mouth.

Violet had the same thought: Mama. Mama? [...] They looked away from each other then. The silence went on until Alice Manfred said, ‘Give me that coat. I can’t look at that lining another minute.’ (110)

Importantly, the silence that follows their involuntary, but shared, confessions is only brief. By sewing back the lining of Violet’s coat, Alice “figuratively stitches Violet back together” (Tally 115). Indeed, during their conversations, Alice carries out household chores which metaphorically help the women cope with the pain caused by Joe and Dorcas’s affair as well as mend their fragmented selves. The women’s dialogues and Alice’s sewing, then, metaphorically piece the fabrics of Violet’s self back together. Moreover, ironing her laundry, Alice seeks to smoothen the wrinkles Joe and Dorcas left in the bed sheets and, metaphorically, in the lives of Alice and Violet: “Two pairs of pillow slips, still warm to the touch, were stacked on the table. So were the two bed sheets” (83). In other words, she irons out the creases in the bed sheets and pillow cases which metonymically represent Joe and Dorcas’s affair and its violent consequences in the women’s lives. While metaphorically stitching back together Violet’s self as well as ironing the wrinkles of the bed sheets, Alice is, therefore, also deeply affected by the conversation with Violet: “Alice slammed the pressing iron down. ‘You don’t know what loss is,’ she said, *and listened as closely to what she was saying as did the woman sitting by her ironing board in a hat in the morning*” (87; emphasis added). The women’s dialogues in the kitchen, across an ironing board, thus constitute an arguably feminine way to deal with Joe and Dorcas’s illicit sexual relation as well as their individual experiences of loss. The crease-free laundry and the sound of the “hissing iron” (112) which accompany their conversations, then, soothe the women’s pain. In short, the women create an essentially feminine space in Alice’s kitchen where they are empowered to engage in a dialogue ‘from woman to woman’ and to metaphorically smoothen and re-piece their fractured selves.

In the end, after an extended period of silence, reproach, and pain, Joe and Violet can finally enter again a dialogue with one another. Having “stopped night sleeping” (223), they now spend the afternoons “under the quilt” lying next to each other “in the dark” (224). It is, in other words, a place of privacy and seclusion where they are able to construct their selves through dialogized language. Concealed, in effect, by the Du Boisian veil, and thus protected

from the outside White gaze, they experience themselves as whole and complete selves, even though they cannot see themselves in the darkness: “It’s nice when grown people whisper to each other under the covers. [...] They reach, grown people, for *something beyond, way beyond and way, way down underneath tissue*. [...] They are under the covers because they don’t have to look at themselves anymore; *there is no stud’s eye, no chippie glance to undo them*” (228; emphasis added). The Du Boisian metaphor of the veil is transformed to the couple’s bed covers which hide their true selves “way down underneath” (228). It is therefore striking that the intimate image of Joe and Violet lying under the bed covers is contrasted with and, indeed, interrupted by the image of Sag Harbor where the White society celebrates the Jazz Age (226-27). Under the veil, Violet’s and Joe’s selves are protected from the White gaze which would split, or “undo” (228), them. In short, it is through the dialogic interaction between self and other, as it is described by Bakhtin, as well as under Du Bois’s veil that Joe and Violet can mend their double-consciousness and experience themselves as separate, but complete, selves.

In brief, *Jazz*, exploring the psychological consequences of geographical dislocation and alienation, demonstrates that the creation of safe spaces is indeed indispensable for the healing process. The re-piecing and mending of the fragmented subjectivities through dialogized language, in other words, is inextricably connected to the private spaces provided by the bed and the (feminine) realm of the kitchen.

4.2. Silences in *Jazz*

In *Jazz*, the voices and the music of the Harlem Renaissance appear to drown out the silences in the text. Indeed, the subtle silences in *Jazz* underlie the narrative in an almost elusive manner as the text tends to allow them to surface only through indirect allusions. Broadly speaking, they mark the fractured selves which arise due to maternal absences. Revolving around the experience of ‘motherlessness,’ *Jazz* foregrounds the dramatic consequences of absent parents for one’s subjectivity. The ‘un-mothered’ characters, in other words, experience themselves as incomplete and, consequently, lack the language to express and re-claim themselves as whole selves. Moreover, language is, due to its arbitrary nature, experienced as insufficient and inadequate to gain knowledge. Joe’s silence, therefore, points to the realization that language constitutes an unreliable medium. Bereft of a maternal figure as well as suspicious of the Symbolic language, Joe seeks refuge in the semiotic. However,

in *Jazz*, the semiotic, paradoxically embodied by Wild's *absence*, constitutes a silence in the Symbolic order which cannot be overcome either.

4.2.1. Silent Children

In *Jazz*, parental absence, much like the experience of geographical displacement, causes a sense of uprooting and estrangement, for the novel clearly suggests that the lack of loving mother-figures dangerously affects one's subjectivity. Indeed, in its depiction of 'un-mothered' characters and their struggle to claim a whole self, *Jazz* seems to indicate that we "move from mother-love through self-love to selfhood" (O'Reilly 368). Importantly, maternal absence and the subsequent fragmentation of self are marked by as well as closely connected to the absence of language.

Jazz, in other words, investigates the psychological consequences of parental loss and absence, for the text itself is scattered with metaphors of emptiness, incompleteness, and fissures which reveal the characters' perceptions of themselves as wanting and split. Hence, experiencing themselves as incomplete, the many orphaned characters struggle to cope with the silence their parents left and, consequently, also perpetually fall silent themselves.

At the outset of the novel, the narrative entity already foreshadows the reason of Violet's incomplete self as it says, "children of suicides are hard to please and quick to believe no one loves them *because they are not really here*" (4; emphasis added). Hence, her mother's suicide not only leaves Violet bereft of mother-love but also unable to experience herself as a complete and whole self. The "crevices", "ill-glued cracks and weak places" (23) of the City, then, come to mirror the fragmentation caused by her mother's absence, making her stumble over her own splintered self. Violet's subjectivity, in other words, is fundamentally determined by an absence created by her mother's death. Moreover, as O'Reilly (369) points out, Violet's coping strategy is to fill this internal void with the "little blond child" (208) of her grandmother's stories. Golden Gray "lived inside [her] mind. Quiet as a mole" (208) as he becomes not only True Belle's but also Violet's desired object. She indeed longs to become him as the stories teach her that maternal love is only granted to White boys (O'Reilly 368-69). Hence, the realization that what is desirable and worthy of love will always remain inaccessible to her splits her vulnerable self. Her second self, or "*that Violet*" (95; emphasis in the original), acts without her volition which leads to her retreat to silence:

“I got quiet because the things I couldn’t say were coming out of my mouth anyhow. I got quiet because I didn’t know what my hands might get up to when the day’s work was done” (97). Violet, whose self is thus severely fragmented as well as split, falls silent. In fact, “her *silences* annoy her husband” (24; emphasis added). Her silence becomes ‘multiple silences’ as her mother’s absence not only leads to the fragmentation of her self but also, by extension, to her double-consciousness.

