

**“Busy being original, complicated, and changeable” –  
Jazz and Modernity in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz***

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Nobel-palkittu Toni Morrison on yksi tämän hetken eturivin afroamerikkalaisista naiskirjailijoista. Tutkin gradussani Morrison romaania *Jazz* (1992). Morrison luo romaanissaan henkilöiden, kertojan, musiikin, ja kaupungin äänistä monitahoisen ja -tasoisen dialogin jossa toisiinsa kietoutuvat ja sekoittuvat kirjallisuus ja musiikki, blues ja jazz, Yhdysvaltojen syvä etelä ja Harlem, menneisyys ja moderniteetti sekä 1900-luvun alun sosiaalinen, poliittinen, taloudellinen, ja kulttuurinen tilanne.

Tutkin työssäni sitä miten romaani käsittelee improvisaatiota, muutosta, valintaa, ennalta-arvaamattomuutta, innovaatiota, ja variaatiota keskeisinä tekijöinä ei vain jazz-musiikissa ja 1900-luvun alun Harlemissa vaan afroamerikkalaisessa kulttuurissa ja historiassa laajemminkin. Nuo piirteet ovat mahdollistaneet selviytymisen muuttuvina aikoina ja luoneet edellytyksen vaikuttaa ei vain afroamerikkalaisten vaan myös koko kansakunnan olemassaoloon. Näen ne yhdistävinä tekijöinä Harlemin, jazzin, ja moderniteetin välisessä vuorovaikutuksessa. Täten ne toimivat työni lähtökohtina sekä keskeisinä käsitteinä ja viitekehystenä.

Johdannon ensimmäisessä osassa 1.1. esittelen romaania ja työni lähtökohtia. Toisessa osassa 1.2. tarjoan lyhyen katsauksen jazz-musiikin historiaan pääpainonani sen suhde afroamerikkalaiseen historiaan ja rooli 1900-luvun alun Amerikassa. Viimeisessä osassa 1.3. avaan moderniteetin ja modernismin ympärillä käytyä keskustelua. Lisäksi käsittelen liikkuvuutta yhtenä keskeisenä tekijänä afroamerikkalaisessa historiassa sekä sen moninaista suhdetta identiteetin rakentumiseen. Analyysiosiossa 2. käsittelen joka luvussa tiettyjä romaanin henkilöistä. Tarkastelen heidän suhteita toisiinsa ja ympäröivään muuttuvaan maailmaan työni keskeisten käsitteiden avulla. Viimeisessä osiossa 3. tarkastelun kohteena ovat kirjan kertoja ja kerronnalliset piirteet sekä päätapahtumapaikka eli 1900-luvun alun New York City, tarkemmin ottaen Harlem, josta muotoutuu romaanin eri äänien ja elementtien kollektiivi. Novellin polyfonisen rakenteen ja modernin, urbaanin tapahtumapaikan kautta pohdin myös miten teoksessa rakentuu yksilön ja yhteisön sekä improvisaation ja rakenteen välille luova ja dynaaminen dialogi.

Avainsanat: improvisaatio, muutos, valinta, polyfoninen romaani, rakennelma, dialogi.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

Toni Morrison (born Chloe Anthony Wofford) is a well known African American writer and critic. She published her first novel *The Bluest Eye* in 1970 and received the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *Beloved* in 1987. Year after she published *Jazz* (1992), she won the Nobel Prize for Literature becoming the first African American writer to be given the honor.<sup>1</sup> Alongside writers like Alice Walker and Maya Angelou, Morrison is a part of a new generation and emergence of African American female writers many of whom have acknowledged their debt to, and in some cases unearthed and reestablished, the work of earlier black women like Zora Neale Hurston.

The widespread acknowledgement black female writers have received in recent decades<sup>2</sup> is especially notable as too often the views and thoughts of black women have been disregarded and been left in the shadow of both white women and men in general.<sup>3</sup> History has often been written by men about other men – which is certainly true with black people. For instance, despite the fact that women were instrumental in promoting the Harlem Renaissance<sup>4</sup> and the agenda of racial uplift – as the slogan of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), "Lifting As We Climb", put it<sup>5</sup> – as well as the Civil Rights Movement, a pattern of black male leadership or prominence can be traced from, at least, the Harlem Renaissance through the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement to the present day.

The novel *Jazz* by Morrison explores some of the central elements of black people's existence in the United States which has in many ways been full of cracks, breaks, fractures, vacancies, and changes. Amidst such shifting circumstances change, innovation, improvisation, experimentation, and originality have enabled black people to define, influence, and reflect not only their existence but also that of the American nation at large. These issues are examined with the music jazz as an useful starting point, frame of reference, and allegory.

The novel weaves, braids, and blends different voices, spaces, and times together. The voices belong to some of the central characters of the novel such as Violet and Joe Trace, an older working class couple who have migrated to the New York City from the rural South in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Dorcas Manfred, a young woman with whom Joe has an affair. The characters also include Dorcas' friend Felice and aunt Alice Manfred as well as a host of characters from Joe's and Violet's pasts. The first-person omniscient anonymous narrator intersects uncharitable judgments about the characters whereas at other times acts as an impersonal and even disembodied medium.

*Jazz* has not received as much critical attention as some of Morrison's other novels, especially *The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved*, and *Song of Solomon*. The work that has been done has dealt with, in particular, the narrator and the narrative structure as well as the different female characters. As to previous work on the role of jazz in the novel, it does exist. In fact, many critical treatments of the novel take at least some account of it. My discussion of the novel, instead of examining them as separate, will look at the different elements and voices as deeply, even inseparably, entwined. Morrison's approach weaves, braids, and blends (her style has, in fact, often been called 'woven', 'braided', or 'hybrid') dynamically jazz and blues, music and literature, past and modernity, Harlem and the South, different voices, and the social, political, and cultural atmosphere of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century into a dense and intricately layered literary artifact. The complexity of the novel warrants a more extensive examination.

The characteristics of change, improvisation, innovation, and originality as well as those of choice, variation, freedom, and ambivalence will be used as key concepts, as kinds of loose metaphors, in my examination and discussion of the novel as they form the intersection of the various elements which comprise it. In the remaining two sections of this introduction, I will look at the central role they have played in jazz and modernity.

## **1.2. All that Jazz: An Introduction into Jazz**

In this section I will give a short, and inevitably sketchy, introduction into jazz, its history, and characteristics in order to give some understanding of the integral role some of the central concepts of this thesis, as mentioned in the previous section 1.1, have played in jazz. I will also shed light on the cultural and social context of the era in which the novel *Jazz* is set and the kind of positions jazz occupied at the time.

The roots of jazz have reflected and affected the situation of black people in the United States. Slaves transported from West Africa brought with them their musical traditions. The African roots of jazz are evident, for instance, in the widespread adoption of call-and-response patterns<sup>6</sup>, syncopation<sup>7</sup>, and polyrhythms. The rhythmic language of African music became fused with the structures and harmonies of European classical music to create the fundamental elements of an exciting new music form. Other roots of jazz include plantation music and black religious music (which also synthesized techniques of African and European origin). The influence of plantation singing, work songs, and field hollers can be heard, for instance, in the embracing of a singer's and musician's idiosyncrasies for their unique expressive effect and in the use of banjo in early jazz. Plantation music and black religious music paved the way for two genres which directly lead to the early jazz style: ragtime and the blues. When these two started to emerge the beginnings of jazz are heard.

Ragtime – sometimes described as white music played black – was a new style of light music which fused white dance forms, syncopated rhythmic style, simple harmonic structures derived from western chords, and, in some cases, elements from blues. Composers of ragtime, such as Scott Joplin, ultimately hoped that they would create a new black classical music.<sup>8</sup> Whereas ragtime was precomposed, the blues was improvised music. As the popularity and influence of ragtime started to decline, blues began to exercise an even greater influence on early jazz,

especially by introducing the elements of improvisation, blue notes<sup>9</sup> retained from African music, and the 32 bar blues ballad<sup>10</sup>, which was the basic composition structure of jazz, especially before the 1960s.

The popular history of jazz goes back to the turn of the century Mississippi delta area, notably New Orleans, and it is intertwined with history of the black experience in America. In New Orleans the celebrated marching bands were predominant among black ensembles and one of the few employment opportunities, besides juke joints, for black musicians. It was in such bands that many early jazz musicians got their formative training and typical instruments of a band such as cornets, clarinets, trombones, tubas and drums, all available cheaply second hand, were soon favored in the early make-up of jazz bands. From the delta area, the music spread rapidly alongside the Great Migration to growing cities such as St Louis and Chicago and there onwards to the East Coast, especially the New York City.<sup>11</sup>

The origin of the word “jazz” – in the early years, the word “jazz” was subject to many variations and spellings such as jass, jas, jaz, jasz, jasz, or jazz<sup>12</sup>– is impossible to ascertain. There are as many theories as there are people who have written on the subject which reflect the improvisational nature of the music and the ambivalent position it has occupied. All have agreed, however, as one writer put it in 1926, that “the word is new and different, just as the thing itself”.<sup>13</sup> It has been applied to manners, morals, and especially music. In time the word became attached, at least in some circles, with a certain obscene meaning and around 1915 many bands provocatively adopted the word in their names and it quickly caught on.<sup>14</sup> One of the first groups to use the word in its name was the Original Dixieland Jass Band, an ensemble of five white musicians, who were billed as “The Creators of Jazz”<sup>15</sup>. However indicative of the racism of the era, the group became in 1917 the first band ever to release a jazz record.<sup>16</sup> When it came out, the record sparked a jazz craze and made the music known to the general public signaling the

beginning of the Jazz Age – an era when an African American art form defined, influenced, and reflected the nation’s culture in so many ways.

During the 1920s, the so-called Jazz Age or the “Roaring Twenties”, and the 1930s, jazz gained national as well as international popularity and fame. Despite its widening popularity, for a long time jazz did not quite succeed in shedding its early links to sex and night life. Early musicians often made their living in brothels and saloons, such as juke joints or jooks, some of the few employment opportunities open to black musicians. Jazz was tarnished by an inevitable association to drinking – jazz, booze, and it as the Jazz Age has been described. The 1920s was a period of contradictions. During Prohibition, that is between 1920 and 1933, the manufacture, sale, purchase, and transport of alcohol were banned – but not the possession or consumption. There was, however, a deep discrepancy between legality and actual practice. More Americans were drinking more alcohol than they ever had before. Home brewing was popular as were bootlegging and underground bars such as jooks with the black market flourishing and benefiting corrupt officials and organized crime.

Jazz was seen as music with riffs and rhythm that could go anywhere and take you everywhere. It was associated with night life, sex, alcohol, violence, illicit behavior, loudness, and flamboyance as well as with energy, excitement, and animation. While the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of the culmination of the loosening of Puritan inhibitions – in between the Victorian era and the backlash which was to follow in the 1930s – there were also those who objected to jazz for, among other reasons, excessively animating the body and as bringing about moral, social, and religious decline leading all the way back to savagery. Though there were negative attitudes and reactions among blacks, especially middle class, they were especially prominent among whites. The racist dimensions of some criticism are not hard to discern. For example in 1932, Hannen Swaffer wrote in *Daily Herald* of Louis Armstrong that “he looks and behaves like an

untrained gorilla. He might have come straight from some African jungle, and then, after been taken to some slop tailors...been put straight on the stage and told to ‘sing’”.<sup>17</sup>

There have also been people in whose views jazz has been bringing positive progress. For Black Arts writers<sup>18</sup> jazz represented the new urban experience whereas the blues was associated with the rural, that is backward, past – a dichotomy Morrison reconciles and transcends in *Jazz*. It has offered upward mobility, at least for some black musicians, and enabled a wider audience for one’s music through mediums such as the radio and recordings that mask the performers’ race. Radio waves, recordings, and charts were unsegregatable. In fact, jazz was the basis of the commercial recording industry in the U.S. which was enthusiastically endorsed by the economically advancing members of the lower classes of blacks. People have seen jazz as the voice of democracy – jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis has even claimed that it is the artistic form that best teaches democratic values: “Jazz is important because it’s the only art form that objectifies the fundamental principles of American democracy. That’s why it swept the country and the world representing the best of the United States”<sup>19</sup>: “[S]o the way these horns relate to the rhythm section is like a musical example of how a democracy works”.<sup>20</sup> In a jazz ensemble like in a democracy, ideally, a person can enter and behave as an individual within the context of a collective; they can successfully balance structure with innovative liberty, assertive voices with cohesiveness.

After the early years, jazz styles, borrowing from various sources, begun to diverge and co-exist. In the 1920s boogie woogie and swing developed and big bands were popular, especially in the 1930s. In the early 1940s bebop (or hard bop) with its complex harmonic and rhythmic variations developed in great contrast to the music of the big bands. The mid 1950s saw “The Birth of the Cool” both as an album by Miles Davis and as a lighter form of jazz. Avant garde jazz, or free jazz as it is also known, represented a new direction in jazz in the 1960s with its

experimental, provocative, and challenging style characterized by collective improvisation and a high degree of dissonance. Today one can talk about, for instance, fusion or jazz-rock, smooth jazz, neo-classic jazz, neo-bop, soul jazz, pop jazz, nu-jazz, modern creative etc. with there being inclusive and exclusive definitions of jazz – supporters of hybrid forms and those who are critical or wary of calling such styles jazz in the first place.

As a music style firmly rooted in innovation and improvisation, jazz has been constantly changing. Thus an effort to offer a sufficient definition of jazz would take a lot more space than is available here and even then prove to be problematic. However, certain central elements can be pinpointed, in addition to those mentioned above. These include innovative liberty, change, and originality with an individual soloist taking liberties with pre-existing things to create something own. Various instruments and soloists take and share turns following their own paths but still listening to the other musicians and maintaining harmony. This is the notion of polyphony which is an integral element of jazz. Besides being polyphonic, jazz compositions often have a concise and simply melody line, that is theme, which is being improvised upon.<sup>21</sup> There is improvisation and variation, both solo and ensemble, in terms of melody and theme, harmony and, least commonly, rhythm.

### **1.3. Rethinking Modernity and Modernism**

Whether as the result of indeterminacy, “the million and one potential meanings”<sup>22</sup>, or inexhaustibility, there has been a wealth of writings and little consensus on everything – beginnings, dominant trends, definitions, and endings – where ‘the modern’, ‘modernity’, and ‘modernism’ are concerned. The recent revisions of the modernist field have come in the light of a growing recognition of the influence the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and social, political, economic, and literary context have had on the ‘modern’ experience. The

problems and possibilities of modernity have challenged and inspired writers to experiment, innovate, and improvise.

Traditional approaches have tended to view the Harlem Renaissance, also known at the time as the New Negro Movement and Negro Renaissance, and the (American) Modernism as contemporaneous with but separate from each other, parallel but not equal. Today scholars such as Adrienne Johnson Gosselin are calling for the utilization of a “nonbinary logic of “both/and””<sup>23</sup> which transcends the binary logic of traditional literary history which has tended to separate the two movements in racial terms. They are making a “Case for Black Modernist Writers”<sup>24</sup>, as the title of Gosselin’s article puts it. Writers like Langston Hughes, Jessie Fauset, Jean Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, and Claude McKay who have traditionally been recognized as major figures in black literary development are, in a growing trend, being discussed in terms of how they have constructed and deconstructed modernism and modernity. They are, in Walt Whitman’s words, “[b]oth in and out of the game, and watching and wondering at it”<sup>25</sup>, “a word of the modern....a word en mass”.<sup>26</sup> The writers themselves have asserted the multifarious relationships between the Anglo-American and African American literary traditions in particular and cultural expressions in general often well before the critics and scholars. Hence Hughes’ assertion of writing poems which are within the literary traditions of the language they employ and his advice that the key to understanding how the various pressures, forces, sources, trends, and influences have been reflected in the writings blacks have written and inspired lies in the poetry itself.<sup>27</sup>

According to Jesse Matz, the modern novel does something differently, out of the realization that modernization has changed the very nature of reality and that fiction also has to change its very nature, to break with the past, – “Make It New!” as Ezra Pound’s famous avant-garde slogan put it<sup>28</sup> – in order to be able to map the new landscape and consciousness and to make the fiction

as complex and strange as the modern experience.<sup>29</sup> The city has been the central discursive space of modernity, the modern experience – the prominent spatial metaphor and myth but also the reality of modernity. Whereas many whites in the “exquisite disillusionment and despair of Britain and Jazz Age USA”<sup>30</sup> tended to view cities as “dystopias from which they hoped to find aesthetic refuge”<sup>31</sup>, for many blacks the city, especially New York, was “The City of Refuge”.<sup>32</sup>

Several hundreds of thousands of blacks migrated from the South to the Northeast (cities like New York, Philadelphia) and Midwest (Chicago, Detroit for instance) as part of what is known as the Great Migration.<sup>33</sup> As a result, a new working class urban black population started to emerge and the emphasis shifted, also in the arts, from the rural to the urban black experience. This had an impact on the rise and new vitality of African American intellectuals and artists, especially within the Harlem Renaissance.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a change in black social and political thought from “social disillusionment to race pride”.<sup>34</sup> This new consciousness which was seen as emerging among the younger generation in the years following the WWI was labeled the “New Negro”. “A New Negro for a New Century”<sup>35</sup>, would remake his past in order to make not just take his future. The *New Negro* is also the name of Locke’s seminal anthology of black art, literature, and critical thought from 1925 which introduced the Harlem Renaissance also known at the time as the New Negro Renaissance. He saw the Renaissance as the cultural embodiment of the New Negro and as the hope of the black race. The younger generation of black writers “vibrant with a new psychology”<sup>36</sup> was to be the heart, soul, and voice of the New Negro. The book was an expansion of a special issue of *The Survey Graphic* magazine, the “Harlem issue”, from March 1925 edited by Locke and titled “Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro”.<sup>37</sup> Scholars like Houston A. Baker Jr. and Henry Louis Gates Jr. see the 1920s as a “decade of unrivalled optimism”<sup>38</sup> for many black intellectuals as well as for the hundreds of thousands of blacks

moving to the northern cities. For Baker Jr., for instance, “Modernism for Afro-America finds impetus, empowerment, and inspiration in the black city (Harlem)...for a generation that moved decisively beyond the horrors of the old country districts”.<sup>39</sup>

Mobility has been central to knowing and shaping the changing world.<sup>40</sup> For blacks it has signified struggle, exile, resistance, survival, pleasure, opportunities, uplift, autonomy, freedom, liberation, and change – thus for them it has been both unique and typical. Alongside urbanization, mobility has been a key element of the modern culture and experience with modern machines moving people to and fro across borders. This has been especially true for blacks, and has been so for over two centuries. As Cheryl Fish has pointed out, “much of the black experience in the new world is characterized by migration, mobility, and travel”, or as James Baldwin asserted, “this world is white no longer, and it will never be white again”, there being few places where blacks have not journeyed.<sup>41</sup> Thus the topic of this thesis connotes a wider perspective, both historically and geographically. The shift from the rural to the urban black experience that was taking place at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is connected not only to the Great Migration, the Harlem Renaissance, the so-called Jazz Age and the music the period has been named after but they all also resonate with the black Atlantic. The ambivalent significance of mobility and its complex relationship to identity and subjectivity are deeply rooted in the black diaspora.