Moreover, it is not only Violet who suffers from True Belle’s love for Whiteness and maleness, but also Rose Dear must learn that the boy who was the reason for True Belle’s absence is indeed not hated but desired by her mother (O’Reilly 371). Consequently, Rose Dear, ‘un-mothered’ by True Belle, reproduces the maternal absence first with her silence and, later, with her suicide in an empty well: “There were five of them, Violet the third, and they all came in the house finally and said mama; each one came and said it until she said uh huh. They never heard her say anything else in the days that followed” (98). The well in which she jumps is also, paradoxically, determined by an absence of things. Rose Dear is unable to mother her children or, for that matter, be *present* for them, for she herself was not mothered as a child. Violet, scared to become an ‘absent mother’ herself, is thus determined to “never never have children. Whatever happened, no small dark foot would rest on another while a hungry mouth said, Mama?” (102). She would never, in other words, be a *silent* mother, whose children’s “Mama?” (102) would remain unanswered.

The silence revolving around Joe’s relation to his absent and speechless mother, Wild, is already evident in the name he gives himself after he was told that his parents “disappeared without a trace. The way [he] heard it [he] understood her to mean the ‘trace’ they disappeared without was [him]” (124). By literally naming himself the Trace his parents left behind, he becomes the mark of his parents’ absence. By extension, this notion evokes Gates’s assertion that blackness⁵ forms an absence in the Western languages: “The problem, for us, can be usually stated in the irony implicit in the attempt to posit a ‘black self’ in the very Western languages in which blackness itself is a figure of absence, a negation” (“Criticism” 124). Joe’s parents, much like Gates’s blackness (or blackness/Blackness), are not ‘available’ in language. Joe is unable, in other words, to fill the absence with language. If we bear in mind Gates’s blackness/Blackness, Joe’s name, Trace, therefore, echoes Morrison’s desire to reify the African American presence in and through a language that is

⁵ I would argue for a reading of Gates’s metaphorically absent blackness as ‘blackness/Blackness’.

historically imbued with racist structures. To do so, however, it is, paradoxically, its absence, or trace, that can be made visible in language. Indeed, Joe's name only remains a trace of the absence as it endlessly refers to it without, however, filling it⁶. Hence, Joe's very name, Trace, not only points to his absent parents, ancestry, and past but also to his own absent selfhood (Page 57). It thus constitutes a gap or, for that matter, a silence in language that cannot be bridged. Moreover, Joe's "inside nothing" (38) is, like Wild's absence, determined by silence as he is unable to speak about the damage his missing mother causes. After having searched for her three times in vain, he seeks to suffocate his pain in physical labor. Later, in his marriage with Violet, he denies his painful longing for a mother as Violet helps him "escape all the redwings in the country and the ripe silence that accompanied them" (30). Only with Dorcas, who "had it too" (38), is he enabled to finally break the silence and speak about his incomplete selfhood.

Similarly, the violent death of Dorcas's parents is determined by a persistent silence. The race riots, even though emblematic of *Jazz*'s historical background, are only mentioned fleetingly, for the optimism of the Jazz Age dictates that "[a]t last, at last, everything's ahead [...] There goes the sad stuff. The bad stuff. The things-nobody-could-help-stuff" (7). The fact that Dorcas's parents were killed in the riots is indeed only briefly referred to and, importantly, never directly mentioned by the characters themselves. The silence linked to the killing is intensified by the silence that immediately followed the fire: "Dorcas [...] did not hear the fire engine clanging and roaring down the street because when it was called it didn't come" (57). Significantly, the narrative entity foregrounds the sound of the fire engine rather than the fire engine itself. There is no Response, in other words, to the Call and what Dorcas hears is, consequently, silence. Notably, the trauma of watching the burning house enters her self through the mouth:

[A]s the little porch fell, wood chips – ignited and smoking – exploded in the air. One of them must have entered her stretched dumb mouth and travelled down her throat because it smoked and glowed there still. Dorcas never let it out and never put it out. At first she thought if she spoke of it, it would leave her, or she would lose it through her mouth. [...] [T]he bright wood chip sank further and further down until it lodged comfortably somewhere below her navel. (60-61)

Scared to speak about her parents' violent death, she internalizes and harbors the burning, traumatic memory of it inside her. She thus falls silent as she, having witnessed the fire that

⁶ Clearly, Joe's name also echoes Derrida's concepts of the trace and of *différance*. For a detailed discussion of this connection see Page 56-57.

killed her parents, “[n]ever said anything about it. She went to two funerals in five days, and never said a word” (57). As already discussed above, her silence is only broken in the dialogue with Joe.

In short, in *Jazz*, parental absence not only leads to the severe fragmentation of the subjectivities of the ‘un-mothered’ children but also to their inability to articulate their loss. Metaphors such as the cracks, the well, the “inside nothing” (37), as well as Joe’s name point to the maternal absences and the sense of emptiness and silence they leave behind. The silences that engulf Violet, Joe, and Dorcas are symptoms of their parents’ absences and their injured subjectivities.

4.2.2. A Wild semiotic Silence

As has already been intimated above, the novel alludes to the inherent division between language and reality. While this discrepancy may afford us with an inherently arbitrary and ambiguous language that is, in a Bakhtinian sense, open to ever new voices and interpretations, it certainly also creates a certain abyss between our experiences and their articulations. Hence, one might conceive of language as a limited as well as limiting means of expression. In *Jazz*, the gap between word and world is experienced as alienating. Upon realizing that language is necessarily arbitrary, Joe becomes suspicious of it and, finally, rejects it as a means of communication. However, his subsequent attempt to find truth and a sense of wholeness in the semiotic proves futile as Wild, who embodies the semiotic form of expression, constitutes a ‘Wild silence’ not only in *Jazz* but in the Symbolic order itself.