This wider view reveals the deeper significance of liberty, change, innovation, improvisation, variation, ambivalence, and uncertainty in shaping the black diasporic experience and expression. For blacks changes and cracks have not only been part of the historical reality but also a way to manage the shifting landscape, a survival strategy. For the “resourceful and creative men and women, risktakers” their “survival skills, efficient networks, and dynamic culture enabled them to thrive and spread. Their hopeful journeys changed not only their world and the fabric of the

African Diaspora but also the Western Hemisphere”.<sup>42</sup> Rather than simply signaling alienation and disruption, the cracks, fractures, vacancies, and fragments have enabled blacks to creatively, actively, and dynamically reinterpret and transform time, space, identity, power relations, tastes, aspirations, and understandings – they could alternately feed their creativity and cripple it.

Mobility has had important consequences on notions of identity and historical memory as well as on cultural and political perceptions. It reveals and reflects the interplay between “two dimensions of racial ontology”, that is the relating of identity to roots and seeing identity as a process.<sup>43</sup> In his book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy discusses how for many mobile blacks their sense of identity and nationality were significantly altered due to experiences of relocation and displacement – especially in Europe where many black American travelers, like their white counterparts, went, which was sometimes seen as a betrayal of a black artist’s authenticity and integrity.<sup>44</sup> Gilroy identifies an uneasy coexistence of a desire to transcend structures and bonds of ethnicity, national identification, even race, frequently expressed by black intellectuals, activists, writers, artists, poets, and speakers and the strategic choices of black movements and individuals incorporated in nation states.<sup>45</sup>

These black intellectuals and artists have articulated and argued for something similar to what David Hollinger has termed a “postethnic perspective” which for him “balances an appreciation for communities of descent with a determination to make room for new communities” promoting “solidarities of wide scope that incorporate people with different ethnic and racial backgrounds”.<sup>46</sup> The tensions and negotiations between the individual and the collective have been expressed by Morrison in her longing for a time and space “when an artist could have a tribal or racial sensibility and an individual expression of it” and where “a single person could enter and behave as an individual within the context of the community”.<sup>47</sup>

The process of identity construction that mobility enabled and necessitated has been discussed by Cheryl Fish through what she has termed as “mobile subjectivity”: a “fluid and provisional epistemology and subject position that is contingent upon one’s relationship to persons, incidents, ideologies, locations, time and space...a process that enables its agents to examine and create various constructions of the self and others while moving and making certain decisions based on a sense of authority they have claimed”. That authority may be incomplete, compromised, stifled, accepted, or enabled, yet it reflects a recognition of the empowering potential of mobility. The mobile identities and subjectivity allow the transcendence of binarism and paradigms providing various ways of authentication and dissent while they may also be grounded on dominant and hegemonic views, values, and assumptions. A person encounters, criticizes, internalizes, and embodies the contradictions and paradoxes of the shifting surroundings as they move through space and time in consequence of decisions they have made about where and when to go.<sup>48</sup>

The ambivalent stances of and in the voices, personas, bodies, and texts of black people are indicative of the resulting tensions and possibilities. The migrant and traveler is, in Frances Bartkowski’s terms, “an amalgamated subject”, that is “mixed, an alloy, a combination of elements already whole and integral unto themselves...being or feeling both more and less oneself”.<sup>49</sup> The coexistence of self-effacement and self-assertion, corporeal and decorporealizing voices, is illustrative of how the black experience and fixed definitions of it have been transformed through negotiating, managing, and creating shifting locations and identities – as well as the stereotypical, and as such often contradictory, portrayals of black people.

The ongoing redrawing of maps of modernity, the modern experience, and modernism calls for the adoption of a wider perspective, both historically and geographically. In his advocacy of the black Atlantic, defined by him as a modern political and cultural formation, Gilroy calls for the rethinking and retiming of modernity.<sup>50</sup> Thus he is echoing Morrison who holds a larger and

more philosophical and metaphorical view of the South as not just “down home” but as the site of a very modern situation, “probably the earliest 19<sup>th</sup>-century modernist existence”, where the blacks who came as slaves had to creatively and inventively forge a new existence in new surroundings, to begin a modern experiment.<sup>51</sup> According to Gilroy, the black Atlantic enables the reexamination of “the orthodox relationship” between modernity and what is taken as its “prehistory”. It provides “a different sense of where modernity itself be thought to begin in the constitutive relationships with outsiders that found and temper a self-conscious sense of western civilization”. He points, for instance, to the ambivalent relationships between the slave trade, industrialization, and modernization.<sup>52</sup>

The reexamination of identity, location, and historical memory involves problematizing binarism and paradigms, also in scholarly work, in favor of crossing traditions, genres, fields, and locations; to read across them while acknowledging historical, social, political, economic, and literary specificities. The multifarious legacies, forces, changes, and dialogues which black expression has been inspired by and in turn has inspired are at the heart of the intersection of jazz, modernity, and Harlem.

In my thesis I analyze the various strains and voices which make up the novel, especially how and why does jazz figure in the text. I seek answers to the question as to how they are woven and braided together to provide the dynamics and structure of the text. I discuss how Morrison uses the form and content to parallel and launch the process of invention, of improvisation, of change in the novel. I am also interested in how through the novel *Jazz* Morrison explores and exposes the widespread significance of these processes in black culture and history. The key concepts of my thesis become voiced and centered at the Jazz Age Harlem. Morrison explores the range, sensuality, history, anarchy, and modernity of both the music and the street life in Harlem at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the end I will examine how the City in general and Harlem in

particular functions as a collective; how in the City the unpredictability of jazz meets the uncertainty of modern black urban life.

## 2. The Identity of Jazz and Modernity

### 2.1. “Danced on into the City” – liberty and change

#### Violet and Joe Trace

Liberty and change were among the things which moved people and what they were striving for in the post-WWI environment. The 1920s was a time of optimism for blacks, the era of the “New Negro for the New Century”<sup>53</sup> – “[i]f Booker T. was sitting down to eat a chicken sandwich in the President’s house in a city called capital...then things must be all right, all right”.<sup>54</sup> Or as Hurston put it, commenting on the situations of and race relations between white people and black people at the turn of the century, “the world to be won and nothing to be lost...the game of keeping what one has is never so exciting as the game of getting”.<sup>55</sup> In *Jazz*, this air of anticipation which followed the war is especially keenly felt by Joe and Violet Trace as they “train-danced into the City”<sup>56</sup>:

At last, at last everything is ahead...Here comes the new. Look out. There goes the sad stuff. The bad stuff. The things-nobody-could-help stuff. The way everybody was then and there. Forget that. History is over, you all, and everything’s is ahead at last. In halls and offices people are sitting around thinking future thoughts<sup>57</sup>

With the aspired and newly acquired liberty came also the responsibility of choice. Many critics have identified choice, the freedom to choose who you are, as having a central role in the novel.<sup>58</sup> The characters have the possibility, and necessity, to creatively construct and transform their identities which are depicted as ongoing processes rather than as something stable. Violet’s and Joe’s processes of and need for self-construction as well as the tensions involved are the result of not only their migration from Vesper County, Virginia to New York but also their generational isolation. The changes and choices in their lives demonstrate their ability and willingness to respond to outside circumstances. This ability “of negotiating multiple tasks, of managing, of creating” is also a survival strategy.<sup>59</sup> It “enables [African Americans] to

extemporize under pressure and in the most complicated circumstances” making “improvisation...the ultimate human endowment”.<sup>60</sup>

The novel juxtaposes the journey in geographic space with the relationship between the past and the present – the cracks, changes, and continuities in time and space. The past and the South in *Jazz* are present through memories, “the historical consciousness of the South that exists” in the characters’ minds.<sup>61</sup> Through the voices and memories of Joe and Violet there is a depiction of the South which reveals the problematic relationship between “a reflective South” and “an experiential South”, the myth and the reality.<sup>62</sup> Both Joe and Violet reflect the ambivalence many black people, including Morrison’s own relatives who were originally from the South, felt towards not only the South but also the North.<sup>63</sup> For Morrison, “the emotional unmanageableness of radical change from the menace of the post-Reconstruction South to the promise of the post-WWI North”<sup>64</sup> arises from efforts to negotiate and balance the two worlds of North and South, “mediating between the way you remember yourself versus the new way you want to be”<sup>65</sup>. Both the South and the North have been covered with myths, gossips, rumors, and stories. They are shaped by and they shape the social and collective cultural memory of the people.

For both Joe and Violet their pasts and their memories of them are fragmented. They give their accounts and versions of their pasts which, along with the narrator’s versions, involve the regrouping of pieces and traces to create meaning. This fragmentation is also part of the historical reality of blacks in America and the black diaspora. The past “must be reconstructed through following traces, written in the face of the reality of the cracks”. The trace can be followed to make a reconnection but it will not be a return of the original. Instead, what will be created is a “creole form”, a hybrid, which combines traces of the original with invented, changed, and improvised elements.<sup>66</sup>

As is the case with some other novels by Morrison, in *Jazz* there are characters who are generationally isolated, orphans in social terms. They have no “people” and thus are outside the potentially limiting aspects of blood relationships and traditional forms of social behavior. Yet, the sense of being without a past and a place is also an obstacle in the process of identification, a construction process which uses a web of relations as a tool. Violet’s father had left his family and her mother Rose Dear committed suicide by jumping in a well, which taught Violet “to never never have children. Whatever happened, no small dark foot would rest on another while a hungry mouth said, Mama?”.<sup>67</sup> Her grandmother, True Belle, who looked after her and her siblings after their mother died, has also died. Joe’s mother whom he tries to trace had abandoned him at birth and the identity of his father is unknown. Joe grew up with the Williams family and it was Rhoda Williams who gave him the name Joseph after her father. Joe has literally named himself, “since nobody did it for me, since nobody knew what it could or should have been”.<sup>68</sup> He had chosen for himself the family name “Trace” as after being told his parents “disappeared without a trace”, he understood it so that “the ‘trace’ they disappeared without was [him]”.<sup>69</sup> Violet and Joe have no children. Neither had wanted them at one stage so Violet’s miscarriages, one “washed away on a tide of soap, salt, and castor oil...mammymade poisons and mammy’s urgent fists”, had been less of a loss than an inconvenience in their new life in the city.<sup>70</sup> When “mother-hunger had hit [Violet] like a hammer. Knocked her down and out”<sup>71</sup> by the time she was forty, it was too late. Being without mothers and children, for Joe and Violet the “mother-hunger” works in both directions.

Being generationally isolated has both enabled and necessitated the couple to respond to changing circumstances and to choose who they love. It was Violet who “chose, picked out and determined to have and hold on to” Joe after he had literally landed at her feet from a walnut tree he had been sleeping in.<sup>72</sup> They got married and, eventually, in 1906, “just as he had decided on

his name, the walnut tree he and Victory [Williams] slept in, a piece of bottom land”, Joe decided it was time to head for the City on board the Southern Sky train with all their belongings in one valise.<sup>73</sup> By 1926, they had left “the stink of Mulberry Street and Little Africa, then the flesh-eating rats on West Fifty-third and moved uptown” where they live on Lenox Avenue, a main street in Harlem.<sup>74</sup> Joe works as a waiter and has gotten himself “a little sideline”<sup>75</sup> as a sample-case salesman of Cleopatra beauty products. Violet is an unlicensed hairdresser thus having the liberties, responsibilities, and burdens of being a private entrepreneur – of being an individual as both of them are.

For the Traces mobility signals both change and challenge. The process of identity construction that mobility enables and necessitates involves negotiating, managing, and creating the changing surroundings. It affects and reflects the web of relations, one’s relationship to persons, incidents, ideologies, locations, time, and space. The process “enables its agents to examine and create various constructions of the self and others while moving and making certain decisions based on a sense of authority they have claimed”.<sup>76</sup> The new consciousness, the New Negro, which emerged after the WWI is an embodiment of this “mobile subjectivity”.

The New Negroes were moving decidedly in time and space with a new sense of authority. They wanted to break from the past – the Old Negro who had become a myth, a formula, a stock figure, “perpetuated as an historical fiction partly in innocent sentimentalism, partly in deliberate reactionism” and the mindsets of both blacks and whites which have “burrowed in the trenches of the Civil War and Reconstruction”<sup>77</sup> – and take their future into their hands and not let it be in those of white America. Hurston, for instance, described herself as not “tragically colored” and not belonging to “the sobbing school of Negrohood”: “Slavery is sixty years in the past...The terrible struggle that made me an American out of a potential slave said “On the line!” The Reconstruction said “Get set!”; and the generation before said “Go!” I am off to a flying start and

I must not halt in the stretch to look behind and weep...The world to be won and nothing to be lost".<sup>78</sup> An expression of the optimism of the era, Hurston's description of "How It Feels To Be Colored Me" is also a reminder of what was still denied and yet to be gained. The steady and systematic deterioration of the position of blacks in America had meant that there really was nothing to lose and that there was only one way to go, up. The ability and need to be the agent of the process of identity construction becomes articulated in *Jazz* when Joe's voice overcomes that of the narrator to describe being "a new Negro all my life".<sup>79</sup>

In his monologue Joe recounts the seven changes he has gone through, his process of self-construction, as his way of negotiating and managing his relationship to the shifting surroundings. He creates and examines various constructions of his self making choices based on a sense of authority he has claimed from the time he named himself and "was picked out and trained to be a man. To live independent and feed myself no matter what" by Henry Lestroy, or "Hunters Hunter",<sup>80</sup> through his marrying Violet and deciding to buy a piece of land to migrating North, settling there, and eventually moving to uptown New York. The impetus for his seventh change came when in a riot in summer 1917 "those whitemen took that pipe from around my head, I was brand new for sure because they almost killed me. Along with many a more".<sup>81</sup> It was in 1919 he finally changed for the seventh time when he "walked all the way, every doddamn step of the way, with the three six nine": "I thought that change was last, and it sure was the best because the War had come and gone and the colored troops of the three six nine that fought it made me so proud it split my heart in two...I had it made. In 1925 we all had it made".<sup>82</sup>

The Traces' migration to the North reflects the ambivalent significance of mobility and its multifaceted relationship to identity and subjectivity. For blacks mobility has signified struggle, resistance, survival, empowerment, opportunities, uplift, freedom, liberation, exile, authority – change in all shapes and sizes. The psychological and emotional effects of the radical change are

captured in Violet's musings of how "[b]efore I came North I made sense and so did the world...I knew who I was before I came up here and got my mind all messed up".<sup>83</sup> She is caught "midway between was and must be".<sup>84</sup>

This fracture is enacted in the body of Violet and on her name. Violet has become 'Violent' with cracks and brakes doing unpredictable acts – disrupting Dorcas' funeral where she slashes her face with a knife, suddenly sitting down on the street, and stealing a baby she was supposed to watch. She feels like she had split into the Violet she had become and "*that* Violet" she used to be. *That* strong Violet blessed with hips who had claimed Joe, handled a four mule team, and hauled hay feeling no shame or disgust whereas the Violet in the City is drinking malted milkshake with "Dr. Dee's Nerve and Flesh Builder"<sup>85</sup> to regain what she had lost and heal the wound caused by the split. Violet's split makes her wonder "who on earth that other Violet was that walked about the City in her skin"<sup>86</sup>, thus creating in her a double-consciousness or dual perspective of watching herself as through an outsider's eyes. Described by W.E.B DuBois as a complex socio-historical and socio-psychological duality of African Americans as both African and American, "two warring ideals in one dark body"<sup>87</sup>, in the novel the double-consciousness is embodied as the "tricky blond kid living inside Mrs. Trace's head...Quiet as a mole".<sup>88</sup> She became aware of him lodging in her mind only when she came to the City where she was running up and down the streets wanting to be white, light, and young again. For Violet, the stories True Belle used to tell and imprint on her mind of a wonderful and perfect gentleman called Golden Gray – the name is descriptive of his mixed heritage and racially indeterminate appearance – created a detrimental light-bright-right model in her mind: "somebody golden, like my own golden boy, who I never saw but who tore up my girlhood as surely as if we'd been the best of lovers".<sup>89</sup> Violet, described as "very dark, boot black"<sup>90</sup>, wonders whether her fascination with Golden Gray was of the same kind that seemed to have taken over Joe when he met the light-

skinned Dorcas Manfred with whom he had an affair. She entertains the possibility that her relationship with Joe has been from the beginning based on settling with what one can get in life; “standing in the cane, he was trying to catch a girl he was yet to see, but his heart knew all about, and me, holding on to him but wishing he was the golden boy I never saw either”.<sup>91</sup> Golden Gray was like “a present taken from whitefolks, given to [Violet] when [she] was too young to say No thank you”<sup>92</sup>, it belonged to her but was not hers, something which she comes to recognize.

Violet’s struggle to gain control over her life and future highlights the violence and complexity of the process of self-construction. It is in a conversation with Felice that Violet describes how she got rid of the little blond child living in her mind, whom she sometimes thought of as a girl, brother, or a boyfriend:

“How did you get rid of her?”  
“Killed her. Then I killed the me that killed her”  
“Who’s left?”  
“Me”<sup>93</sup>

Violet reconstructs herself “through following traces, written in the face of the reality of the cracks”.<sup>94</sup> The ‘me’ that emerges is not a return of the original Violet nor is it something completely new but rather a mixture. She learns the importance of negotiating, mediating, and balancing the two Violets, how she remembered herself as having been and what she had become. Because when she does, “suddenly the world was the right side up” and she “noticed, at the same moment as *that* Violet did, that it was spring. In the City”.<sup>95</sup>

Violet’s double-consciousness is not only a source of alienation and disruption, of cracks, fractures, and brakes, but also gives her a new perspective on things which enables her to creatively and actively reinterpret and transform identity, aspirations, and understandings; whenever “she thought about *that* Violet, and what *that* Violet saw through her own eyes, she knew there was no shame, no disgust”.<sup>96</sup> She “thought about how she must have looked at the

funeral, at what her mission was. The sight of herself trying to do something bluesy, something hep, fumbling the knife, too late anyway... She laughed till she coughed".<sup>97</sup>

Humor, alongside the ability to improvise, is revealed as a crucial survival mechanism creating a cathartic feeling which relies on a "blues-type movement back and forth, across and between a whole range of experiences".<sup>98</sup> Not just *Jazz* but Morrison's novels in general weave and blend melancholic, distressing, and violent strains with humorous ones recognizing, as Violet and Alice Manfred eventually do, that laughter is more complicated and serious than tears. Violet is reminded of what she had learned from True Belle, as the readers do from the style and tone of Morrison's novels, that laughter in the face of difficulties will make you feel "better. Not beaten, not lost. Better".<sup>99</sup> The connection which springs between Violet, Alice, and True Belle offers a way to transcend pain and regain human contact and reassurance. It bridges the distance and alienation which had formed between the past and the present and the different characters.

In the course of the novel Joe and Violet come to realize that in order to be successful in the "enterprise of being a complete individual", there is "something rogue. Something else [they] have to figure in before [they] can figure it out".<sup>100</sup> They have learned that "the past might haunt us, but it would not entrap us".<sup>101</sup> Instead of letting the past "be a straightjacket, which overwhelms and binds" they should "critique it, test it, confront it and understand it in order to achieve freedom that is more than license, to achieve true, adult agency".<sup>102</sup> They learn to negotiate and balance the two worlds of South and North, past and present. They recognize the value of being amalgamated, "mixed, an alloy, a combination of elements"<sup>103</sup> from both, being "new and stay the same everyday the sun rose and every night it dropped".<sup>104</sup> That something they have to figure in might be love, laughter, human ability to see things from a different angle and to change the pattern – in short, that something is the improvisational quality of human beings, and the music.

Towards the end of the novel Violet passes on the advice she used to know by heart but had lost along the way till she was reminded of it by Alice of how “nobody’s asking you to take it. I’m sayin’ make it, make it!”.<sup>105</sup> In a conversation she has with Felice she asks her “what’s the world for if you can’t make it up the way you want it?...Don’t you want it to be something more than what it is?”. When Felice remains doubtful saying “what’s the point? I can’t change it”, Violet replies “that’s the point. If you don’t, it will change you and it’ll be you fault cause you let it. I let it. And messed up my life...forgot it was mine”.<sup>106</sup> What she had forgotten was her ability to negotiate, manage, and create change in her surroundings and in herself, an ability which the novel sees as vital to humanity. It is a survival strategy which enables people to make and not just take the future.

## **2.2. “What was meant came from the drums” – anger and hunger**

### **Alice Manfred**

The optimism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was accompanied by a sense of urgency. The excitement and animation of the era gets blended with and acts as a counterpoint in the novel to a more melancholy and ambivalent view of the era and the music which reflected and affected it. During a July 1917 march, organized in response to the East St Louis, Illinois riot<sup>107</sup>, Alice Manfred stands for three hours on Fifth Avenue watching the marchers and listening to their drums:

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 the bearer. But what was meant came from the drums. It was July in 1917 and the beautiful faces where cold and quiet; moving slowly into the space the drums were building for them.<sup>108</sup>

It is Alice Manfred, as Linden Peach has pointed out, who recognizes the role of African American music in building a space “which shaped and was shaped by people’s behavior and which in turn was influenced by this particular musical discourse”.<sup>109</sup> Alice, like Leroi Jones

(also known as Imamu Amiri Baraka) and James Weldon Johnson, recognizes that there is an attitude expressed in the music; that, in the words of Jones, “the notes means [sic] something; and the something is, regardless of its stylistic considerations, part of the black psyche as it dictates various forms of Negro culture”.<sup>110</sup>

Langston Hughes, a key figure of the Harlem Renaissance, has also addressed the connection between the music, especially the drums, and the black psyche in his poem “Jukebox Love Song”: “Take the Lenox Avenue buses,/ Taxis and subways,/ Take Harlem’s heartbeat,/ Make a drumbeat, Put it on a record, let it whirl”.<sup>111</sup> Or as he put it in “The Weary Blues”, a poem from his first collection of poetry by the same name which appeared in 1926, “Droning a syncopated tune,/...I heard a Negro play,/ Down on Lenox Avenue the other night/ Sweet Blues!/ Coming from a black man’s soul,/ In a deep voice with a melancholy tone”.<sup>112</sup> Hughes is reflecting the significance of not just the music but also Harlem, and the urban setting in general, to black people in America.

For Alice, the heartbeat and drumbeat of Harlem are a source of trouble and unease. She sees the music as reflecting and encouraging the lawlessness and violence that was part of the metropolis and life in the Jazz Age, the “streets will confuse you, teach you or break your head”<sup>113</sup>. She wants to shield herself and her niece Dorcas, whose guardian she had been since Dorcas’ parents had died during the East. St. Louis riot when she was little, from the “dirty, get-on-down music the women sang and the men played and both danced to, close and shameless or apart and wild” because “it made you do unwise disorderly things. Just hearing it was like violating the law”.<sup>114</sup> She recognizes that it is in “the social space of the novel, where the instability of the urban meets the unpredictability of jazz.”<sup>115</sup> Even though she had learned from sermons and editorials that the music was not real, not serious, she swears she hears a “complicated anger” in “this juke joint, barrel hooch, tonk house, music”, “something hostile that

disguised itself as flourish and roaring seduction”.<sup>116</sup> She is disturbed by it and tries to stay in control so as to not break down and succumb to the music’s seduction, anger, and careless hunger for a fight.

As Alice Manfred stands on Fifth Avenue watching the cold, freezing faces of the slowly moving silent marchers in July 1917, she senses anger in the air but none of the recklessness, lawlessness, and disorderliness of the riot in the memory of which the march is organized and which lead to the death of Dorcas’ parents, the burning of their house, and her ending up in Alice’s care. For Alice the riot had at its core not the WWI and the disgruntled veterans nor the whites terrified by the “wave of southern Negroes flooding the towns” but something to do with the “dirty, get-on-down music”.<sup>117</sup> The marchers and their drums, in contrast to the beat of the lowdown music, represented for Alice “an all-embracing rope of fellowship, discipline and transcendence”.<sup>118</sup> She grabs the rope and clutches her other hand in a fist in her pocket so as to not smash “it through the glass pane to snatch the world in her fist and squeeze the life out of it for doing what it did and did and did to her and everybody else she knew or knew about”.<sup>119</sup> Yet, when she lets her guards down a melody of longing or hunger sneaks into her mind making her aware of “flesh and something so free she could smell its bloodsmell; made her aware of its life below the sash and its red lip rouge”.<sup>120</sup> The music is difficult for her to dismiss “because underneath, holding up the looseness like a palm are the drums that put Fifth Avenue into focus”<sup>121</sup> and made her fear go away at last. Hard as she tries to keep the Fifth Avenue drums of controlled anger apart from the reckless hunger of the music, she cannot help feeling that the beat informing both comes from the same black heart and psyche.

Having ambivalent and mixed feelings of fright, anger, envy, and pleasure towards the changes and atmosphere she observes around her, Alice reflects the complications of the modern, urban black experience. She, like the other characters, realizes the fears, hopes, excitement, crisis,

opportunity, regret, hunger, and anger of trying to survive in a world which in itself is in a state of flux yet has deep undercurrents of unfulfilled promises and denied opportunities. While having felt scared all her life, “seeded in childhood, watered every day since then, fear had sprouted through her veins”, thinking war thoughts, Alice’s fear had “gathered, blossomed into another thing”.<sup>122</sup> Set in a period which was hoped at the time to mark a break from the problems of the past and see the birth of the New Negro with the full rights of a citizen, the novel maps a multilayered space which it likens to a battle field not unlike those which black soldiers had only recently left behind. The difference, though, was that now the black women were also armed, and dangerous.

The changing atmosphere of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is traced in the three generations of Manfred women. Waiting for Violet to pay her a visit, Alice contemplates on her own upbringing and its impact on how she had raised Dorcas. The way she was brought up and in turn brought up Dorcas, despite of having sworn not to pass it on, “to keep the heart ignorant of the hips and the head in charge of both”<sup>123</sup> highlights and acts as a counterpoint to the changes which were taking place in terms of norms, values, mores, and conventions. The 19<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment, passed after a long struggle on 28 August 1920, gave women the right to vote having a significant influence on the values and views of the 1920s. The music, the burgeoning movie industry, and the changes in socially acceptable behavior for women all contributed to one another and together helped to turn the 1920s into a “radical decade as far as behavior and consciousness were concerned”.<sup>124</sup> Both Alice and Dorcas, though with opposite reactions, see the music, and the general air it reflected and affected, as encouraging the new morality with its looser sexual mores and the accelerated, tenses pace and style of life.

The proper behavior for women that Alice’s parents instructed and valued, and Alice in turn imposed on Dorcas, focused especially on the body, “sitting nasty (legs open); sitting womanish

(legs crossed)".<sup>125</sup> The body was confined also in other ways to try to control the way it occupied the socially constructed space according to equally socially constructed norms of behavior, for instance by the way Alice's parents bounded and resented her breasts the moment she got them; she was even cautioned against breathing through her mouth and switching when walking. Her parents resented "the blood spots, the new hips, the new hair"<sup>126</sup> of their daughters. Alice, in her turn, despite of swearing otherwise, wants to keep Dorcas a little girl with hair in braids tucked under. For these ends, she employs the same strategies as her parents had used with and on her and her sisters by outlawing make-up, high-heeled shoes, "the vampy hats", and especially coats which made the "Gay Northeasters and the City Belles" look "like they had just stepped out of the bath tub and were already ready for bed" with their "ready-for-bed-in-the-street-clothes".<sup>127</sup> Instead she dressed Dorcas in a "cast-iron skirt" and "clunky...high-topped shoes that covered ankles other girls exposed".<sup>128</sup> She and the Miller sisters who used to take of Dorcas when Alice was working share mutual feelings towards the way in which "you couldn't tell the streetwalkers from the mothers" and the omnipresent lowdown music that affected the children in their care, "cocking their heads and swaying ridiculous, unformed hips".<sup>129</sup>

Alice's concern, like that of the Miller sisters', over the behavior and moral character of black women may be seen as an example of not allowing "the funk to erupt"<sup>130</sup>. They resemble the many women Morrison remembers and describes in an interview as "those women who won't dance – not for religious reasons, but because they are afraid to express joy or sensual pleasure, because both are associated in White culture with lack of discipline". "They were very busy", Morrison further describes them, "the eye that looked at them was not another Black person's eye. It was a distant White eye that looked at them that they were aspiring to emulate or correct".<sup>131</sup> Alice and the Miller sisters live on Clifton Place, with "a leafy sixty-foot tree every hundred feet, a quite street with no fewer than five motor cars parked at the curb"<sup>132</sup>, and

organize luncheon meetings of the Civic Daughters for instance to plan fund raisers for the National Negro Business League.

They thus resemble the often middle class black people who, like James Weldon Johnson, saw the black dances, blues, and jazz as “lower forms of art” which animated the body and had a negative effect on the mind compared with, for instance, the “noble music” of spirituals.<sup>133</sup> She has learned from sermons and editorials that the music is “just colored folks’ stuff: harmful, certainly; embarrassing, of course; but not real, not serious”.<sup>134</sup> Alice initially has “scary angry feelings”<sup>135</sup> towards the brutal people who commit unjustified acts of violence being like “snake-in-the-grass”<sup>136</sup> – as she sees Joe who killed Dorcas and Violet, “a brutal woman black as soot known to carry a knife”.<sup>137</sup> For Alice, they are exactly the kind of black people she tried to keep Dorcas away from, the “embarrassing kind. More than unappealing, they were dangerous, the husband shot, the wife stabbed...And where there was violence wasn’t there also vice? Gambling. Cursing. A terrible and nasty closeness...And of course, race music to urge them on”.<sup>138</sup>

However, Alice, like the other characters and the narrator, reflect the ambivalence and multifacetedness of the era. While she had “chosen surrender and made Dorcas her own prisoner of war”<sup>139</sup>, she expresses her approval of how all over the country black women were making a stand against their objectification and subordination, and for a good reason:

Men ran through the streets of Springfield, East St. Louis, and the City holding one red wet hand in the other, a flap of skin on the face...Black women were armed; black women were dangerous...Were the women fondled in kitchens and the back of stores? Uh huh. Did police put their fists in women’s faces so the husband’s spirits would break along the women’s jaws? Did men (those who knew them as well as strangers sitting in motor cars) call them out of their names every single day of their lives? Uh huh<sup>140</sup>

The women who are armed as well as the unarmed ones are acting in the public domain to change the position of blacks and women especially – “any other kind of...black woman in 1926 was

silent or crazy or dead”.<sup>141</sup> Black women were, in the words of Hurston, “not weep[ing] at the world” but “too busy sharpening [their] oyster knife[s]”.<sup>142</sup>

The unarmed ones included those who worked through clubs, leagues, societies, and sisterhoods dealing with a wide scope of issues. Black clubwomen prided themselves as people who made a real difference to their communities and provided leadership of particular importance. Indeed, they were not lacking in confidence. “The Negro woman has been the motive power in whatever has been accomplished by the race”, claimed, for instance, Addie Hunton Williams of Chicago, and Gertrude Calvert of Iowa asserted that “[i]t is to the Afro-American woman that the world looks for the solution of the race problem”.<sup>143</sup> Such political, social, and economic considerations compelled black women to move beyond their local and state associations to devise plans for the formation of a national body that would systematically and professionally address the problems that black people had to face. The result was NACW (National Association of Colored Women) formed in 1896.

These women were counteracting, as Alice does, an increasing stridency and widespread circulation of negative images of black women as lubricious and promiscuous. They disputed the identification process by others which labeled them based on both race and gender to make a claim for self-identification as citizens of the United States. A woman called Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, for instance, declared that “for the sake of our own dignity, the dignity of our race, and the future good name of our children, it is “mete, right and bounden duty” to stand forth and declare ourselves and our principles, to teach an ignorant and suspicious world that our aims and interests are identical with those of all good and aspiring women”.<sup>144</sup> For Alice, part of the effort was to try to keep herself and Dorcas away from where there were white males over the age of eleven as they might approach them with “dollar-wrapped fingers”.<sup>145</sup>

Though Alice and Violet are different in many ways, “the woman who avoided the streets let into her living room the woman who sat in the middle of one”<sup>146</sup>, the relationship between Alice and Violet proves to be cathartic for both of them. It is in their conversations during Violet’s visits, initially annoying but eventually looked forward to, that they learn and are reminded about things concerning themselves, their pasts, and each other that enable them to “achieve freedom that is more than license, to achieve true, adult agency”.<sup>147</sup> The discussions heal the fracture in Violet while making Alice realize the cracks under her polished surface; “she was impolite. Sudden. Frugal. No apology or courtesy seemed required or necessary between them. But something else was – clarity, perhaps”.<sup>148</sup> Alice is not afraid to lose control around Violet: “Shit!” Alice shouted. “Oh shit!” Violet was the first to smile. Then Alice. In no time laughter was rocking them both”.<sup>149</sup> They come to realize as True Belle had that laughter in the face of difficulties will make it easier to face them. The connection which forms between the women changes both of them and their state of minds.