The silent gap between word and world is best captured in Alice’s inability to connect the written words she reads with the life around her. Significantly, Alice and her niece Dorcas attend the Silent Parade of African Americans on Fifth Avenue on 28 July 1917 to protest the lynching of African Americans in East St. Louis (Pryse 590). In *Jazz*, Dorcas’s parents were also killed in the riots (57). The historical protest of 1917 was indeed silent, but not without words, for the marchers carried banners and children handed out leaflets. It is, however, the power of silence and its evocation of mourning and loss that are remembered until today (Barron). As can be seen in the following quote, the silence of the “silent black women and men marching down Fifth Avenue” (56-57) is accompanied by a dissonance between language and world:

Alice had picked up a leaflet that had floated to the pavement, read the words, and shifted her weight at the curb. She read the words and looked at Dorcas. Looked at Dorcas and read the words again. What she read seemed crazy, out of focus. Some great gap lunged between the print and the child. She glanced between them struggling for the connection, something to close the distance between the silent staring child and the slippery crazy words. (58)

This “crack in language” (Hardack 457) causes in Alice a deep sense of (self-) alienation. *Jazz*, as Nowlin points out, thus “recalls the romantic aspect of modernism, its quest for a mode of natural and authentic signification” (154-55). Indeed, language is experienced as insufficient a tool, for the silent gap, or crack, cannot be overcome. Hence, as will be of further relevance below, music, rather than language, finally serves as the “gathering rope” (58) for Alice which connects and expresses her experiences.

The inadequacy of language to express as well as gain an understanding of the world around us is also seen in the narrator’s unsuccessful attempt to make visible and to interpret Golden Gray’s motives for his search for his father. Realizing that it misjudged Golden Gray, the narrative entity repeats and revises the episode of the Golden Boy’s arrival at his father’s house: “What was I thinking of? How could I have imagined him so poorly? [...] I have been careless and stupid and it infuriates me to discover (again) *how unreliable I am* [...] Now I have to think this through, carefully, even though I may be doomed to another misunderstanding” (260-61; emphasis added). Importantly, only the *historie* remains the same, while the *discours* of the second telling is fundamentally different (Eckhard 146). This narrative impasse, in other words, illustrates that the “aching words that set, then miss, the mark” (219) are inadequate to represent what goes on in “heart-pockets closed” to the narrator as well as to us (221). If we read the narrative entity as the book or language itself, it is highly significant that it perpetually fails to be faithful and reliable in its narration. The narrative entity, having only the language of the Symbolic at its disposal, must admit that there will always remain things unspoken and unrepresented because they *are* unspeakable and unrepresentable in language. As O’Reilly aptly argues, “the narrator recognizes that the symbolic can never completely contain her narrative. There will always be gaps, silences, and excesses” (374). Indeed, it is worth noting that Alice struggles to bridge the gap between written words and her experiences of life, given that written language is emblematic of the Symbolic order and power. In contrast, it is music, i.e. a “signifying practice” of the semiotic (Kristeva, *Desire* 134), which finally serves as the “gathering rope” (58).

Much like Alice's wish for a natural and intrinsic connection of the (linguistic) sign and the world, Joe is also acutely aware of their divide which, for him, renders language unreliable and treacherous. He, therefore, begs Wild to give him a sign through a hand gesture which would tell him that she is his mother. Asking her not to say anything, he thus rejects the Symbolic language because "he knew how [words] could lie" (37). However, the sign of his mother's hand is denied to him, leaving him in a silence which he cannot decipher either: "Give me a sign, then. You don't have to say nothing. Let me see your hand. Just stick it out someplace and I'll go; I promise. A sign.' He begged, pleaded for her hand until the light grew even smaller. 'You my mother?' Yes. No. Both. Either. But not this nothing" (178). Joe, in other words, dismisses language because he knows that due to its arbitrary nature it can become hollow and meaningless. He seeks to find answers in the ostensible purity of the non-linguistic sign but it, too, does not grant him knowledge, leaving him in silence.

The silence Joe is forced to face and endure is a wild, unbound, and gendered silence: it is Wild's silence. Significantly, she is the only character who does not utter a word. As the "archetypal wild woman", she lives beyond the Symbolic order and language in a womb-like, essentially feminine space (O'Reilly 373). Described as a "black, liquid female" (145) and an "indecent speechless lurking insanity" (179), Wild exemplifies the Black feminine force which in White patriarchal hegemony and language, however, becomes speechless. Communicating through touch, song, and laughter, she is indeed an outcast whose feminine, semiotic speech is unheard in the language of the Symbolic order. Moreover, the numerous similarities between her and Beloved⁷ not only suggest that she might be Beloved herself, reappearing pregnant with Paul D's child, but also point to her as an embodiment of the semiotic, feminine realm from which Beloved emerged at the end of *Beloved*. Wild's presence – or rather absence – in *Jazz* thus constitutes a silence as though the text (as well as Joe) could not contain, or interpret, the semiotic within the male language and order. She is, indeed, the "ripe silence" (38) of the feminine in the Symbolic language. Hence, in contrast to the semiotic in *Beloved*, Wild's semiotic speech is not represented but rather only indicated. The semiotic in *Jazz* is, much like Wild herself, both present and absent, both heard and felt as well as silent and unseen.

Hence, Joe, rejecting and fleeing from the Symbolic language and its unreliable relation to the world, not only seeks to find his mother but also to return to the semiotic. Alienated by

⁷ For a detailed discussion of the intertextual references between *Beloved* and *Jazz* and, more specifically, between Beloved and Wild see Cutter 66-67.

the Symbolic language with its ambiguous and ‘lying’ words, he hopes to find and restore a “wholeness and unity of self” in the semiotic, maternal bond with Wild (O’Reilly 377). His entry into her burrow is, significantly, a reversed birth as he “reenter[s] head first” (183). However, his attempt is in vain because he moves from the silent gap in language to Wild’s silence because the overall narrative of *Jazz* demonstrates that the semiotic is (or must be) repressed in the Symbolic.

In short, *Jazz* investigates the problem of the inherently arbitrary nature of language as well as the tension between the semiotic and the Symbolic. This is most clearly seen in Joe’s rejection of the Symbolic language due to its unreliable relation to reality. His attempt to seek refuge in the semiotic, however, proves futile, for Wild’s (silent) absence indicates the suppression of the semiotic in the Symbolic order.

4.3. Beyond Silence and the (Silenced) semiotic: Music in *Jazz*

Without a doubt, *Jazz* is brimming with music as it is filled with narrative analogies of and thematical references to music. It thus explores the significance of (jazz) music for not only the individual Black subjectivity but also for the American consciousness in general. On the one hand, music, and jazz music more specifically, constitutes an omnipresent theme in the novel. It functions as a disruptive and liberating force that crucially shapes the lives and subjectivities of the new arrivals in Harlem. On the other hand, it is the novel’s ‘jazz aesthetic’ with its persistent discursive analogies and adaptations of typical jazz features which indicates the music’s power as a unique and alternative means of expression and communication in an era of social and political uncertainty. Music, in other words, permeates the novel both thematically as well as stylistically.

4.3.1. The Power of Music

As a ubiquitous narratological theme, music acquires a variety of meanings and functions in the novel. Representing a powerful form of expression and a source of empowerment, music awakens a sense of optimism, strength, and lust for life in the characters as well as in the narrative entity. The City of the Jazz Age, in other words, throbbing with music, “pump[s] desire” (34) in the new arrivals.

Clearly, in *Jazz*, music functions as a bearer of hope and optimism for a better future in the City where slavery and Jim Crowism are believed to belong to the past. Joe and Violet, for instance, hoping to leave physical hardship and segregation behind them, train-dance into the City whose music promises a new life: “They were dancing. And like a million others, chests pounding, tracks controlling their feet, they stared out the windows for first sight of the City that danced with them, proving already how much it loved them. Like a million more they could hardly wait to get there and love it back” (32). Even the narrative entity is captured by the music and its optimism: “[C]larinets and lovemaking, fists and the voices of sorrowful women. A city like this one makes me dream tall and feel in on things” (7). The beat of modernity, in other words, entices the Harlemites to believe in a future life in which “everything’s ahead at last” (7).

However, *Jazz* suggests that the optimism that is carried by music through the City veils a bitter reality in which slavery’s legacy in the form of systematic discrimination is still evident. For instance, the segregated train with its “green-as-poison curtain” (31), the riots (57), and the violent dispossessions of Rose Dear and Joe (138; 126) indicate that the struggle for true freedom for African Americans has not ended with the abolition of slavery. It is, therefore, significant that Violet remembers the slave spiritual “Go Down, Moses” at the end of the novel: Years earlier, still living in Virginia, Violet heard “women in houses nearby singing ‘Go down, go down, way down in Egypt land...’ Answering each other from yard to yard with a verse or its own variation” (226). The spiritual “Go Down, Moses”, like Du Bois’s epigraph above, draws on the biblical story of the Israelites leaving Egypt. Its allusion to the abolition of slavery in the US, then, provided solace and hope during slavery. The fact that the women in Virginia sing it painfully shows that Emancipation has not ended racism. Indeed, their singing suggests that the struggle for true freedom must continue. At the same time, however, the spiritual’s lyrics also provide comfort and a sense of hope as they indicate that the enslaved (as well as free, but nonetheless discriminated against) African Americans will be, like the Israelites, truly free someday. Violet’s memory of it at the end of *Jazz*, then, not only hints at future historical developments such as the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s but also provides strength and hope to persevere in the struggle for equality.

Similarly, the drums’ rhythmic beats that accompany the silent marchers on Fifth Avenue communicate a sense of collectivity and solidarity. In fact, Alice, alienated by the printed words and their meanings, feels connected to the Black community and, consequently, empowered by the drums:

Then suddenly, like a rope cast for rescue, *the drums spanned the distance, gathering them all up and connected them*: Alice, Dorcas, her sister and her brother-in-law, the Boy Scouts and the frozen black faces, the watchers on the pavement and those in the windows above. Alice carried that gathering rope with her always after that day on Fifth Avenue, and found it *reliably secure and tight* [...]. (58; emphasis added)

The drums, in other words, re-connect Alice with the community as she remembers them as an “all-embracing rope of fellowship” (60). As such, the music becomes a symbol of collective strength, cohesion, and resilience. Moreover, the drums transcend language and silence, filling the gap that “lunged between the print and the child” (58). Their echoing beats break a silence as they not only evoke the “irrepressible rhythm of the once forbidden drum” (Gilroy, *Atlantic* 76) but also powerfully express what cannot be said in language: Alice listens to the “drums saying what the graceful women and the marching men could not. What was possible to say was already in print on a banner that repeated a couple of promises from the Declaration of Independence and waved over the head of its bearer. But what was meant came from the drums” (53). The drums, in other words, transmit meanings that are beyond the reach of the static words on the banners and leaflets. Emphasizing collectivity as well as communicating unarticulated meanings, the drums, then, constitute a refined mode of expression.

Moreover, jazz music floats through the City like an independent, disruptive force as it comes to represent a means of resistance against and subversion of the authoritative language. The tension between the dominant and the disruptive discourse is epitomized by Alice’s struggle to keep jazz music away from her niece. For Alice, “[j]ust hearing it was like violating the law” (58). Representing the middle-class, she condemns the “race music” (79) which she views as an unacceptable language that drives its listeners to behave in immoral ways. However, at the same time, she feels secretly drawn to it for it is “hard to dismiss [the music] because underneath [...] are the drums that put Fifth Avenue into focus” (60). Jazz music, like the drums of the Silent Parade which, for Alice, communicated what the printed word could not, thus constitutes a discourse that powerfully disrupts the dominant law and language.

In fact, *Jazz* suggests that the “law” (58) which jazz music violates can be understood as the paternal order which seeks to control and suppress female sexuality. As Tally, for instance, points out, jazz was “associated with moral anarchy, cultural backwardness and illicit sexuality, particularly black female sexuality” (65). In the novel, Dorcas’s budding sexuality is indeed linked to the sensuality of jazz music:

Dorcas lay on a chenille bedspread, tickled and happy knowing that there was no place to be where somewhere, close by, somebody was not licking his licorice stick, tickling the ivories, beating his skins, blowing off his horn while a knowing woman sang ain't nobody going to keep me down you got the right key baby but the wrong keyhole you got to get it bring it and put it right here, or else. (60)

Metonymically foregrounding the licking, tickling, beating, and blowing of the instruments, Dorcas, clearly, imagines the music in bodily and sexual terms. Importantly, she feels empowered by this imagery to explore her own sexuality. For her, the drums of the Silent Parade were like “the first part, the first word, of a command” which she, stimulated by the music of the Jazz Age, “looked to complete” (60). She interprets the music, then, as an instruction to embrace her sexuality. *Jazz*, in other words, depicts jazz music as a disruptive, empowering and essentially positive discourse.

Furthermore, its disruptive quality also points to the music's power to dismantle prevalent constructions of race. Drawing on both White and Black musical traditions, jazz blurs racial distinctions and thus demands the presence of Blackness in the American consciousness. In the novel, jazz music captures not only the Black residents but also becomes an integral part of the Great Gatsby-like parties of White society. The narrative entity, for instance, briefly describes the White Long Island inhabitants who, driven by the “click of dark and snapping fingers” (227), go to Black jazz nightclubs. The narrator, consequently, envisions a future where Blackness and Whiteness are no longer categories of social separation and distinction: “When I see them now they are not sepia, still losing their edges to the light of a future afternoon. Caught midway between was and must be” (226). Hence, in *Jazz*, the clicking and snapping of jazz ultimately disrupts White hegemony and re-asserts Blackness in the American identity (Cataliotti 133).

In short, in its depiction and treatment of music as an all-pervasive theme, *Jazz* highlights its capacity to serve as a source of hope, optimism, and empowerment. In addition to its use of music as a narratological theme, *Jazz* also draws on the structures and features of jazz music as a discursive strategy.