As women neither has been a stranger to domestic chores and “mother-hunger”<sup>150</sup> nor to the experience of having a cheating husband. As black women they are not unfamiliar with being amidst whites who treated a black grown woman of independent means as though she had no surname, as a thing rather than a person; experiences which combine them despite of the differences in their background that have taught the “very very dark, boot black”<sup>151</sup> Violet how to pick cotton, plow, and handle a four-mule team and have enabled Alice, an Illinois originated woman of “independent means”<sup>152</sup>, to work as a dress-maker when she felt like it. As Violet reminds Alice, they are “[b]orn around the same time... we women, me and you”.<sup>153</sup>

Like Joe and Violet, Alice has come to learn the role played by choice in love and life having made her wayward husband Louis Manfred choose between her and his lover. Her husband chose the lover but after seven months, it was Alice who had to choose – the clothes her husband was to

be buried in. Both women have come to realize that they have been faced with not just the necessity but also the freedom to make their life the way they want it to be; to be the agents of their lives, and not just take it as it is. It was liberty which came with the responsibility of self-construction which involved negotiating individuality and relationship to others. Alice reflects the manifold connections between the changing surroundings and the black psyche, especially that of a woman – the heart beat of the space the drum beat was building.

### **2.3. “From freezing to hot to cool” – unpredictability and uncertainty**

#### **Dorcas Manfred**

The 1920s was a time of changing mores, norms, conventions, and attitudes. It was a shifting terrain whose boundaries were redrawn and questioned in multiple ways – it has been called “one of the least conservative and least “normal” decades of the century”<sup>154</sup>. Sharp dichotomies like those between masculine and feminine, humanity and animality were being rejected and questioned in favor of views which saw the polarities as integrated with one another. The modern liberated and self-reliant women, known at the time as flappers<sup>155</sup>, were reclaiming their bodies and sexuality pointing out the social constructedness of the space they occupied and of the boundaries for proper female behavior. At the same time, they were being objectified and under the male gaze, subject to its appetite, both on the big screen and off. The 1920s was as much about an “emancipatory spirit”<sup>156</sup> and romantic love as about the importance of appearance, images, and watching and being watched, “the place where things pop...a market where gesture is all”.<sup>157</sup>

The characters encounter, criticize, internalize, and embody the contradictions and paradoxes of the era. Their mobile subjectivities enable the transcendence of paradigms providing various ways of authentication and dissent at the same time as they may also be grounded on hegemonic

views, values, and assumptions. The ambivalent stances of their voices, personas, and bodies are indicative of the resulting possibilities and tensions. The mobile subjectivity enables the different voices which constitute the novel to examine and create various constructions of not just the self but also of others. It is this kind of a conflicting and often confusing time and space that Dorcas Manfred occupies and which occupies her; she is caught in and embodies the era of “dressed-up nakedness”.<sup>158</sup>

The ambivalent picture that is given of Dorcas is as much the result of embodying the shifting surroundings as it is due to the others’ contradictory attitudes towards her. It is not until towards the end of the book that her independent voice overcomes that of the narrator. Till then her and her image are being constructed not just by Joe and Acton but also by Violet, her aunt Alice, her friend Felice and, especially, the narrator. If the person who looks at the picture of Dorcas that Violet has gotten from Alice and put on the Traces’ mantelpiece is Joe “her face is calm, generous and sweet”. But if it is Violet, the photograph is not that at all and the girl’s face looks “greedy, haughty and very lazy.” It is an “inward face – whatever it sees is its own self. You are there, it says, because I am looking at you”.<sup>159</sup> The photograph of Dorcas acts as a kind of mirror for the other characters, a mirror which reflects the essence of both the onlooker and the image at the same time as it reveals that essence to be constructed and fluid.

The image that is given of Dorcas by her friend Felice reflects and reveals the ambivalent position she occupies. Described as a young woman for whom everything was “like picture show” in which “she was the one on the railroad track, or the one trapped in the sheik’s tent when it caught fire”<sup>160</sup>, she is casted as the stereotypical maiden in distress and the object of male fantasies and agency as well as people’s gazes. Yet, she is also characterized as someone who loved plotting and secrets pushing men interested in her to do scary things for the attention and excitement. The contradictory but coexisting imagery of a maiden in distress, and an energetic “It

girl” – “[o]ne could have It, want It, show It, or think about It but not *do* It”<sup>161</sup> – is indicative of the conflicting roles and images of women amidst the varieties of experiences in modern American life, and of the fine line between the different roles and images, with a woman being at the same time an agent and object of a gaze.

Dorcas uses other people as a mirror changing her image depending on who the person is. Like her aunt Alice, she hears longing and hunger in the music with “a knowing woman [singing] ain’t nobody going to keep me down you got the right key baby but the wrong keyhole you got to bring it and put it right here or else”, could have been sung by her; she “may not know who is that woman singing but [she] know[s] the words by heart”.<sup>162</sup> Her flesh “held secret the love appetite soaring inside it”. She “stood in her body and offered it”<sup>163</sup> as for her the body is *the*, even only, vehicle for social and sexual interaction, she feels it is all she has to give. She is hungry for love and approval: “I wanted a personality and with Acton I’m getting one. I have a look now...I’m Acton’s and it’s Acton I want to please. He expects it”.<sup>164</sup> For her the way Acton tells her immediately when he disapproves of her actions or appearance is sign that he, unlike Joe, worries about her and cares about the kind of woman she is: “Joe didn’t care what kind of woman I was. He should have. I cared...With Joe I pleased myself because he encouraged me to. With Joe I worked the stick of the world, the power in my hand”.<sup>165</sup>

Dorcas’ process of identity construction is a fluid and provisional subject position that is contingent of her relationship to persons, incidents, ideologies, locations, time, and space. This leads to her giving the impression of a lack of inner consistency with everything appearing as a “kaleidoscope of actions and reactions with little beyond” and stable or meaningful enough.<sup>166</sup> The actions of others, or a tune “lifted from the circles and grooves of a record”, can change her composure “[f]rom freezing to hot to cool”.<sup>167</sup> Dorcas transcends the boundaries of the socially constructed space of proper female behavior at the same time as she occupies it. She embodies

the spirit and pulse of the “Roaring Twenties” or Jazz Age mirroring its paradoxes and contradictions; the emotions, hopes, fears and deep realities of black urban life in an era that was in a state of flux and upheaval.

The readers, like Violet who never knew Dorcas, have to construct an image of her based on “only her picture and the personality [they] invented based on careful investigations”,<sup>168</sup> the fragments and traces provided by other people – “the body’s traces and marks represent us with significant textual hieroglyphs”.<sup>169</sup> The reliability of the traces and marks of her body become questioned, however, as when Joe contemplates during his interior monologue why he has told about his affair with Dorcas and his reasons for it to practically no one: “[I]t was because I couldn’t tell myself because I didn’t know all about it...I didn’t have a plan and couldn’t have carried it out if I did”.<sup>170</sup> In a style typical of the novel, which also underscores the subjective nature of the different voices which create a construction of Dorcas and the novel on the whole, the narrator describes Dorcas as Joe’s “personal sweet – like candy...his private candy box” whereas two pages later Joe, in his monologue, gives a different picture of himself and their affair: “[C]andy’s something you lick, suck on, and then swallow and it’s gone. No. This was something else”.<sup>171</sup>

For Joe, the traces and marks of Dorcas’ body created a track. Just as he had tracked his mother in Virginia, Joe tracks Dorcas after she had left him with all the instincts and skills of being taught by a Hunters Hunter that when “the trail speaks, no matter what’s in the way, you can find yourself in a crowded room aiming a bullet at her heart, never mind it’s the heart you can’t live without”.<sup>172</sup> In his monologue, Joe addresses Dorcas about their relationship: “I *chose* you...Wrong time, yep, and doing wrong by my wife. But the picking out, the choosing. Don’t ever think I fell for you. I didn’t fall in love. I rose in it. I saw you and made up my mind. My mind. And I made up my mind to follow you too.”<sup>173</sup> The freedom to choose in love and life, to

negotiate between individuality and commitment, offered by the degree of liberty of the modern black urban life, leads in the novel to both dissonance and harmony.

The changes and choices in the characters' lives are contingent upon their relationships to other people, time, and space. They are necessitated and enabled to create various constructions of themselves and others. Their ability and willingness "of negotiating multiple tasks, of managing, of creating"<sup>174</sup> is vital to humanity. It becomes a survival strategy which makes it possible "to extemporize under pressure and in the most complicated circumstances"<sup>175</sup>, to make and not just take the future. Forgetting that she should and could make up the world the way she wants it to be, not just let it change her, that it is her life she is leading not Joe's, Acton's, or others, it is Dorcas who does not have a future and who does not survive.

#### **2.4. "Her tempo is next year's news" – harmony and transformation**

##### **Felice**

When Felice walks into the lives of Traces' carrying a record under her arm, she changes the tune of the composition with "her tempo [which] is next year's news".<sup>176</sup> Instead of being "another true-as-life Dorcas, four marcelled waves and all" forming a "mirror image of Dorcas, Joe and Violet", her voice brings along harmony.<sup>177</sup> She eases pain, not creates it. As Joe says to her, "Felice that means happy...They named you right. Remember that".<sup>178</sup>

It is Felice, not Dorcas, that sets the heart/drum beat of the novel. Taking to heart Violet's advice of "nobody's asking you to take it. I'm sayin' make it, make it!"<sup>179</sup>, Felice wants to have a good job and make her own money before getting married like her mother, Alice, and Violet had done. She does not want to be like other girls her age such as Dorcas who, for Felice, spent their time trying to figure out how to find and then keep a guy – she wants to be "nobody's alibi or hammer or toy"<sup>180</sup>. Felice resists and undermines the image of and direction for her life imagined

by the narrator. When her independent voice overcomes that of the narrator near the end of the novel, the picture she offers of her relationship with Joe and Violet differs drastically from the one given by the narrator at the beginning of the novel. She cannot be “swathed in [the] formulae”<sup>181</sup> of the narrator and the surrounding society. She is self-dependent and self-respecting; the new spirit, psychology, of the era is awake in and awakened by her in the novel.

Felice does not appear for most of the novel and when she does the narrator imagines and anticipates her to be a mirror image of Dorcas. She is in the shadow of, even the shadow of, Dorcas, “the dark-skinned friend” who “heightens the cream color of the other” and whose “oily hair enhances Dorcas’ soft, dry waves”.<sup>182</sup> Of the different characters, her name is mentioned and her voice emerges last and it is only towards the end of the novel that it is revealed that she is the “another girl”<sup>183</sup> mentioned at the beginning of the novel who carries a record under arm heading for Violet. However, it is her voice, when it eventually does emerge, that finally persuades the narrator to revisit and revise the composition it had improvised. The narrator realizes that the past is not an “abused record with no choice but to repeat itself at the crack and no power could lift the arm that held the needle”.<sup>184</sup> The record Felice carries is not the one that started “that scandalizing threesome on Lenox Avenue”<sup>185</sup> as the narrator had imagined. Like a person who manages the record player at a house-rent party Dorcas and Felice attend, the narrator puts a record of its choice on the Victrola, “scratches the record, tries again, then exchanges the record for another”,<sup>186</sup> the one brought by Felice. She gears the composition forward; changes the record and lifts the arm of the narrator.

The relationship between Joe, Violet, and Felice brings human contact and reassurance into their lives which enable them to transcend the pain in their lives. It is during her visits to the Traces that Felice begins to deal with the fractures, breaks, and vacancies in her life. She had not gone to Dorcas’ wake nor to her funeral as she was angry at her – for using people, for messing

up their friendship when she started to see first Joe and then Acton, and for “dying like a fool”.<sup>187</sup> She wants to stop Joe from being “all broke up” and crying day and night by telling him what had happened after he had shot Dorcas but in the process goes through a cathartic experience herself which makes her cry over Dorcas for the first time.

They have “double-eyes”, one which allows them to look inside each other and one which enables the others to look inside of them.<sup>188</sup> They see in each other sides the other characters cannot. Joe looks at Felice, who has always been overshadowed by Dorcas, not with cold eyes as her father does but like she is someone interesting, deep, important, and different. Felice sees in Violet not the crazy “Violent” person other people took her to be but a woman who has come to understand life and love, though sometimes in quite an eccentric manner. It is the way Violet sees and has made herself, not like it was somebody tough or “put together for show” but somebody she favored and could count on, which compels Felice to return to the ‘Traces’ despite of her intentions otherwise.<sup>189</sup>

They awake from the hibernation they had fallen into starting to live in the present and plan for the future instead of being caught in the past. Their relationship creates harmony enabling them to enter a renewed dynamic phase in their lives. A kind of surrogate daughter for the Traces, they become for Felice the parents she, for all practical purposes, has lacked. When the music floated into the lives of the Traces’ through the reopened window, Joe “moved his head to the rhythm and his wife snapped her fingers in time” and Felice was laughing “for real”.<sup>190</sup> They come to understand the value of not taking everything, including themselves, that seriously; that laughter in the face of difficulties will make you feel better. It can be as, even more, cathartic than tears. Violet offers to do Felice’s hair the next time she comes for a visit, and her reaction to Felice’s suggestion that what their apartment needs is a Victrola is to motherly tell her to “Watch your mouth, girl.” Joe plans to get a new job to replace the one he lost when he was “all broke

up” so they can get the record player. Felice offers to bring some records they can listen and dance to the next time she comes as they all agreed that “nothing was left to love or need but music”.<sup>191</sup> The record is a source of music and both of them become a metaphor for the possibility for change and choice. They become instrumental to and symbolic of the harmony their relationship brings into their lives and the composition improvised by the narrator.

### 3. The Voice and Social Space of Jazz and Modernity

#### 3.1. “Make me, remake me” – improvisation and originality

##### The narrator

There has been a great deal of discussion as to the gender of the narrator, an issue which many critics and scholars have addressed. Dirk Ludigkeit, for instance, uses in his discussion of the novel the male pronoun “for clarity’s sake alone”<sup>192</sup> portraying the narrator as someone who from the very beginning “seeks to create the confidentiality of gossiping women between *himself* and the reader as audience” (my emphasis).<sup>193</sup> Many have seen the narrator as female – a gossiping woman herself – and prefer to use the female pronoun while some use the gender-specific pronouns more or less interchangeably with the gender-neutral pronoun ‘it’. Others have de-genderized the narrator and presented the narrator as an abstract concept personified. For Paula Eckhard, for instance, “by personifying jazz...music, language, and narrative come together in *Jazz*, and their interplay provides real dynamics of the text”.<sup>194</sup> However, it is the very elusiveness and innovativeness which jazz and the narrator share that problematize efforts to pinpoint them and to personify the music.

What is even more interesting, is the relative lack of discussion as to the race of the narrator which, like the narrator’s gender, is unspecified in the novel and yet often assumed as given, that is black. As Caroline Rody asserts – at the same time revealing the problematic nature of the narrator, the English language, and ingrained ways of thinking about gender – “despite the sexual suggestion of this voice and the racialized plot *she* tells, this narrator...is pointedly ungendered and unraced, an uncategorizable speaker”, thus “both about gender and genderless, about race and raceless” existing within and yet beyond identity markers (my emphasis).<sup>195</sup> The narrator’s voice is “both corporeal and decorporealizing”<sup>196</sup>, self-effacing and self-asserting, internalizing the shifting surroundings and thus transcending, defying, appropriating, and upholding binarism

and paradigms. In Gates Jr.'s words, "[i]t remains indeterminate: it is neither male nor female; neither young nor old; neither rich nor poor. It is *both* and *neither*. But it is *alive*" – I might add to the list 'neither black nor white'.<sup>197</sup> Morrison herself has addressed the issue of race in a 1989 interview in which she asks the interviewer, "can you think what it would mean for me and my relationship to language and to texts to be able to write without having to always specify to the reader the race of the characters?"<sup>198</sup> Through deliberate indeterminacy, such as the refusal to specify the race as well as the gender of the narrator, Morrison creates a mirror which tells as much, if not even more, about the reader and their deeply ingrained assumptions about race and gender than about the narrator.

While acknowledging the difficulties posed by the English language in avoiding the use of gender-specific pronouns, which for me are loaded with assumptions, in favor of a gender-free style when referring to the narrator, the elusiveness and multifaceted identity of the narrator warrants such a strategy. In my discussion of the narrator I will be using the gender-neutral 'it' pronoun while being at the same time aware of the fact that its usage may sound repetitive and impersonal as well as run the risk of blurring the distinction between a person and an inanimate or nonhuman object.

As has been pointed out above, the identity of the first-person omniscient anonymous narrator has received a lot of scholarly and critical attention. Much in the same way as the issue of gender and race, the narrator's point of view and voice have also been seen as provocative and elusive. Philip Page, for instance, in his discussion of the novel has described how by not being "confined to 'a simple' 'either/or' structure...the narrator is knowledgeable *and* limited, reliable *and* unreliable".<sup>199</sup> The narrator's voice, point of view, and persona transcends and problematizes traditional narrative strategies and paradigms. Or as Barbara Johnson further elaborates, "[i]nstead of a 'simple either/or' structure [the novel] attempts to elaborate a discourse that says

*neither* ‘either/or’ *nor* both/and *nor* even neither/nor, while at the same time not totally abandoning these logics either”.<sup>200</sup> Morrison does not reject the terms of binary opposition nor replace the traditionally favored one with the unfavored one but rather argues for a new, more complex perception of their interrelation.<sup>201</sup> The narrator can thus be seen as a very modernist or postmodernist narrator. Modernism and postmodernism have reflected, often in an ambivalent manner, modernity which has been defined as the shaking or blurring boundaries; as the questioning of the neutrality and naturality of the grounding pillars of traditional structures of knowledge, the throwing of “all Big Dichotomies into question”.<sup>202</sup> The intellectual and writer have criticized, transcended, embodied, and internalized the changing surroundings.