4.3.2. The Jazz-like Language of *Jazz*

Jazz exhibits a vast array of discursive techniques which are clearly influenced by jazz music. It is, therefore, not surprising that the narrative structure in *Jazz* tends to be read in

terms of a 'jazz aesthetic' (cf. Rice 424). This notion denotes a prose style which adopts and, importantly, adapts structural characteristics of jazz music such as, for instance, improvisation-like features, antiphony, repetitions, and audience participation. Since the idea of a 'jazz aesthetic' in (African American) literature involves a necessarily incomplete adaptation, it is crucial to reiterate that the relation between language and music is, in essence, one of analogy (Munton 250).

The notion that *Jazz*'s narration is imbued with music-like structures becomes highly significant if we consider *Jazz*, as Tally proposes, a "story about the ways and means of storytelling itself and the language of the narrative process" (29). Jazz music, then, functions as a central metaphor of *how* the narrative entity, Joe, Violet, and Dorcas unravel their stories and hence become active narrators of their lives; it is, in effect, a metaphor of storytelling and narrating (Tally 65). Consequently, as Ludigkeit aptly argues, this jazz-like narration in *Jazz* "offers a unique language for creative communication and interaction" (182). This distinctive use of jazz-like features in literary work, in other words, alludes to the power of music to supplement and enrich language in the process of meaning-making. The language of *Jazz* may thus be understood as an alternative, music-like language of heteroglossia which affords the narrative entity as well as the characters with innovative ways of articulation. Moreover, as has already been mentioned above, the reliance on jazz, an art form shaped by both Black and White influences (cf. Munton 251), clearly refers to the genre's significance, or 'voice', in the US-American cultural discourse and consciousness. In short, the jazz-like language and narrative structure of *Jazz* allude to the power of music to enhance the expressivity of language in literature as well as to the role of jazz music as a central art form in American history and culture.

Interestingly, the use of jazz music as a metaphor to describe the overall narrative structure of *Jazz* neatly captures Bakhtin's notions of heteroglossia and double-voicedness. The confluence of multiple voices and the narrator's orchestration thereof resemble a jazz ensemble: In *Jazz*, "like the leader of a collectively improvising ensemble, the narrator structures the performance to allow shifts in emphasis, foregrounding first one, than [sic] another of the voices within the collective" (Ludigkeit 176). The novel's polyphonic composition and double-voiced language can be expressed with both Bakhtin's terminology and the metaphor of jazz.

Indeed, its double-voicedness, or rather its Signifyin(g) practice, is seen in the characters' improvisations of the core theme of *Jazz*. Like a jazz piece whose "preexisting core of musical material [...] is generally short" (Southern 368), the novel's basic plot is summarized in only few lines. The narrator provides it at the outset of the novel in a single paragraph:

Sth, I know that woman. She used to live with a flock of birds on Lenox Avenue. Know her husband, too. He fell for an eighteen-year-old girl with one of those deepdown, spooky loves that made him so sad and happy he shot her just to keep the feeling going. When the woman, her name is Violet, went to the funeral to see the girl and to cut her dead face they threw her to the floor and out of the church. (3)

This rendering of the novel's main plot, however, "'ain't got that swing'" of jazz music (Williams 271). It is only when the various voices or, for that matter, 'musicians' 'play' on the basic material that the text begins to appropriate a jazz-like structure and swing. The characters' perspectives and interpretations of the story's core resemble, in other words, a jazz ensemble's improvisation on a short musical theme. In the opening paragraph, the narrative entity narrates the characters, while through their own improvisations on the theme they finally become their own 'narrator-musicians'. The jazz-like composition of the narrative, then, empowers, much like Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, the individual characters to raise their voices and claim narrative authority. Importantly, the characters' interpretations of the thematic core constitute a form of Signifyin(g). As Munton asserts, "every jazz performance is a 'signification' upon, or revision of, something already in existence, whether the melody or theme, or the chord sequence. If all jazz is Signifyin(g), then the term becomes redundant" (248). The narrative entity, for instance, falsely predicts another shooting at the beginning of *Jazz*. Realizing that the characters have improvised and Signified on the basic material in a way it had not foreseen, the narrative entity must respond 'spontaneously' to their improvisations. In short, then, the narrative structure of *Jazz*, as it is analogous of a jazz piece consisting of a short musical theme, enables the characters to Signify on the thematical core. The narrative process of *Jazz*, in other words, is, in essence, a jazz-like, polyphonic signification.

Similarly, improvisation-like features, antiphony, and repetitions of so-called riffs notably structure the overall narrative. The chapter endings and beginnings, for instance, resemble a Call and Response pattern while also indicating an improvisational style. The final two sentences of the first chapter, "He is married to a woman who speaks mainly to her birds. One of whom answers back: 'I love you'" (24), for example, are Responded to by the very

first sentence of the subsequent chapter, “Or used to” (27). Such chapter transitions are thus mimetic of antiphony as well as of the typically fluid and improvisational transitions in jazz music. Another example of antiphony is seen in the juxtaposition of the narrator’s voice with Joe’s voice. The narrative entity recounts Joe’s search for Wild, whereas Joe’s voice, demarcated by quotation marks, expresses his thoughts while hunting Dorcas (182-184). As Ludigkeit points out, this alternation between the two voices and their accounts reminds one of the Call and Response pattern of a “cutting contest” where two soloists, for example, respond to and complement each other’s statements (178). Furthermore, improvisation-like features are also evident in the narrator’s repetitive diction as, for instance, can be seen in the passage, “Blues man. Black and bluesman. Black therefore blue man. Everybody knows your name. Where-did-she-go-and-why-man. So-lonesome-I-could die man. Everybody knows your name” (119). The narrative entity improvises and thus expands on the riffs “[b]lues man” and “name” (119). Repetitions, indeed, fundamentally structure the narrative as a whole as well as short, separate sections. For example, the narrator’s description of Dorcas dancing with Acton is clearly organized around the repetition and variation of “Dorcas is satisfied, content” as it is transformed into “Dorcas is happy” and, finally, “Dorcas is lucky” (188).

With regard to audience participation, the relation between *Jazz*’s narrator and its reader bears analogy to the relation between a jazz ensemble and their audience as the narrator demands the reader’s active participation in the joint endeavor to construct meaning. However, by doing so, it not only alludes to the reader’s involvement but also to their potential limits in the perception of and interaction with a text that, like jazz music, Signifies on its meanings. The jazz-metaphor of storytelling, in other words, indicates the tension arising from the pivotal role of the reader-audience in *Jazz* and the fact that meaning is simultaneously open and closed to certain readers as they may not be aware of the underlying Signifyin(g) processes. Certainly, *Jazz* is not only read by Black audiences but by a wider readership. The jazz-like language, structure, and demand for reader participation thus call for a consideration of the (White) reader’s ability to engage with the notion of otherness as well as Otherness in the novel. This reflection, then, leads to a dialogue between self and other/Other and, consequently, to a better understanding of oneself: *Jazz* is “about not just the community or the village but ‘you’ – the isolated reader who may be black, white, male, gay, straight, old or young – the isolated reader in search of some connection to some ‘other’ self through the printed word” (Nowlin 167). While this notion suggests that *Jazz* invites the reader into the text to actively explore the notions of self and other (and, indeed, Other), it

also implies that there will always remain meanings in the text that elude the reader's understanding. Clearly, the same holds true for literary criticism, for it is crucial to be aware that one's engagement with a text cannot illuminate all layers of its meanings. Mayberry, therefore, advocates a critical practice that "acknowledges its relationship to the text it studies and its inevitable 'otherness' from the text" (308). In short, the jazz metaphor requires the reader as well as the critic to engage actively with the text and its representation of otherness/Otherness, while also bearing in mind that certain meanings resist one's decoding.

The use of jazz music as a metaphor to describe the narrative processes of *Jazz* clearly illuminates how music constitutes a powerful mode of expression in the novel. Jazz-like discursive features thus not only supplement but indeed significantly enhance the novel's narration and storytelling.

5. “I want to be the language that wishes him well”: A (Comparative) Conclusion

Her story was bearable because it was his as well – to tell, to refine and tell again. The things neither knew about the other – the things neither had word-shapes for – well, it would come in time [...].

Morrison, *Beloved* 116

Now I have to think this through, carefully, even though I may be doomed to another misunderstanding.

Morrison, *Jazz* 161

Using the Bakhtinian concepts of heteroglossia, dialogism, and double-voicedness as a theoretical point of departure for the analysis of Morrison’s *Beloved* and *Jazz* proves illuminating and enriching. The two novels reveal the struggle of Bakhtin’s heteroglossia as they investigate the potential of dialogized language to construct meaning and a sense of self within suppressive power structures that seek to metaphorically and physically silence the Black subject. To be more precise, the novels under consideration clearly revolve around the desire to find, create, and, indeed, *become* a language that “wishes [...] well” (*J* 161), i.e. a language which reifies, mends, and empowers the African American subject in (American) history, culture, and consciousness. An analysis of Morrison’s *Beloved* and *Jazz* with the aim to elucidate how language functions as a central tool to re-inscribe the African American presence into American consciousness as well as to re-piece the fragmented Black subjectivity, therefore, benefits from Bakhtin’s theory of language.

Nonetheless, for the purpose of such an analysis the Bakhtinian concepts need to be supplemented and extended by notions of both feminist and African American critical theories as well as by the notion of silence. At the core of these considerations is the question whether women and members of ethnical minorities can truly appropriate a language within heteroglossia as White patriarchal hegemony threatens to powerfully impose and control a univocal, monologic language. Importantly, along with this language it seeks to reinforce a unitary ideology and thus to silence marginalized groups.

Consequently, the endeavor to overcome the imposed silence and to find a ‘benevolent’ language within White patriarchal hegemony is, without a doubt, a difficult task for people

who are perceived as the Other. The social, political, and psychological violence they must endure is reflected in the struggle of heteroglossia. It is, therefore, necessary to extend Bakhtin's theory of language with the notion of silence to aptly analyze imaginative work that deals with the struggle for and recuperation of silenced voices in heteroglossia.

Nonetheless, the need to appropriate and thus double-voice language can also be regarded as liberating for members of oppressed groups. Indeed, feminist as well as African American critical theories tend to perceive Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia, dialogism, and double-voicedness in mostly positive terms as they emphasize that these concepts afford the subaltern subject with the possibility to appropriate and double-voice language and thus to find a voice in heteroglossia. Put differently, the Other is bound to speak in an inherently dialogized language and is, therefore, empowered to construct new and potentially subversive meanings. With regard to Morrison's novels, this notion is highly relevant because *Beloved* and *Jazz* can be considered to constitute alternative, feminist, and African American discourses or voices within a White and male dominated (literary) discourse.

Moreover, as regards feminist theories, Bakhtin's conceptual framework is enhanced by Kristeva's concept of the semiotic. As an essentially feminine, maternal form of expression that is characterized by rhythm and sound, the semiotic is, according to Kristeva, a fundamental modality of language itself (Kristeva, "Revolution" 92). The semiotic, then, tends to be suppressed by the language of the Symbolic, which, in Bakhtinian terms, constitutes the authoritarian, dominant, and monologic language of heteroglossia. The semiotic indeed infuses the narratives of both *Beloved* and *Jazz*. In the former one, the character of Beloved embodies the semiotic and its feminine power of expression, while in the latter one it is Wild who represents the semiotic. As will be discussed in more detail below, both novels depict the semiotic as a form of resistance and subversion of the paternal law. However, in both novels, the semiotic form of expression is in the end suppressed by the Symbolic language and order.

Moreover, Bakhtin's theory of language has been widely adapted in African American critical theories as it bears conceptual similarities with prevalent notions thereof. Especially Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness and H. L. Gates's, Jr. concept of Signifyin(g) have been discussed in connection with Bakhtin's notion of double-voicedness. Firstly, a reading of the Du Boisian concept in relation to Bakhtin's theories envisages double-voicedness as an essential aspect of African American discourse for the Black double-

consciousness necessarily finds its articulation in “double words” (Du Bois 96) or, in Bakhtinian terms, in double-voicedness. This line of thought implies that the African American’s subaltern positionality, which leads to the Du Boisian double-consciousness, affords them not only with the gift of “second-sight” (Du Bois 3) but also with the ability to speak in an inherently dialogized language. Secondly, both Bakhtin’s notion of double-voicedness and Gates’s concept of Signifyin(g) relate to the appropriation of language for one’s own purposes and intentions. Interestingly, for both Bakhtin and Gates, humor and laughter are essentially connected to the process of appropriation and, for that matter, of political resistance. In *Beloved* and *Jazz*, the practice of Signifyin(g) determines the narratives both thematically and formally, since the characters Signify in their dialogues as well as the overall discursive organization of *Jazz*, for instance, resembles the Signifyin(g) processes of a jazz ensemble.

Similarly, in the novels, music in general constitutes a powerful alternative means of communication. Bakhtin’s theory of language must, therefore, be supplemented not only by Kristeva’s semiotic but also by music. This notion implies that one conceives of music as a potentially subversive means of expression in heteroglossia. For instance, in *Beloved* and *Jazz*, the blues, spirituals, railroad hollers, and jazz music are not only formally incorporated but they also function thematically as powerful vehicles for the silenced characters.