*Jazz* explores this pattern of blurred distinction creating rogueness in the narration. The main narrator is a first-person narrator who is not a character in the story it narrates thus deconstructing the traditional dichotomy between third-person, external and first-person, internal narrators. The lines are further blurred when the characters’ first-person monologues take over the narrating function while the narrator occasionally moves inconspicuously in and out of their minds. There is a long tradition of narrators who play with the convention of omniscience and “blur the line between the personified and the omniscient, the detached and the desirous”.<sup>203</sup> While exploring the possibilities of a unfixed or unstable narrative point of view, as Rody sees many modern and postmodern inventions as doing in “the aftermath of the nineteenth century’s solid-citizen narrators”<sup>204</sup>, the novel does not, however, abandon nor overthrow the singular, authoritative narrator. Rather the novel’s narrator and narrative structure draw attention to the conventions of not just the first-person narrator but also the third-person narrator by creating a revealing dialogue or interplay between them. The result is a seemingly all-knowing anonymous first-person narrator who is necessitated and enabled to resort to speculation, fabrication, and

improvisation – a subjective, even judgmental, and mobile personality in “the seat where abstraction and objectivity have conventionally reigned”.<sup>205</sup>

In and with *Jazz* Morrison creates a dynamic and innovative interplay of ideas and voices which challenge, contest, complement, and support each other. The relationship between pre-existing and new as well as between the individual and the collective are inherent to the concept of originality which is closely entwined with those of improvisation and innovation. As Hurston has pointed out, getting back to original sources is difficult for anyone to claim in any certainty and “what we really mean by originality, is the modification of ideas”, “the exchange and re-exchange of ideas between groups”, which for Hurston is at the heart of black expression and “our so-called civilization”.<sup>206</sup> It is important to be aware of the context of a discourse at the same time as acknowledging the necessity and ability of interdisciplinary reading; to read across traditions, genres, fields, and locations. The modification and exchange of ideas is a process which, like that of identity construction, is contingent upon one’s relationship to others. In the novel that relationship is dialogic or, in musical terminology, polyphonic.

The novel *Jazz* is, as for Mikhail Bakhtin novels ideally are, “a diversity of individual voices artistically organized”.<sup>207</sup> It “orchestrates”,<sup>208</sup> its themes by the dynamically and creatively coexisting voices. Bakhtin, like Morrison has, adopted and adapted ideas from music, linguistics, and literature which come together in the notion of polyphony. Discussed in the context of jazz through such concepts as call-and-response patterns<sup>209</sup>, ‘musical conversation’, cutting contest<sup>210</sup>, and collective improvisation, polyphony enables the musicians to follow their own paths and to revise, revisit, and respond to each other’s statements. For Bakhtin dialogism and polyphony are closely related. In his influential *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1929) – coincidentally written at a time when jazz was gaining international exposure – he coined the term polyphonic novel which he initially applied to the works of Dostoevsky but later expanded to all novelistic

discourse. Polyphonic novel is characterized by a plurality of independent and equally valid voices and consciousnesses which “sound, as it were, *alongside* the author’s word and in a special way combine with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters”.<sup>211</sup> It is a free play of independent discourses engaging in a polyphonic dialogue which informs the text. The focus for both Bakhtin and Morrison is on the process, an unfinalized conversation, rather than on the creation of a “systematically monologic whole”, a single worldview.<sup>212</sup> By incorporating the notion of polyphony, Bakhtin and Morrison can acquire and retain a capacity for unpredictability, innovation, and change, creativity in short. Human life and discourse become open-ended:

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of the past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a next context). Nothing is absolutely dead.<sup>213</sup>

Both Bakhtin and Morrison move across time and space engaging in a dialogue of a diversity of voices and consciousnesses.

*Jazz* explores and exposes the dynamism of the polyphonic process of creation. Instead of striving towards creating an unified, harmonious whole, the polyphonic novel is characterized by alternatives, tension, dissonance, opposition; it is in Bakhtin’s terms ‘varidirectional’ not ‘unidirectional’. The coexistence and interaction of diverse discourses, the polyphonic heterogeneity, provides the dynamism of the novel. It is deliberately open-ended, as is Bakhtin’s theorizing, enabling interpretative freedom for the reader. In *Jazz* the dissonance is the result of not only the dialogue of assertive, independent voices but also the presence of a narrator who attempts to assert authorial control and (dis)miss the other voices in order to create a unified narrative.

Eventually it comes to acknowledge and embrace the polyphonic nature of human life and discourse.

Morrison examines ideas similar to those expressed by Bakhtin in the form and content of *Jazz*. At the same time she elaborates on Bakhtin's notions. She weaves together dialogism and polyphony from the point of view of music creating a nuanced musical conversation. Inherently polyphonic, the music jazz becomes a structural metaphor for both constructing and examining the novel. The textual space, like the music, has breaks which signal change in speaker, theme, and tone with the speaker, or soloist, typically using elements of the discussion on the whole and of the previous statement and section to create something own. The speakers may also interject lines and break into each other's phrasing to comment on what the other person is expressing. While Bakhtin focused on describing and analyzing the dynamics and tensions of a text instead of solving them, Morrison explores the music as providing the structural device and dynamics of the novel as well as a possibility to resolve its structural conflicts. It offers a way to creatively mediate between improvisation and structure, individual expression and communal performance, assertive voices and cohesive composition. However, the unity and harmony which can be achieved in life and discourse are shown to be processes rather than a finalized and stable product.

Like the musicians of a jazz ensemble or speakers engaged in a dialogue, the different voices which create the novel are free to follow their own paths while being aware of the necessity of negotiating their intensions and statements with those of others. The characters and the narrator frequently revisit and revise statements made by themselves and the others returning to the melody line time after time, "seeing it afresh each time, playing it back and forth".<sup>214</sup> The focus shifts as the personal narratives and voices of the characters begin to surface to give different interpretations of the same events as when what are described as Violet's miscarriages are two

pages later presented as violent abortions. They pick up phrases and themes to create their take on the different themes, sometimes within a single paragraph.

Having affection for pain, the narrator tries to improvise and invent a composition with the central narrative, the melody or the theme, a complete story of alienation, seduction, and tragedy. It is to be a story of “One man. One defenseless girl. Death. A sample-case man. A nice, neighborly, everybody-knows-him man”, a love triangle between Violet, Joe, and Dorcas/Felice – “what turned different was who shot whom”.<sup>215</sup> Like a blues musician, the different voices construct and structure the composition by using elaboration and revision:

Blues man. Black and blues man. Blacktherefore blue man.  
Everybody knows your name.  
Where-did-she-go-and-why man. So-lonesome-I-could-die man.  
Everybody knows your name<sup>216</sup>

The narrator’s attempts to create a cohesive composition are sometimes undercut by the very effort as they often involve conjecture to forge together the different strains. It draws a connection between Joe, the “everybody-knows-him man”<sup>217</sup>, and the “everybody knows your name” blues man, by speculating how “Joe probably thinks the song is about him. He’d like believing it. I know him so well”.<sup>218</sup> The narrator (dis)misses the presence of alternative views which might undermine its statements trying to create in Bakhtinian terms a ‘monologic’ or ‘homophonic’ and ‘single voiced discourse’. Sometimes it is aware of the existence of the other voices agreeing with them to support its statements and aspirations to create a ‘uni-directional’ composition. Other times the tension, the dissonance, which forms between the narrator’s improvisation and the other voices which create the narrative becomes apparent within an utterance. Claiming to know the characters better than they know themselves and each other, the narrator’s “curious, inventive and well-informed” and “know-it-all self” becomes a liability which undermines the pretense to omniscience:

Joe acts like he knew all about what old folks did to keep them going, but he couldn't have known much about True Belle, for example, because I doubt Violet ever talked to him about her grandmother – and never about her mother. So he didn't know. Neither do I, although it's not hard to imagine what it must have been like.<sup>219</sup>

The narrator's discourse is directed at establishing and asserting authorial control over the composition; it makes a "sideward glance" anticipating a contesting point of view by striking "a polemic blow at the other's discourse".<sup>220</sup> The narrator may know more than the characters but is none of the wiser for it.

The characters and the narrator frequently pick up the final statement of a section to begin the next and to complement, elaborate, and challenge previous views and perspectives as well as to introduce new ones. Like Violet who murmurs "Ha mercy" at appropriate breaks in the old lady's stream of confidences"<sup>221</sup> when doing a customer's hair, or like a jazz musician, the characters use the breaks and cracks in the narrator's stream of confides to air their personal statements in a way that reveals and expresses more than any one voice could alone. Joe begins his monologue by refuting the narrator's view of Dorcas as his "private candy box"<sup>222</sup>. The narrator then begins the section following Joe's monologue reassuming control by picking up Joe's final statement to undermine his perspective and authority and to underline its. Commenting on his view of how "back then, back there, if you was or claimed to be colored you had to be new and stay the same every day the sun rose and every night it dropped...those days it was more than a state of mind"<sup>223</sup>, the narrator asserts that it is "[r]isky, I'd say, trying to figure out anybody's state of mind" thus undermining Joe's authority.<sup>224</sup> The narrator doubts whether he knows anything, for instance, about Violet's mother and grandmother. Claiming to be well-informed, the narrator admits in the very same paragraph to know as little as Joe about the past. However, it goes on to point out that it is not hard, for it, to imagine what things must have been

like and to speculate what True Belle's state of mind must have been when she moved from Baltimore back to Vesper County, Virginia.

The novel slides from one voice, perspective, consciousness, point in time, location, and setting to another. The coexistence of self-effacement and self-assertion, corporeal and decorporealizing voices, enables the creation, management, and negotiation of a layered and dynamic narrative. The novel is illustrative how through the construction of shifting locations and identities the black experience and fixed notions of it can be transformed. Through its structure the novel problematizes the logic of traditional narrative paradigms –such as reliable/unreliable, knowledgeable/limited, first person/third person, and internal/external– as well as the traditionally dichotomous structures of knowledge. When Joe is looking for Dorcas, the focus shifts between the narrator's voice and Joe's; external narration and internal; third-person narration and first-person; Joe's quest for Dorcas and his quest for Wild. After Joe finally gets to the party where Dorcas is, her voice surfaces and intersects the narrator's perspective. Even before Joe's and Dorcas' voice become foregrounded, Violet's assertive voice breaks into the narrator's contemplation of the two Violets and Violet's behavior at the funeral. She imagines what the affair between Joe and Dorcas must have been like:

[H]er hand...under the table drumming out the rhythm on the inside of his thigh, his thigh, his thigh, thigh, thigh, 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 thin as it was and too cold for a that couldn't count on a radiator to work through the afternoon, while I was where?<sup>225</sup>

The significance of the moment is highlighted by a change in point of view and phrasing. A sixteen line long sentence is suddenly intersected with a repeated word and ends with the surfacing of Violet's assertive "I" which takes over. It is at that moment that Violet remembers that the past is not a broken record which repeated itself at the crack with no power capable to lift

the hand that held the needle. She had been the agent of her destiny before and she could be that again: “[T]hat’s why it took so much wrestling to get me down, keep me down and out of that coffin where she was the heifer who took what was mine, what I chose, picked out and determined to have and hold on to, NO!”<sup>226</sup> She recognizes she has to be more self-assertive and observing as to the course of her life.

After Violet’s burst subsides, she becomes hesitant and insecure again and the narration shifts once more into an external description of her sitting at Duggie’s drugstore where she had gone to drink malted milkshake to regain her hips and strength. In a similar way as she recedes from the foreground thus relinquishing control of her life-narration becoming the subject rather than the agent of it, she once again succumbs to resignation assigning the power that could heal the split between the two Violets and by so doing change the course of her life to an exterior source rather than an interior one. She momentarily intersects the narrator’s voice to recollect a moment a group of men came to dispose her mother Rose Dear, after which the narrator reassumes control and takes over to relate the story of Violet’s mother and grandmother.

Besides that of Violet, Joe, Dorcas, and Felice, the voice of Golden Gray also intersects that of the narrator with the combined effect of creating a layered and multifaceted story which is made up of many stories. It is at a point when the narrator’s creation is furthest from its experience, thus being enabled and necessitated to rely on imagination and personal judgment, that the story starts to become reoriented. The judgmental portrayal of Golden Gray causes the narrator to nearly miss the beat of the story and the overall composition to almost break down. Sometimes accurate, sometimes inaccurate, the often self-assertive narrator intermittently injects uncharitable judgments about the characters while other times it resorts to self-effacement or acts like an impersonal and nonjudgmental medium, even a disembodied consciousness. The story narrated is complete *and* incomplete. For the narrator, like for Morrison herself, accessing the interior life of

the characters is a “kind of literary archeology: on the basis of some information and a little bit of guess work you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world these remains imply”.<sup>227</sup> The remains are images which become “a route to reconstruction of the world, to an exploration of an interior life that was not written and to a revelation of a kind of truth”, which may or may not be one with verifiable and accepted fact.<sup>228</sup> Thus the world that is constructed encompasses both the actual and the possible.

The narrator introduces Golden Gray, “the blond boy”<sup>229</sup>, and how True Belle used to tell stories about him to Violet early on in the novel, a theme Violet elaborates on around the mid way of the book and returns to during her conversation with Felice. It is the narrator, however, who improvises on the theme rather abruptly shifting the focus from the 1920s Harlem to the mid 19th century rural Virginia to give a creative account of the past which ties together Violet’s family history with that of Joe’s. The narrator imagines seeing Golden Gray sitting on a two-seat phaeton on his way to Vienna to look for his father, who turns out to be Joe’s friend Hunters Hunter, a black man. Describing the scenes that open before its eyes in an almost impersonal manner, the narrator relates how along the road Golden Gray notices a naked black pregnant woman, presumably Joe’s mother Wild, whom he takes to the house where his father lives and which had been mapped out and described to him in “clear, childish pictures” by True Belle<sup>230</sup>.

The narrator plays the theme back and forth exploring different variations of it. As the narrator watches the scenes unfold from various point of views, they change reflecting its ambivalent perception of Golden Gray: “He does not see himself touching her, but the picture he does imagine is himself walking away from her a second time, climbing into his carriage and leaving her a second time. He is uneasy with this picture of himself, and does not want to spend any part of the time to come remembering having done that...The scene becomes an anecdote, an action”.<sup>231</sup> The narrator tracks “an image from picture to meaning to text”<sup>232</sup> with the images

evoking and being assigned various emotional memories – “mind soaked and sodden with sorrow, or dry and brittle from the hopelessness that comes from knowing too little and feeling too much (so brittle, so dry [as to be] in danger of the reverse: feeling nothing and knowing everything)”.<sup>233</sup> It tries out various versions of the story focusing and elaborating on different scenes each time filling in the gaps which had been left. Thus the theme becomes analogous to the story of the novel on the whole revealing and commenting on its narrative structure. It also highlights the dissonance which has developed between the narrator’s improvisation and the characters’ perspectives.

Oscillating between hate and affection, judgment and understanding, the narrator feels uneasy about the story it has imagined and its subject, Golden Gray. As it tries to figure out what the theme is and should be about it comments, inadvertently at first then later consciously, on itself and the process of narration. It asserts that it knows that “he is a hypocrite; that he is shaping a story for himself to tell somebody” thinking his story is so wonderful that if spoken right will impress people all the while wanting to brag about his courageous and valiant deed like a knight who has encountered a dragon.<sup>234</sup> The narrator who has been seeing and telling the story in graphic terms is reminded by Golden Gray’s inner monologue of his humanity, that he is not a stock character, a realization which opens up both him and the narrator.

The narrator sees in and reflects on Golden Gray the person it is. Like it imagines he has done, the narrator had shaped a story both for and of itself the way it wants things to be in which it is both the knight in rescue, the only one who can figure out how to save the people, and the one who breathes life into the monster with scales and fiery breath. It has broken lives to prove it can mend them back again. Realizing it had used “aching words that set, then miss, the mark”, the narrator acknowledges it has to alter itself for the story to move forward: “What was I thinking

of? How could I have imagined him so poorly? Now I have to think this through, carefully, even though I might be doomed to another misunderstanding. I have to do it and not break down”.<sup>235</sup>

Images which are seen and the “emotional memory” they invoke are what the narrator uses to move from an image that is left to a (re)construction of an event, remembering, recollecting, and imagining.<sup>236</sup> Like Violet who constructed a view of Dorcas’s personality based on her investigations and the picture she had of her, the narrator creates the central narrative based on what it sees and invents: “I saw the three of them, Felice, Joe and Violet, and they looked to me like a mirror image of Dorcas, Joe and Violet. I believed I saw everything important they did, and based on what I saw I could imagine what I didn’t”.<sup>237</sup> “[T]hinking my space, my view was the only one that was or mattered”,<sup>238</sup> the narrator believes it can remain invisible and unobservable while “looking out and in on things”,<sup>239</sup> through windows and doors and meddling in people’s lives. However, the narrator eventually comes to realize that the characters in their turn had been watching and whispering about it, entering and exploring through images the interior life it tries to enclose.