In short, the analysis of *Beloved* and *Jazz* shows that Bakhtin’s theory of language provides a useful conceptual framework to illuminate the role of language in the struggle for power in White patriarchy. Both novels indeed envisage language as a crucial means to reconstruct the African American fragmented subjectivities and thus to counteract White paternal dominance. However, in the novels, language is at times experienced as an insufficient or inaccessible tool to truly construct meaning and a sense of self. Silences, the semiotic, and music, consequently, become meaningful features of the code. Hence, Bakhtin’s theoretical basis needs to be broadened by the notions of silence, the semiotic, and music.

Clearly, the novels’ historical backgrounds have a bearing on the role and significance of language. As the story of *Beloved* unfolds during and shortly after slavery, the power over language is inextricably connected to the dominance over the Black body. The White paternal master discourse, although widely avoided on the level of narration, powerfully determines the slaves’ lives and consciousness as it turns them into inarticulate commodities. For instance, schoolteacher, embodying White male supremacy, literally ascribes animalistic

features to the slaves as well as inscribes physical marks onto their bodies through torture practices. Nonetheless, language, in *Beloved*, is also a tool of resistance and autonomy as the (ex-) slaves manage to enter a healing process through dialogized language. In contrast, in *Jazz*, language is clearly associated with the optimism of the Jazz Age, for the new arrivals to Harlem believe that after the abolition of slavery and their migration to the more liberal North language has finally become a “malleable toy for their play” (*Jazz* 33). However, *Jazz* suggests that the search for a language with which one can truly construct a sense of self and meaning is not only difficult but also dependent on an other with whom one can enter a dialogue. In short, *Beloved* and *Jazz* depict the role of language in the struggle for power in two entirely distinct moments of recent American history. Importantly, language is understood as a powerful instrument not only of the dominant ones but also of the disenfranchised group.

In agreement with Bakhtin’s theories, *Beloved* and *Jazz* conceive of dialogized language as a crucial means to re-construct one’s own subjectivity and thus to mend the severe fragmentation of suppressive power relations. It is, therefore, not surprising that the overall narrative composition of both novels is essentially heteroglot. In addition to the narrative voices, *Beloved* and *Jazz* incorporate a multitude of other voices which are represented through direct speech, free direct speech, free indirect speech, and *skaz*. The dialogues of these voices recreate Bakhtin’s notions of heteroglossia and double-voicedness. In *Beloved*, for instance, Sethe’s, Baby Suggs’s, and Stamp Paid’s accounts of the “Misery” (*Beloved* 201) are in dialogue with one another. Moreover, in their dialogues, Sethe and the other characters seek to construct and claim their subjectivities. The Black subject is re-pieced by the (ex-) slaves’ dialogues as Sethe, for instance, discovers a ‘me-ness’ in her conversation with Paul D. The dialogues, put differently, have a healing effect on the fragmented selves. Similarly, in *Jazz*, Violet’s, Joe’s, Alice’s, and Felice’s stories are in dialogic relation to one another as they present different opinions and views on the same theme. In their dialogues, they, like the characters in *Beloved*, re-assert their individual selves. Importantly, due to the experience of dislocation, the healing dialogues take place in private realms where the characters feel safe from outside harm. Furthermore, as the novel’s epigraph already foreshadows, *Jazz* is deeply concerned with the pivotal role of language to gain *gnosis*. The narrative entity as well as the characters acquire a sense of self-knowledge and self-awareness in the course of their conversations. Finally, the novels’ heteroglot narratives not only ensure a democratic dialogue and a form of healing among the characters but also indicate that meaning is inherently dynamic. Indeed, both *Beloved* and *Jazz* suggest that

meaning, much like self and other, is always in the process of becoming. Their open and ambiguous endings allude to this notion as the chant “[t]his is not a story to pass on” at the end of *Beloved* (324) and, in *Jazz* (229), the narrator’s request to the reader to read the story again hint at the necessity to perpetually construct meaning.

However, *Beloved* and *Jazz* are also pervaded by silences. The former one, for instance, clearly illustrates the physical as well as metaphorical silence imposed on the African American population during slavery and its destructive effects on the individual and the collective consciousness. It is, unsurprisingly, the overbearing and ubiquitous White patriarchal power that seeks to render the subaltern subjects inarticulate. In contrast, the silences in *Jazz* are connected to the experience of dislocation and the subsequent loss of familial ties as well as to a sense of alienation arising due to the realization that language is inherently arbitrary and ambiguous. Moreover, in *Jazz*, the semiotic, embodied by Wild, constitutes a silence in the text. Hence, *Beloved* and *Jazz* demonstrate that silences can become part of the code and that they potentially carry multiple meanings.

To be more precise, both narratives are propelled by the wish to overcome the silences that mark the violent fragmentation of the characters’ vulnerable subjectivities. Indeed, the silences in *Beloved* and *Jazz* suggest that the disintegration of self necessarily leads to the absence of language. In *Beloved*, the dissolution of the slaves’ subjectivities, engendered by the loss of the African languages, torture practices, and traumata, render the survivors speechless. Sethe and Paul D, for instance, perpetually fall silent as they lack the language of their ancestors as well as because their traumatic past eludes articulation. Much like the severe wounding of the slaves’ subjectivities in *Beloved*, the fragmentation of Joe’s, Violet’s, and Dorcas’s subjectivities in *Jazz* is also signaled by silence. It is the experience of maternal loss and absence which injures the characters’ subjectivities and, consequently, silences them, for the overall story of *Jazz* implies that self-love and, by implication, selfhood necessitate mother-love. In short, then, the silences in *Beloved* and *Jazz* reveal the characters’ wounded subjectivities.

Moreover, in both novels, language perpetually proves to be an inadequate means to render the world visible and knowable. Silences, therefore, also point to the epistemological limits of language. *Beloved*, for example, is pierced by silences and gaps because slavery itself cannot be grasped through language. At the heart of the novel is the desire to give voice to the “disremembered and unaccounted for” (*Beloved* 323) who died during slavery. To this

end, however, silences become, paradoxically, meaningful features of the code. The gaps in Beloved's speech, for instance, indicate that slavery with its violence and sheer atrocity cannot be truly articulated in language. Similarly, the infanticide constitutes a silence that scars the overall narrative as it is, in essence, unspeakable. Moreover, just like the slaves in *Beloved* must realize that the word and its definition are capriciously manipulated by the White slave master, in *Jazz*, Joe becomes painfully aware of the arbitrary nature of the Symbolic language. In other words, due to its ambiguous and arbitrary relation to reality, language is perceived as an unreliable and even treacherous medium. It is highly significant that Joe eschews language and demands truth and knowledge in the nonlinguistic sign of Wild's hand gesture. The semiotic in *Jazz* is, however, like Wild herself, both present and absent. It is, in other words, rather indicated than represented, constituting a form of 'Wild silence'.