The lives of the characters and thus their personal narratives, like that of the narrator, are fragmented being full of cracks, breaks, gaps, absences, and omissions. The fragments and the space between provide access to and a glimpse of the interior life of the people which make up the novel functioning like the double eyes, one which allows Joe, Violet, and Felice to look inside each other and one which enables the others to look inside of them. It is this human contact and connection which helps the characters and the narrator to accept, transcend, and manage the imperfections and changeability of the modern experience, of living in a world which in itself seemed to be in a state of constant flux. As the narrator acknowledges, “I lived a long time, maybe too much, in my own mind. People say I should come out more. Mix. I agree”.<sup>240</sup>

As the narrator tells the story, it changes alongside and is changed by the characters that it develops as a storyteller eventually revisiting and revising its views of them, jazz, the City, and itself. The narrator reflects – can even be seen as a personification of – the shifting surroundings and the music by being deliberately uncategorizable and indeterminate, existing within and yet beyond paradigms. However, it is the very elusiveness and changeability of the narrator and the time and space in which the novel is set that problematizes efforts to pinpoint them. Like Morrison has pointed out in relation to a jazz performance, “you have to make something out of a mistake, and if you do it well enough it will take you to another place where you never would have gone had you not made that error. So you have to be able to risk making that error”.<sup>241</sup> A mistake or a crack in continuity causes not only incoherence and dissonance but also becomes a possibility for change, improvisation, and innovation – an attitude which echoes the optimism as well as the more melancholy strains of the novel and the era in which it is set.

The polyphonic and dialogic structure of the novel, the exchange and re-exchange of ideas, forms an intersection, an interplay, of the various strains which make up the novel. Structured with and by the dialogues between and monologues of the different voices, it is this musical conversation which provides the novel its structural device, dynamics, conflicts, as well as potential for resolution. While being aware of taking the risk of making a mistake as it imagines and invents the narrative, the narrator had nevertheless refused to acknowledge being “out of control or controlled by some outside thing”.<sup>242</sup> In the end, however, it begins to realize the problematic nature of monologic discourse, of trying to create a uni-directional composition by asserting authorial control. It becomes aware that though it may have felt in control the other’s had been interrogating and putting it to test thus changing the nature of its authority and creating dialogism. The polyphonic structure of the novel means that the characters have the freedom to improvise on the beat of the story and to take it to different directions than those initially

indicated by the narrator. It is a freedom which comes with the responsibility of mediating one's improvisation with the intensions of others.

The narrator has to start to listen to the heart/drum beat of the novel, "heart-pockets closed to"<sup>243</sup> it, which it had (dis)missed as the characters "were thinking other thoughts, feeling other feelings, putting their lives together in ways I never dreamed of": "Busy, they were, busy being original complicated, changeable – human I guess you'd say".<sup>244</sup> Through trial and error the narrator learns that improvisation is the ultimate human endowment. The narrator comes to know and embrace the human potential to change, innovate, and improvise. Like the process of identity construction, the structure of the novel is contingent upon the characters' relationships to each other. The conversation between the various voices which constitute the novel, that is the process which creates it, is participated and carried on by the reader. The narrator which had been "finger-shaping" the lives of the characters realizes it had been "completely in their hands, managed without mercy".<sup>245</sup> In the end it relinquishes itself and the novel into the hands of the reader:

I have surrendered my whole self reckless to you and nobody else. I want you to love me back and show it to me. That I love the way you hold me, how close you let me be to you. I like your fingers on and on, lifting, turning. I have watched your face for a long time now, and missed your eyes when you have been away from me. Talking to you and hearing your answer – that's the kick.<sup>246</sup>

Through directly addressing the reader, the narrator explores and exposes how the relationship between the various voices that create the novel are altered "in (or by) a certain level of liberty"<sup>247</sup>: "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".<sup>248</sup> The ending of the novel reminds Rody of Walt Whitman's address to "Whoever you are holding me now in hand".<sup>249</sup> But for her Morrison's text leaves the readers more likely wondering "Who is speaking *to* me?"<sup>250</sup> The ending also bears a resemblance to Whitman's "Song of Myself" where the voice speaking encourages the readers to

think about the roles of and relationships between speaker/narrator and listener/reader by asking “What am I? and what are you? All I mark as my own you shall offset it with your own. Else it were time lost listening to me”: “You shall no longer take things at second or third hand....you shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me, you shall listen to all sides and filter them for yourself”.<sup>251</sup> The speaker also asks “Do I contradict myself? Very well then....I contradict myself; I am large....I contain multitudes” – like *Jazz* and the music it is named after do. Though in the end of the novel the narrator would reply to the speaker that there is not really a contradiction but rather it is, or at least should be, characteristic of human life and discourse. The polyphonic and dialogic structure of the novel enables creative and interpretative freedom. The various voices create reconfigurations of the self and others; negotiate individuality in relation to the others. The intratextual and extratextual conversation of equally valid voices which shapes and is shaped by the text extends into the boundless past and boundless future.

### **3.2. “City seeping music that begged and challenged each and every day” – animation and jazzification**

#### **The City**

The city was at the centre of the modern experience and the black experience in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Literature has played a key role in shaping and depicting city imagery which tends to be often ambivalent. Morrison portrays the City in general and Harlem in particular in a way which captures their significance in the cultural and social history of black America, especially the urban black working class which emerged at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She explores the melancholy and tedium but also the bustling rhythms of ghetto life – the novel manifests the range, sensuality, history, anarchy, intellect, and modernity of both the music and life in Harlem. The City, however, is more than a backdrop or a setting as it is attributed with human

characteristics becoming another voice in its own right. It is a state of mind and it seems to have a mind of its own. Covered with stories, myths, rumors, and gossips, it is shaped by and shapes the social and collective cultural memory of the people who live, toil, and play on its streets. The City is everything they want it to be.

The city has become the prominent special metaphor, mythical space, and the reality of modernity. Perceived and portrayed as being lost in the mean world, jostled by the multifaceted but faceless crowd, for writers and intellectuals alike central themes of modernity such as crowds, alienation and reification, and the shifting position of the intellectual have been connected to the city.<sup>252</sup> For many writers on and of modernity, the “general concern was the discontinuous experience of time, space and causality as located in the immediacy of social relations with the social and physical environment of the metropolis and our relations with the past”.<sup>253</sup> In the modern world that experience has often been characterized by a sense of “loss of legitimation, loss of authority, loss of seduction, loss of genius – loss”<sup>254</sup>, “no return to Tolstoy and Dickens & Co except in nostalgia trips”.<sup>255</sup> There is a feeling of “meaninglessness, emptiness, and fragmentariness”.<sup>256</sup> Modernity has been perceived and explored as a loss of intellectual innocence, the naturality and sexual and political neutrality of knowledge; as a distraction breaking down the traditional structures and boundaries of knowledge, even a crisis of the status of knowledge, the problem being, partly, that “our ways of understanding in the West have been and continue to be complicitous with our ways of oppressing”.<sup>257</sup> Modernity has been defined as bringing an end to the privileged position of the scientist, “an indistinctness between the inside and the outside, between original boundaries and states. To think this indistinctness in the twentieth century is to think of a crisis of indescribable proportions, to throw all Big Dichotomies into question”.<sup>258</sup>

The scientist and the intellectual have often viewed the metropolis as an unknown jungle, a home of the crowd, a mass of people, which as the result of its uncontrollability and turbulence has held a peculiar attraction and repulsion, even menace. The urban, and in conjunction modern, experience has been portrayed as one of continuous shocks, over-abundance of stimuli and communication, as a degradation of physical and moral conditions, – “shock experience has become the norm”.<sup>259</sup> The alienation has been felt by scientist and subject alike. For the marginal majority of and on the street, the ordinary everyday person, however, the crowd and street are natural elements where one not only survives but can also feel at home. The city centre draws people not just because of possibilities of shopping or the need to attend to business but precisely because it is crowded. It is in the City, the social space of modernity, that dichotomies of the grounding pillars of traditional structures of knowledge are shaken to make room for a new, more complex perception of their interrelation. The social rests upon and defines itself through what it has excluded, the marginal majority, the Other, which “becomes the ultimate truth of the social” with the truth becoming first a truth and then a fiction of the truth in the disintegrating turbulence of modernity.<sup>260</sup>

The urbanization of black America was one of the central experiences of American blacks in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the effects of black migration was the emergence of Harlem in the 1920s as the social and cultural capital of black America, a black metropolis whose name evoked a magic which drew blacks from all classes and all parts of the country. The different elements mixed and reacted in a common area of contact and interaction. From the days of slavery the North had held a special place in the mythology and collective memory of southern blacks as a place of refuge where racial equality and justice abounded amidst the increasingly distraught situation which black people faced. Housing a community of over 160,000 blacks, 73 % of Manhattan’s blacks, by 1930<sup>261</sup>, black Harlem was also increasingly a teeming overcrowded

ghetto with manifold social and economic problems. It symbolized both the hopes and frustration, the self-confidence and despair of the new urban black masses which lived on its streets. The writers of the Harlem Renaissance were at the vanguard of attempts to come to terms with black urbanization. Their major task was to uncover, depict, and explain the life of American blacks.

Major interest, inspiration, and influence for many Renaissance artists was the colorful life of the lower class urban black masses – there are notable exceptions such as Hurston who in her work focused on the rural surroundings, though her main interest, too, lay in the lives of lower class blacks. As Claude McKay expressed it, “in saloons and cabarets and along the streets I received impressions like arrows piercing my nerves and distilled poetry from them...a vagabond feeding upon secret music singing in me”.<sup>262</sup> The focus on and drawing from the everyday life, the street life, reflected a new black consciousness, the New Negro, that would, as Hughes explained the agenda behind *Fire!!*.<sup>263</sup>, “burn up a lot of the old, dead, conventional Negro-white ideas of the past. The new psychology was “more of a consensus of feeling than of opinion, of attitude rather than of program”<sup>264</sup>; the Harlem Renaissance was an acknowledged and asserted sense of community, shared by a group of individual artists and intellectuals in the 1920s and early 1930s centering in Harlem.

The artistic and intellectual Harlemites, the black bohemia, explored and experienced the different sides of Harlem at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was the spiritual home of as well as the material and setting for the Renaissance artists. Whereas before many black writers avoided detailed and realistic expressions of the lives of lower class urban blacks and ghetto neighborhoods out of concern of reinforcing already widespread negative stereotypes and hurting the agenda of racial uplift, the younger generation wanted to expose and depict it producing works of urban local color and ghetto realism, the seamy side of black America; the day-to-day

life of the black masses of Harlem, the street life, with its joys and sorrows, the misery and poverty but also the glamour and excitement were explored by the black bohemia in its life and writings. They wanted to give voice to and be the voice of Harlem and its Harlemites, to speak Harlemites in all its different accents:

Here in Manhattan is not merely the largest Negro community in the world, but the first concentration in history of so many diverse elements of Negro life. It has attracted the African, the West Indian, the Negro American; has brought together the Negro of the North and the Negro of the South; the man from the city and the man from the town and village; the peasant, the student, the business man, the professional man, artist, poet, musician, adventurer and worker, preacher and criminal, exploiter and social outcast.<sup>265</sup>

It was in the ghetto's speakeasies, house-rent parties, jazzrooms, cabarets, nightclubs, and ginhouses that all of Harlem converged: "the prostitute, the washwoman, the pettygangster, the poet, and the intellectual shared the blues and swayed to the beat of the jazz musicians".<sup>266</sup> Langston Hughes described the playing of one of the musicians, Gladys Bentley, as having "scarcely a break between the notes, sliding from one song to another, with a powerful and continuous underbeat of jungle rhythm. Miss Bentley was an amazing exhibition of musical energy...feet pounded the floor while her fingers pounded the keyboard – a perfect piece of African sculpture, animated by her own rhythm".<sup>267</sup> The depiction of miss Bentley captures what drew, held, and was perceived by the black bohemians – the "pulse of the Negro world has begun to beat in Harlem".<sup>268</sup> Harlem was the heart of the heart beat which characterized and raptured the early 20<sup>th</sup> century America, and beyond.

Morrison dynamically blends the different strains of Harlem and the New York City, the myth and the reality, thus continuing in the footsteps of the writers who explored in their writing and lives the era in which the novel is set. Harlem reflected and affected the contradictions of the lives and position of black people in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century America. The day-to-day life and

experiences, the street life, of the urban black masses is alongside the music the inspiration, material, and focus of the novel.

At the beginning of the novel the narrator offers a sweeping tour of the City and Harlem establishing them as *the* places where everyone was and anything could happen. It observes the life of the City and the people living, toiling, and playing on its streets: “Below is shadow where any blasé thing takes place: clarinets and lovemaking, fists and the voices of sorrowful women...Nobody says it’s pretty here; nobody says it’s easy either.”<sup>269</sup> White people, wealthy and plain ones, black Jews, musicians, UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association) men<sup>270</sup>, ladies men, hoodlums, regular people are all seduced by the City that makes people think they can do whatever they want and get away with it; “[d]o what you please in the City, it is there to back and frame you no matter what you do. And what goes on on its blocks and lots and side streets is anything the strong can think of and the weak will admire. All you have to do is heed the design – the way it’s laid out for you, considerate, mindful of where you want to go and what you might need tomorrow.”<sup>271</sup> For those blacks lucky enough to live in the black metropolis within a metropolis there is no need to go to many places, although they could if they wanted to as there is no segregation on public transport, as almost everything imaginable is right where they are. Harlem was the cultural and social capital of black America where there was “every club, organization, group, order, union, society, brotherhood, sisterhood or association imaginable”<sup>272</sup>.

There were also juke joints, bootleg houses, pool halls, parties, and “paths slick from the forays of members of one group into the territory of another”.<sup>273</sup> It was not only blacks who were lured by Harlem. In the 1920s New York’s interest in black life became a fascination bordering on obsession as Harlem and blacks in general became the latest fad for white middle-class America. Harlem, the Negro, and jazz were in vogue. The white tourists came to experience the excitement and entertainment, to sample the wild, primitive nightlife and black exotica reputed to

abound in Harlem – an urban jungle or a playground, a home of the Other at the heart of white Manhattan which held a peculiar fascination and repulsion. Slumming in Harlem became a favorite pastime for the curious thrill-seekers, although many white people wanted to have the Harlem experience in the safe confines of white only night spots like the Cotton Club where they could enjoy the black entertainment without having to face the dangers they imagined would result from race mixing. Harlem was place where it was “believed something curious or thrilling lies. Some gleaming, cracking, scary stuff. Where you can pop the cork and put the cold glass mouth right up to your own. Where you can find danger or be it; where you can fight till you drop and smile at the knife when it misses and when it doesn’t. It makes you wonderful just to see it”.<sup>274</sup>

The narrator is equally seduced and animated by the City that is alive and makes people think they are more alive and more like themselves than ever before. It is “what they want it to be: thrifless, warm, scary and full of amiable strangers”.<sup>275</sup> For the narrator, the City is an analogy or a symbiosis; it is the concrete embodiment of the people and their state of mind and it in turn affects their state of mind. It is the hope and dream of the people – or as James Weldon Johnson put it, “a phenomenon, a miracle straight out of the skies”<sup>276</sup>– and it shapes their dreams and hopes. For the narrator it is a place where people are “not so much new as themselves: their stronger, riskier selves”<sup>277</sup>, more like the people they always believed they were if they just had the change: “A city like this one makes me dream tall and feel in on things...I’m strong. Alone, yes, but top-notch and indestructible – like the City in 1926 when all the wars are over and there will never be another one”.<sup>278</sup> Not only black people but the whole nation, even the whole world, was hoping that their dreams could and would come true.

The novel chronicles the stream and pattern of black migration to the North in a way which puts a face and gives a voice to the people revealing the multifacetedness of and the psychology

behind what has often been depicted as a faceless and nameless mass or wave of people. The narrator establishes migration, mobility, as another theme which is later revisited and revised by the different voices which construct the novel, especially Violet's and Joes's. Morrison uses history and memory to "reproduce the flavor of the period"<sup>279</sup> in a way which reveals their inner dynamics. The period is as much a fragmented hybrid as the history and memory which construct it; traces of the past get blended and woven with improvised and invented strains making them often indistinguishable from one another. History and memory are exposed and explored as collections and constructions made from stories, imagery, myths, gossips, and rumors rather than as something natural or neutral. It is this kind of social, collective cultural, memory and history which is the material from which the novel is created.

By weaving together myths, realities, different voices, stories, and personal histories of both the North and the South the novel is able to trace the range and dynamism of one of the most significant periods in the black experience in America. The discontinuity, break, in time and space, an integral part of mobility, "as located in the immediacy of social relations with the social and physical environment of the metropolis...and relations with the past"<sup>280</sup> meant not only emotional unmanageableness but also created an opening for a new consciousness, state of mind for black people – "in the very process of being transplanted...a transformed and transforming psychology permeates the masses".<sup>281</sup>

The Traces' train ride symbolizes the transition. The "green-as-poison curtain"<sup>282</sup> which separated the blacks from the rest of the passengers had disappeared once the train was out of Delaware and a long way from Maryland. They were nervous, terrified, and scared but also eager as their train approached the City:

They weren't there yet and already the City was speaking to them. They were dancing. And like million others, chest pounding, tracks controlling their feet, they stared out of the window for the first sight of the City that danced with them, proving how much it loved them. Like a million more they could hardly wait to get there and love it back.<sup>283</sup>

The minute the people get to the City there is no turning or looking back, they know they are born for it. They embrace it and feel that it embraces them. The transition, described by Locke as “a deliberate flight not only from countryside to city, but from medieval America to modern”<sup>284</sup>, was not just geographical. As the focus turned northwards there was a shift in attitude: the future of black people was to lay in the North, not the South. In her writing Morrison problematizes such notions. She explores and exposes the North and the South to be as much, if not even more, mental constructs as something tangible; imagery and narratives construct and are constructed by the cultural memory of black people. For her the black experience not only in the North but also in the South was a very modern one. Like Joe and Violet learn, the past should not be like a broken record but it does have a role to play. It was Joe's experiences in the South which taught him a valuable survival strategy of how to chose, make up one's mind, to live independent, and feed oneself no matter what so as to not “end up out of control or controlled by some outside thing”.<sup>285</sup> The strategy he learns is how to improvise in the face of changing circumstances. It is a lesson of self-confidence, self-help, self-reliance, and pride – a combination of militancy and introspection. The past and present, South and North, have shaped and are shaped by the black experience.

The novel's depiction of the early twentieth century black America blends and weaves together the contradictory but symbiotic strains of optimism and violence which characterized the era. As Joe puts it, “they were bringing in swarms of colored people to work during the War. Crackers in the South mad cause Negroes were leaving, crackers in the North mad cause they were coming”.<sup>286</sup> People had the “praying palms, raspy breathing” of the “children of the ones

who had escaped from Springfield Ohio, Springfield Indiana, Greensburg Indiana, Wilmington Delaware, New Orleans Louisiana, after raving whites had foamed all over the lanes and yards of home”.<sup>287</sup> The streets of the American cities are depicted as not unlike the battle fields left behind by the veterans still wearing their army-issue coats because nothing they could afford “is as sturdy or hides so well what they had boasted in 1919”.<sup>288</sup>

The colored troops that fought in the war and were marching in the parades like the one Joe attends were seen as proof of both claims to full citizenship and the character of the black people in America. They were also a reminder of what was yet denied and to be gained: “veterans who had fought in all-colored units...came home to white violence more intense than when they enlisted and, unlike the battles they fought in Europe, stateside fighting was pitiless and totally without honor.”<sup>289</sup> The pride engendered by the wartime service and the emerging self-confidence combined with the general frustration giving birth to a new militancy. As Joe observed, after the WWI and “up here if you bust out a hundred’ll bust along with you”.<sup>290</sup> Black people would organize and fight for improved racial conditions, and surely there would be a better day coming. It was on the grass root level, the street level, that the central concepts of the new psychology were realized and the various strains of optimism, militancy, self-help, and racial solidarity which characterized the era met. The City was a state mind, an attitude, and it affected the people’s state of mind.

The City in general and Harlem in particular lured people, black and white, not just with the new opportunities and freedom it seemed to offer but also because it was crowded. It was the space of the black masses, the marginal majority, for whom the crowd and street was a natural element where one can learn to survive, even to feel oneself at home. It was a black metropolis, “the greatest Negro city in the world”<sup>291</sup>, at the heart of white Manhattan which was located at the heart of the nation’s greatest city, *the City of New York*. The sheer size of Harlem and its black

population generated awe and excitement in intellectual, writer, and worker alike. As Rudolph Fisher depicts Harlem through the consciousness of the newly arrived southern migrant, a fugitive by the name of King Solomon Gillis, in his first short story “The City of Refuge” from 1925:

Slowly, spreadingly, he grinned at what he saw: Negroes at every turn; up and down One Hundred and Thirty-Fifth Street; big, lanky Negroes, short, squat Negroes; black ones, brown ones, yellow ones...here and there a white face drifting along but Negroes predominantly, overwhelmingly, everywhere. There was no doubt of his whereabouts. This was Negro Harlem...Harlem. Land of plenty. City of refuge – city of refuge. If you live long enough—<sup>292</sup>

The experience of encountering a whole sea of different kinds of black faces on its streets felt like coming to a new world, a better world where “going in and out, in and out the same door; they handle the handle; on trolleys and park benches they settle their thighs on a seat where hundreds”<sup>293</sup> of both black and white people had sat too.

Harlem had also a more sobering side. On a piece of land nowhere near the size of the one Joe had tried to buy, but was cheated out of, there were more and more people and houses. Realtors and land lords black and white were eager to cash in on the area’s burgeoning growth by acquiring, subdividing, and renting out Harlem property to the rapidly growing black population. Many people took on lodgers and boarders or held house-rent parties to be able pay for the ever higher rents. Yet “even if the room they rented was smaller than the heifer’s stall and darker than a morning privy” and despite of the social and economic problems caused partly by the increasing congestion, people stayed because of the spectacle of the streets; “the amazement of throwing open the window and being hypnotized for hours by the people on the street below.”<sup>294</sup> The crowdedness of Harlem and city life was alienating for some but for many it was stimulating to “look at their number, hear themselves in an audience, feel themselves moving down the street among hundreds of others who moved the way they did, and who, when they spoke, regardless of

the accent, treated language like the same intricate, malleable toy designed for their play”.<sup>295</sup> For those people the abundance of stimuli and communication, even shocks, that they faced on the streets was the City’s main attraction. They stayed because “citylife is streetlife”.<sup>296</sup>

The City is part of the narrative structure being another voice and theme which shapes and is shaped by the characters and the narrator. It is also an analogy of the narrative structure having similar dynamics between assertive voices and cohesion, individual and community, improvisation and structure. It is there to back and frame the other voices like a rhythm section of a jazz ensemble. The City can make the night sky “close up on the tops of the buildings, near, nearer than the cap you’re wearing, such a city sky presses and retreats, presses and retreats...booming over the glittering city”.<sup>297</sup> It pulsates with life sharing and being its inhabitant’s “pulse like a second jugular”.<sup>298</sup> The rhythm, the flow and the pace, of the City is both external and internal to the people; they are the heart of the City, the crowd on the street which makes a space a city, at the same time as they adjust to the pulse of the City which is more than the sum of its people.

The City sets the pace of the people who live on its streets, the streetlife, at the same time offering them freedom to follow their own paths; to take freedom with pre-existing things to create something own, while still listening to the other voices and being part of the collective. The improvisation of the people in turn affects the City. It is a symbiosis or, in musical terms, polyphony which enables a creative and dynamic, though potentially volatile, interaction between the individual and community, the improvisation and assertive voice of an individual and the structures and cohesion of a community or a city. It “urges contradiction...giving you a taste for a single room occupied by you alone as well as a craving to share it with someone you passed in the street”.<sup>299</sup> But in the City there need not be a contradiction; there a person does not have to settle with either/or. It can offer and be a space where “a single person could enter and behave as

an individual within the context of the community”<sup>300</sup>. A space for “the negotiation between individuality and commitment to another” – how such relationship was altered “in (or by) a certain level of liberty” – which for Morrison was a major element of the 1920s and jazz.<sup>301</sup>

The City cooperates with the people, it anticipates their anticipation:

The City is smart at this: smelling and good and looking raunchy; sending secret messages disguised as public signs: this way, open here, danger to let colored only single men on sale woman wanted private room stop dog on premises absolutely no money down fresh chicken free delivery fast. And good at opening locks, dimming stairways. Covering your moans with its own.<sup>302</sup>

The City backs and frames people, it guides and covers them. It is alive and makes people think they are more alive than ever before. They feel that the City is whatever they want it to be and that there they can be what they have always wanted to be. They believe they are in control of their lives at the same time as they adapt themselves to the flow, the pace, the rhythm of citylife. That is the City’s, and the music’s, secret drive.

There is music everywhere in this urban environment of shadowy alleyways, dim stairways, labyrinthine streets, a quilt of rooftops, thrilling and wasteful streetlamps that make stars irrelevant, darkness under bridges that changes from gloom to cooling shade. It is in a “City seeping music that begged and challenged each and every day”<sup>303</sup> that the unpredictability of jazz meets the instability and uncertainty of black urban life in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The music floats through open windows and doors that stand ajar; “a colored man floats down the sky blowing a saxophone.”<sup>304</sup> The music comes from “the old uncles”<sup>305</sup>, the blues men, in the middle of the block playing a six-string guitar and singing; from the young men on the rooftops; from the drums of the Fifth Avenue marchers; from the records swirling on a Victrola in parlors and house-rent parties. 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”.<sup>306</sup> It

reaches even Alice Manfred who tries to shield herself and Dorcas from the music that urged, animated, and seduced the people. Up there in Harlem “the right tune whistled in a doorway or lifting up from the circles and grooves of a record could change the weather. From freezing to hot to cool”.<sup>307</sup> It can change the state of mind, attitude, of the people. It can change the tune of the composition.

When spring comes the whole City changes its tune. Lenox Avenue widens itself and the sounds of the City – the rumbling of highways, the loud Fords and the honking of horns – retreated to the background to hold the day and the voices of the young men on rooftops “just like the light of that day, pure and steady and kind of kind”.<sup>308</sup> “The City was speaking to them”<sup>309</sup> and the people were speaking back, adding their own voice, sound, and rhythm into the conversation. Like the sound of the young men “from Lenox to St. Nicholas and across 135<sup>th</sup> Street, Lexington, from Convent to Eight” who were playing their hearts out, “just wanted to let it run that day, slow if it wished, or fast, but a free run”, the voices of the people and the City are free and yet dependent of each other.<sup>310</sup> The tune and pace of one affects the other. Sometimes it is more of a cutting contest than a conversation or a pattern of call and response, in which “the clarinets had trouble because the brass was cut so fine, not lowdown the way they love to do it, but high and fine...facing each other first, but then when it was clear that they had beat the clarinets out, they turned their backs on them and lifted those horns straight up and joined the light”.<sup>311</sup> The music reflects and affects the people and the City. Sometimes there is harmony and cooperation, sometimes dissonance and competition. There is dynamism, even volatile tension, as a result of the coexistence of individual, assertive voices and the need to be part of something beyond oneself.

The street is what makes a space a city. That is where the voices of the people and of the City meet and mingle. As a result of its turbulence and uncontrollability the street like the music holds

a peculiar attraction and repulsion. Like the music, radio waves, recordings, the sounds of the street were unsegregatable. When the engines pause and the loud trains pull into their stops “attentive listeners can hear it. Even when they are not there, when whole city blocks downtown and acres of lawned neighborhoods in Sag Harbor cannot see them the clicking is there...The click of dark and snapping fingers”.<sup>312</sup> It is in the T-strap shoes and the sparkling fringes of the daring short skirts of Long Island debutantes and in the graceful slouch of their tuxedo-clad young partners as they “swish and glide to music that intoxicates them more than the champagne”<sup>313</sup> and the Victrola plays in the parlor.<sup>314</sup> It drives them into places – “the edge of the town, in the dark, in the shady areas where the panoptic light of the system is lifted”<sup>315</sup>– their fathers warned them about and their mothers shudder to think of, “[b]oth the warning and the shudder come from the snapping fingers, the clicking”.<sup>316</sup> Hard as they try to push the shade away into certain streets and restrict it from others making it possible to sigh and sleep in relief, “the shade stretches – just there – at the edge of the dream, or slips into the crevices of a chuckle”.<sup>317</sup> For some, the lucky ones, the shade is protective and available, for others “it seems to lurk rather than hover kindly, and its stretch is not a yawn but an increase to be beaten back with a stick. Before it clicks, or taps or snaps its fingers”.<sup>318</sup> The music and the City in general and Harlem in particular affected and reflected the contradictory position of black people in a segregated society which nonetheless embraced, even became obsessed with, Harlem, the Negro, and jazz.

The city is the space where the big dichotomies are thrown into question and boundaries are blurred in the disintegrating turbulence of the street. The city is a point of transgression. But “[r]eally there is no contradiction – rather is a condition”, a human condition, “the range of what an artful City” and novel can do.<sup>319</sup> While scholarly work, the traditional structures of knowledge,

sets up boundaries and dichotomies, the writers and the people who live, toil, and play on the streets are “busy being original, complicated, changeable – human I guess you’d say”.<sup>320</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

In my thesis I have analyzed the multifaceted and multivoiced novel *Jazz* by Toni Morrison. I have examined various intratextual and extratextual interactions which the novel creates and is created by. It explores and exposes change and improvisation as being at the heart of jazz and modernity, the 1920s Harlem, – as the ultimate human abilities which have enabled black people to not just survive but thrive in the often uncertain and unpredictable surroundings. Human lives and discourses are revealed as amalgamated constructs, continuous processes, which combine traces of the past with changed, improvised, and invented elements. With my thesis I want to advocate a reading of the novel which involves a “blues-type movement back and forth, across and between a whole range of experiences”; a reading which examines the various elements and voices of the novel not as separate but as interwoven.

The dialogic and polyphonic structure of the novel warrants such a strategy. It invites a dialogue, rather than a monologue, of diverse voices. At the same time the text complicates relational reading<sup>321</sup> with its range and complexity. It is an intricately layered composition that has a deliberately uncategorizable narrator and is purposefully unfinalized. There is a danger that both the text and the analysis appears as “some sort of conglomerate of disparate materials and incompatible principles for shaping them”.<sup>322</sup> Though that same danger lies, as Bakhtin recognized, in a “consistently monologic visualization and understanding of the represented world...monologic canon for the proper construction of novels”. Or as Hurston pointed out, what is really meant by originality is the modification, exchange and re-exchange of, ideas – thus has our “so-called civilization” come into existence.

Like Bakhtin and Hurston, Morrison crosses traditions, genres, locations, and fields while being at the same time aware of contextual particularities. Mobility, literally and spiritually moving in time and space, has been a key to knowing, shaping, and depicting the changing world.

Through the polyphonic process of creation, Morrison explores both the convergence and individual paths of the various strains – musical, literary, linguistic – of the cultural productions blacks have written and been inspired by. People encounter, transcend, transform, criticize, internalize, and uphold the paradoxes, contradictions, and paradigms of modern life. Although it is at the heart of both the black and modern experience, the city, especially *the* City of New York, has been divergently portrayed in the contemporaneous writings of early 20<sup>th</sup> century white and black writers as a space from which to seek “aesthetic refuge” and as “The City of Refuge”, respectively. In *Jazz* the modern urban black life of the City and the music which shaped and was shaped by it are revealed as involving a negotiation between individuality and collectivity – an interplay which has occupied black writers and intellectuals for a long time. The polyphonically structured City and jazz become models for the construction of a space where a person can both have the freedom to create various constructions of self and others and maintain a sense of community; there need not be a contradiction.

In recent decades scholars and critics have increasingly been arguing for a more complex understanding of the interrelation of fields which traditional structures of knowledge have tended to separate. Like the narrator of *Jazz* eventually does, they have begun to listen to the voices they have for a long time (dis)missed. Long before they have begun to make a “Case for Black Modernist Writers”<sup>323</sup>, the writers themselves have been arguing for a more comprehensive understanding of the multifarious interaction of literary traditions. Human life, discourse, and experience are recognized as being contingent upon relationships; race, color, class, sexuality<sup>324</sup>, gender, age, and geographical background all combine and collide in the process of construction. Meanings will always change in the process of the development of the dialogue. The ongoing redrawing of the map of modernity and modernism is illustrative of the way current critical thought is problematizing and transcending the binary logic of traditional or monologic

theorizing. Black women writers such as Morrison, Alice Walker, and Hurston have further complicated notions of modernity and the black experience by giving voice to black women and examining the ambivalent relationship between race and gender. Through depicting the lives of lower class blacks – both the Southern and Northern, rural and urban – in her work, Morrison is part of a line of black writers including those of the Harlem Renaissance who have also discussed the issue of class and color as well as the complex ways they are entwined.<sup>325</sup>

In her work Morrison traces the range of black experiences and history.<sup>326</sup> Morrison constructs her novels by weaving together the tears and laughter, melancholy and optimism, blues and jazz of black life. By setting *Jazz* in the 1920s New York City, *the* modernistic time and space, and drawing upon jazz, Morrison creates an original composition which captures and enables the changeable and improvisational quality of the various elements and voices it creates and interweaves. It is the polyphonic and dialogic structure which provides the dynamism of the novel. *Jazz* captures the pulse of the Jazz Age when people believed they could go anywhere and be carried everywhere. For many blacks that was Harlem where everyone was and anything could happen; it was everything they wanted it to be. The novel is as complicated as the themes it improvises on – they become ideas (ex)changed in the process of the development of the dialogue which extends beyond and across boundaries.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr. sees in “Harlem on Our Minds” Morrison’s winning the Noble Prize and the unprecedented number of black artists at work in so many genres today as a sign of the 4<sup>th</sup> African American renaissance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “it is also the most successful and sustained” (p. 2). It is characterized by “a specific awareness of previous black traditions, which these artists echo, imitate, parody, and revise, self-consciously, in acts of riffing or signifying or sampling” (p. 8.).

<sup>2</sup> The 1970s, especially, saw a resurgence of interest in the work of not only contemporary but also earlier black female writers that continues to swell with works by writers like Morrison popularizing African American writing for diverse audiences. The creation of modern Black Feminism is usually dated to the 1960s and 1970s. The early 1980s witnessed a resurgence of black women’s literature and criticism, which according to Henry Louis Gates, Jr., marks for some scholars the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> and current African American renaissance.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> as well as before and since then there have been vocal and notable black female writers, thinkers, campaigners, and activists. Women were instrumental in promoting the Harlem Renaissance and they were more active than men in their support of the Civil Rights Movement. See, for instance, Teresa A. Nance, “Hearing the Missing Voice”, *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 5, Special Issue: The Voices of African American Women in the Civil Rights Movement (May, 1996). Available from <<http://www.jstor.org>>.

<sup>4</sup> Harlem Renaissance was a flowering of African American art, dance, writing, music, social commentary, and criticism centered in Harlem, New York City, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially the 1920s.