Indeed, in *Beloved* and *Jazz*, Beloved and Wild embody the semiotic, feminine aspect of language which is, according to Kristeva, characterized by sound, rhythm, touch, and glossolalia (cf. Schippers 26). Notably, in both novels, while promising a refuge from the paternal language, the semiotic is, in the end, repressed by the Symbolic order. In *Beloved*, for instance, even though it is directly represented by Beloved's cacophonous, baby-like talk as well as in her pre-Oedipal fusion with Sethe, the semiotic is, ultimately, silenced in the paternal language. Beloved and her semiotic speech cannot be recuperated and remembered in the Symbolic order. Similarly, in *Jazz*, the semiotic is not even represented but rather only indicated by Wild's absence. As a speechless outcast, who communicates through laughter, song, and touch, Wild is in fact more absent than present in the text. Hence, the "ripe silence" (*Jazz* 30) that surrounds her is an unbound and feminine silence as the semiotic cannot be contained by the Symbolic language and order. In short, while in *Beloved* the semiotic constitutes a refuge for Sethe and her daughters, it is, in the end, repressed and forgotten by the Symbolic order and language. In *Jazz*, the semiotic is not only at the margin of the narrative but also engulfed by a silence as it is also suppressed by the paternal language.

While the semiotic is controlled and subdued by the paternal order, music, a signifying practice of the semiotic, takes on a central role in the struggle for a means of expression in *Beloved* and *Jazz*. In both novels, music constitutes a prevalent theme as well as a narrative strategy. For instance, organizational features of jazz music such as antiphony, improvisation, and repetition significantly shape the overall narrative structure of *Beloved* and *Jazz*. Clearly, in the translation process from music to literature, these features can only

be adapted in the form of (literary) analogies. With regard to its thematic significance, music acquires a wide range of functions and meanings. Generally speaking, it serves as an enhanced means to articulate and communicate what would otherwise remain silenced. Transcending language and silence, in other words, music becomes a central vehicle for the characters. In *Beloved*, for example, the traumatized victims of slavery draw on music to cope with and express their past. Comparably, in *Jazz*, music strengthens the characters' sense of community as well as functions as a resource of hope and optimism. In a sense, in both novels, music comes to stand for a mode of resistance and empowerment.

Furthermore, in *Beloved* and *Jazz*, musical references point to the notion that American history and culture are inherently both Black and White. The search for a language, in other words, with which to reify the African American presence in the American consciousness is shown to entail the use of music. Especially jazz music clearly functions as a reminder of a shared history as it displays influences of both White and Black traditions. In the novels, incorporated both thematically and formally, jazz music thus indicates that American culture is neither entirely Black nor White but determined by European as well as African art forms. Moreover, in *Beloved*, Paul D's railroad holler testifies that modern America is fundamentally based on the exploitation of African Americans. Similarly, in *Jazz*, the reference to the slave spiritual "Go Down Moses" not only communicates hope but also reminds one of the institutionalized coercion of people of African descent. Music, in short, not only empowers the silenced characters to express themselves but also carries multiple meanings as it points to a shared American history and culture.

To conclude, the present thesis demonstrates that Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia, dialogism, and double-voicedness must be supplemented by the notions of silence, the semiotic, and music to provide a theoretical framework for the analysis of imaginative work that testifies to the arduous struggle of marginalized and oppressed groups for a voice. Morrison's *Beloved* and *Jazz* revolve around the desire to bear a language that not only serves as a form of resistance against suppressive power structures but also as a tool to reconstruct and heal the fragmented African American self.

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7. Appendix

7.1. English Abstract

It is the desire to construct meaning as well as a sense of self through language that propels the narratives of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Jazz*. However, since language perpetually proves an insufficient tool to do so, silences as well as the semiotic and music become meaningful features of the code. The purpose of the present thesis is, therefore, to investigate how *Beloved* and *Jazz* draw on language, silence, the semiotic, and music in order to reify the African American presence in the American consciousness as well as to mend the fragmented Black subjectivity.

M. M. Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia, dialogism, and double-voicedness provide the theoretical basis for the analysis as they suggest that meaning and subjectivity can only be constructed in and through language. For the analysis of Morrison's novels, these concepts are discussed in relation to prevalent feminist and African American critical theories and, consequently, supplemented by the notions of silence, Kristeva's semiotic, and music.

The analysis of *Beloved* and *Jazz* demonstrates that the novels revolve around the wish to find a language with which to gain knowledge of the world around us as well as to construct ourselves as self and other. This language, however, necessarily involves silences as well as semiotic and musical features.

7.1. Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Die Suche nach Wissen und Selbstgewahrsein in Sprache liegt Toni Morrisons *Beloved* (dt. *Menschenkind*) und *Jazz* zu Grunde. Da sich Sprache jedoch fortwährend als unzulängliches Medium herausstellt, entstehen verschiedene Arten von Stille. Schweigen und Stille sowie semiotische Ausdrucksformen und Musik ergänzen in den beiden Romanen Sprache und bilden, in weiterer Folge, ein alternatives, erweitertes Medium. Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit untersucht daher *Beloved* und *Jazz* unter dem Gesichtspunkt, wie Sprache, Stille, semiotische Ausdrucksformen und Musik einen Diskurs bilden, in dem die Afro-Amerikanische Präsenz in das Amerikanische Bewusstsein geschrieben und eine Afro-Amerikanische Subjektivität konstruiert wird.

M. M. Bachtins Konzepte der Heteroglossia, Dialogism (dt. Dialogizität) und Double-voicedness (dt. Zweistimmigkeit) werden als theoretische Basis herangezogen. Bachtin zufolge können Wissen und Subjektivität nur in und durch Sprache erreicht werden. Die Konzepte werden im Zusammenhang mit feministischen und Afro-Amerikanischen Kritik-Theorien erörtert und mit den Konzepten der Stille, Kristevas Semiotik und Musik ergänzt.

Die Analyse zeigt, wie die Romane *Beloved* und *Jazz* die Suche nach einer Ausdrucksform, mit der Wissen und Subjektivität geschaffen werden kann, darstellen. Diese Ausdrucksform beinhaltet jedoch notwendigerweise verschiedene Arten von Stille sowie semiotische und musikalische Aspekte.

Declaration of Authenticity

I confirm to have conceived and written this Diploma thesis in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors are all clearly marked and acknowledged in the bibliographical references, either in the footnotes or within the text. Any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors are truthfully acknowledged and identified in the footnotes.

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