<sup>5</sup> Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming, Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000*, (USA: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> Call-and-response can be describes as an interaction or dialogue between voices in which the statements (‘calls’) of one are punctuated by expressions (‘responses’) from another. In African cultures it has been a widespread pattern in public gatherings and religious rituals as well as in vocal and instrumental expression. This tradition was brought over to the United States and has been transmitted in various forms of cultural expression, including and most notably music in its multiple forms: gospel, blues, jazz, and music inspired by them. In music a call-and-response can be, for example, between a soloist/singer and a band/choir, two musicians/singers, or a leader and the band/choir, even musician/band and singer/choir. A phrase or statement played by one is immediately followed by another’s phrase as a commentary or respond to ideas expressed by the first. Thus it corresponds to patterns of human communication; it becomes a musical conversation.

<sup>7</sup> Syncopation involves a shift in accent when normally a weak beat in a rhythm is stressed instead of the strong one. It can be used, for instance, to create rhythmic surprise.

<sup>8</sup> Mervyn Cooke, *The Chronicle of Jazz*, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1997), p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> Blue notes: certain altered pitches of the key resulting in the blues scale. The blues scale lowers or flattens the third, fifth and eighth notes (they are the blue notes) of the Euro-American scale.

<sup>10</sup> 32 bar blues ballad: made up of 32 different bars, with 4 even beats in a bar. First a short melody, i.e. theme is played and repeated by all players. Then one soloist improvises on it after which it is repeated again by all. Then another soloist takes turn and so on. The result is a pattern of AABAC.

<sup>11</sup> In 1910 seven million of the eight million black people in the United States lived in the South, most of them in the rural areas. Between 1915 and 1920 more than one million moved to the Northeast (to cities like New York and Philadelphia) and the Midwest (Chicago, Detroit and Minneapolis, for instance). Nearly another million joined them in the decade that followed. In addition, tens of thousands went west, especially to California, while several hundred thousand moved to southern cities. The Great Migration was the first step in the full nationalization of the black population and has been considered a watershed in the black history in the United States. It transformed a southern, rural population into a national, urban one. See a very informative and in depth website on Great Migration, as well as other African American migrations, including pictures, illustrations, and maps by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, which is part of the New York Public Library. The website “In Motion: The African American Migration Experience” is available from <<http://www.inmotionaame.org/home.cfm>>.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Osborne Osgood, “Jazz”, *American Speech*, Vol. 1, No. 10, (Jul., 1926), p. 514. The article is a chapter from Osgood’s book *So This is Jazz!* (1926) in which an attempt is made for the first time to tell the story of the origin and development of jazz from its beginning till the time the book was published. In the article he discusses the various theories about the origin of the word ‘jazz’ which were circulating at the time.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 513.

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<sup>14</sup> One of the theories is that the word ‘jazz’ was derived from ‘orgasm’ which in its slang term was cut to ‘jasm’. Clay Smith, for example, wrote in 1924 that “[i]f the truth were known about the origin of ‘Jazz’ it would never be mentioned in polite society” (Osgood, p. 516).

<sup>15</sup> “Original Dixieland Jazz Band”. Available from <<http://www.redhotjazz.com/odjb.html>>. The Original Dixieland Jazz Band has for a long time been maligned by jazz purists and dismissed as white men who copied black music calling it their own but losing in comparison to black bands like King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band and Louis Armstrong’s Hot Five. The Original Dixieland Jazz Band, however, was the first jazz band to achieve widespread prominence.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Cooke, p. 74.

<sup>18</sup> The Black Arts Movement was, in the words of Larry Neal who was besides Amiri Baraka another of its seminal figures, “the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept...The Black Arts and the Black Power concept both relate broadly to the Afro-American’s desire for self-determination and nationhood. Both concepts are nationalistic”. Larry Neal, “The Black Arts Movement,” *The Drama Review*, Vol. 12, No. 4, Summer 1968, p. 29. The Black Arts Movement, prolific in the 1960s, can be seen as renewing and redirecting the process of “racial uplift” begun by their predecessors in the 1920s - in fact, according to Houston A. Baker Jr, the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s “referred to itself in energetically self-conscious ways as “Renaissance II” (Baker Jr., Spring 1987, p. 96). The Movement can also be seen as a culmination of the revolutionary and militant impulse that had been growing steadily in African American literature.

<sup>19</sup> Marsalis is quoted in the newsletter “Blue Note to release “Higher Ground” benefit CD of highlights from Jazz at Lincoln Center’s landmark *Higher Ground Hurricane Relief Benefit Concert*”. Available from <<http://www.jalc.org/about/news/051020-news.html>>. Marsalis co-founded a jazz program at Lincoln Centre is currently the Artistic Director of Jazz at Lincoln Centre.

<sup>20</sup> Marsalis is quoted in “Music’s Jazz Maestro” which is a Wynton Marsalis Profile at the website of the Academy of Achievement. It is available from <<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/mar0pro-1>>. Marsalis has won the Pulitzer Prize for Music.

<sup>21</sup> For instance, the melody line or theme of a jazz piece is sometimes adopted from popular melodies and many of the earliest influential songs, or standards, used melodies from musicals and familiar sheet music – the standards, in their turn, have been the subject of subsequent appropriations. One of the most well known examples of such a pattern of adoption and adaptation is John Coltrane’s ‘My Favorite Things’ in which he isolated specific melodic ideas from the Sound of Music song by that name then explored through improvisation as many possible variations of them as he could.

<sup>22</sup> Houston A. Baker, Jr. is quoting Robert Martin Adams’ “What Was Modernism”. Houston A. Baker Jr. *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Adrienne Johnson Gosselin, “Beyond the Harlem Renaissance: The Case for Black Modernist Writers”, *Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 26, No 4, Colorizing Literary Theory (Autumn, 1996), p. 38.

<sup>24</sup> Gosselin.

<sup>25</sup> Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2001), p. 4. The Dover Thrift edition is an unabridged republication of “Song of Myself” from the first (1855) edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>27</sup> Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps (eds.), *The Poetry of the Negro, 1746-1949: An Anthology*, (Garden City: Double Day, 1949). The anthology includes poetry not just by black Americans but also black poets from Caribbean countries. In addition, it has a section titled “Tributary Poems by Non-Negroes” which begins with a selection from poetry by Walt Whitman, among them *Song of Myself*. Hughes has cited Whitman’s work as another influence on his poetry.

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, Jane Goldman, *Modernism, 1910-1945, Image to Apocalypse*, (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> Jesse Matz, *The Modern Novel: A Short Introduction*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 1-14.

<sup>30</sup> Baker, Jr., (Spring 1987), p. 96.

<sup>31</sup> Brian Carr and Tova Cooper, “Zora Neale Hurston and Modernism at Critical Limit”, *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 48.2 (2002), p. 289.

<sup>32</sup> The short story from 1925 offers a vivid depiction of the animation and excitement, the glamour and clamor, of the streets and Prohibition era cabarets of Harlem as through the consciousness of a newly arrived southern migrant King Solomon Gillis. Rudolph Fisher, “The City of Refuge”, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2004), pp. 1225-35.

<sup>33</sup> See note 11 above.

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<sup>34</sup> Alain Locke, "The New Negro", introduction to *The New Negro*. Available from *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004), p. 989.

<sup>35</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black", *Representations*, No 24. Special Issue: America Reconstructed, 1840-1940, (Autumn, 1998), p. 136.

<sup>36</sup> Locke, p. 984.

<sup>37</sup> Wintz, p. 81. The special issue was an extraordinary success. It included a wide variety of poems, stories, articles, and other writings by writers such as W. E. B. DuBois, James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Angelina Grimké. Eight months later, he published *The New Negro* which included most of what appeared in the Harlem Issue, though much of it revised, as well as a great deal of new material. It announced a new spirit among black Americans. For Houston A. Baker Jr., it is "representative of efforts Harlem Renaissance spokespersons": It "represents Afro-American discourse in its myriad stops and resonances...a landmark in Afro-American discourse: a collection that sounds a resolutely new note...High cultural and vernacular expressivity merge in the office of moving Afro-America from subservience, low esteem, and dependency to the status of respected and boldly outspoken nation. What is signal in Locke's venture is the unabashed coalescence of mass and class, "standard" dialect and black vernacular, aesthetic and political concerns" (Baker Jr. Spring 1987, pp. 94-5). For a further discussion of the New Negro, Harlem, and the Harlem Renaissance see section 2.1. "Danced on into the City" on Violet and Joe Trace and, especially section 3.2, "City seeping music that begged and challenged each and every day" on the City.

<sup>38</sup> *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. (ed.) Henry Louis Gates Jr., (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1997, p. 932.

<sup>39</sup> Houston A. Baker Jr., "Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance", *American Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 1., Special Issue: Modernist Culture in America, (Spring, 1987), p. 96.

<sup>40</sup> Cheryl Fish, *Black and White Women's Travel Narratives, Antebellum Explorations*, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004), p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Cheryl Fish, *Stranger in the Village: Two Centuries of African American Travel Writing*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), p. 1). James Baldwin is quoted in Fish, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> "In Motion: The African American Migration Experience". Available from <<http://www.inmotionaame.org/home.cfm>>.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 19.

<sup>44</sup> Gilroy, pp. 17-18.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> David Hollinger is quoted in Rody, p. 637.

<sup>47</sup> Gay Wilentz is quoting Toni Morrison's "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation". Gay Willentz, "Civilizations Underneath: African Heritage as Cultural Discourse in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon", *African American Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1, Women Writers Issue, (Spring, 1992), p. 61.

<sup>48</sup> Fish, pp. 6-7.

<sup>49</sup> Frances Bartkowski is quoted in Fish (2004), pp. 8-9.

<sup>50</sup> Gilroy, pp. 17-9.

<sup>51</sup> Morrison is quoted in Carolyn Denard, "Blacks, Modernism, and the American South: An Interview with Toni Morrison", *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, Fall98, Vol. 31, Issue 2.

<sup>52</sup> Gilroy, p. 17.

<sup>53</sup> Gates Jr. (1998), p. 136.

<sup>54</sup> Toni Morrison, *Jazz*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1992/2004), p. 107.

<sup>55</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, "How it Feels to be a Colored Me", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2004), p. 1031.

<sup>56</sup> Morrison, p. 36.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Derek Alwes, "The Burden of Liberty: Choice in Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and Toni Cade Bambara's *Salt Eaters*", *African American Review*, Vol. 30, No. 3, Autumn 1996 and Carolyn M. Jones "Traces and Cracks: Identity and Narrative in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*", (*African American Review*, Vol. 31, No 3, Autumn 1997). For Alwes, for instance, "Morrison dramatizes the perpetual process of choosing, thereby teaching her readers less *what* to choose than *how* to choose" (p. 363).

<sup>59</sup> Jones (1997), p. 493

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- <sup>60</sup> Jones (1997) is quoting Albert Murray's *The Hero and the Blues*. Jones, p. 493.
- <sup>61</sup> Denard, p. 7.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid., 10.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>64</sup> Morrison, p. xvi.
- <sup>65</sup> Denard, p. 4.
- <sup>66</sup> Jones (1997), pp. 483-493
- <sup>67</sup> Morrison, p. 102.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid., 123.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid., 124.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid., 107-9.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid., 108.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid., 29-30.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid., 29-30.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid., 127.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid., 128.
- <sup>76</sup> Fish (2004), pp. 6-7.
- <sup>77</sup> Locke, p. 985.
- <sup>78</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, "How it Feels to be a Colored Me", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, (New York: W.W. Morton & Company, Inc. 2004), p. 1031.
- <sup>79</sup> Morrison., p. 129.
- <sup>80</sup> Ibid., 125.
- <sup>81</sup> Ibid., 128.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid., 129.
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid., 81-207.
- <sup>84</sup> Ibid., 226.
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid., 93
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid., 89.
- <sup>87</sup> W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 1903/1994), p. 2.
- <sup>88</sup> Morrison, 208.
- <sup>89</sup> Ibid., 97.
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid., 206.
- <sup>91</sup> Ibid., 97
- <sup>92</sup> Ibid., 211.
- <sup>93</sup> Ibid., 209.
- <sup>94</sup> Jones (1997), p. 493.
- <sup>95</sup> Morrison, pp. 113-4.
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid., 94.
- <sup>97</sup> Ibid., 114.
- <sup>98</sup> Linden Peach, *Macmillan Modern Novelists, Toni Morrison*, (Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1995), pp. 133-4.
- <sup>99</sup> Morrison, p. 113.
- <sup>100</sup> Ibid., 228.
- <sup>101</sup> Ibid., xvi.
- <sup>102</sup> The remarks on history by Morrison are from a 1993 interview quoted by Alwes. Alwes, p. 361.
- <sup>103</sup> Frances Bartkowski is quoted in Fish (2004), pp. 8-9.
- <sup>104</sup> Morrison, p. 135.
- <sup>105</sup> Ibid., 113.
- <sup>106</sup> Ibid., 208.
- <sup>107</sup> The East St. Louis riot (May-June 1917) was an outbreak of racial violence in the city of East St. Louis, Illinois. The employment of blacks at a factory holding government contracts sparked a riot that left at least 150 blacks dead, including a two-year-old who was shot and thrown into a burning building. The riot reflected a general rise in racial violence as well as an increasing willingness of blacks to arm themselves and fight back.
- <sup>108</sup> Morrison, p. 53.
- <sup>109</sup> Peach, p. 117.
- <sup>110</sup> Leroi Jones, *Black Music*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1967/1988), p. 15.

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- <sup>111</sup> Langston Hughes, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, (eds.) Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel, (NY: Vintage Classics, 1994), p. 393.
- <sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.
- <sup>113</sup> Morrison, p. 72.
- <sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.
- <sup>115</sup> Peach, p.117.
- <sup>116</sup> Morrison, 59.
- <sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-8.
- <sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.
- <sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.
- <sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.
- <sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 60
- <sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.
- <sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.
- <sup>124</sup> Peach, p. 121.
- <sup>125</sup> Morrison, p. 76.
- <sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-7. In the 1920s a new short haircut, the bob cut, was popularized by the flappers. The term flapper referred to a new kind of young women who wore short dresses, bobbed their hair, listened to what was then considered unconventional music, that is jazz, and were disdainful of what was then deemed decent behavior. They were seen as brash for wearing excessive makeup, drinking alcohol, having a casual attitude to sex, smoking cigarettes, driving cars, and otherwise flouting conventional social and sexual norms. The dress style of the flapper was largely the result of jazz music and what were seen as shocking dancing styles, such as Charleston, that accompanied it. The straight and loose dresses made their wearers look young and boyish. Unlike the old, restrictive corsets, which were rejected by the flappers, early popular bras were used to flatten and reduce the appearance of the bust. The bob haircut further enhanced the boyish look and expression. The flapper look and lifestyle was considered a sign of a modern liberated and self-reliant woman.
- <sup>127</sup> Morrison, p. 55.
- <sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 61
- <sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.
- <sup>130</sup> Denard, p.6.
- <sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>132</sup> Morrison, p. 56.
- <sup>133</sup> James Weldon Johnson, "Preface" from *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1997), p. 866.
- <sup>134</sup> Morrison, p. 59.
- <sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.
- <sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.
- <sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.
- <sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.
- <sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.
- <sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-8.
- <sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.
- <sup>142</sup> Hurston, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" p. 1031. She is alluding to Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* 2.2.3-4: "Why, then the world's mine oyster/ Which I with sword will open". Many black writers have asserted the multifarious relationships between Anglo-American and African American literary traditions. Hence for example Hughes' assertion of writing poetry which is within the traditions of the language it employs.
- <sup>143</sup> Fairclough, p. 35.
- <sup>144</sup> Introduction to the records of the National Association of Colored Women, 1895-1992 by Lillian Serece Williams.
- <sup>145</sup> Morrison, p. 54.
- <sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* 73
- <sup>147</sup> From a 1993 interview of Toni Morrison quoted by Alwes. Alwes, p. 361.
- <sup>148</sup> Morrison, p. 83.
- <sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.
- <sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

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- <sup>151</sup> Ibid., 206.
- <sup>152</sup> Ibid., 54.
- <sup>153</sup> Ibid. 110.
- <sup>154</sup> Gerald Mast and Bruce F. Kawin, *A Short History of the Movies*, (USA: Longman, 2003), p. 143.
- <sup>155</sup> See note 126.
- <sup>156</sup> Peach, p. 121.
- <sup>157</sup> Morrison, p. 192.
- <sup>158</sup> Ibid., 188.
- <sup>159</sup> Ibid., 12.
- <sup>160</sup> Ibid., 202.
- <sup>161</sup> Gerald Mast and Bruce F. Kawin, p. 144. 'It', like jazz, was another one of the important vague words which indicated the values of the decade. 'It' was a vague euphemism for sex implying a range of suggestions: sex appeal, sexual drive, the sex act itself or a more general attitude toward sexual activity.
- <sup>162</sup> Morrison, pp. 60-193.
- <sup>163</sup> Ibid., 64.
- <sup>164</sup> Ibid., 191.
- <sup>165</sup> Ibid., 190.
- <sup>166</sup> Peach, p. 124.
- <sup>167</sup> Morrison, p. 51.
- <sup>168</sup> Ibid., 28.
- <sup>169</sup> Fish (2004), p. 17.
- <sup>170</sup> Morrison, p. 121.
- <sup>171</sup> Ibid., 120-22.
- <sup>172</sup> Ibid., 130.
- <sup>173</sup> Ibid., 135.
- <sup>174</sup> Jones (1997), p. 493.
- <sup>175</sup> Jones (1997) is quoting Albert Murray's *The Hero and the Blues*. Jones, p. 493.
- <sup>176</sup> Morrison, p. 222.
- <sup>177</sup> Ibid., 6-221.
- <sup>178</sup> Ibid., 212-5.
- <sup>179</sup> Ibid., 113.
- <sup>180</sup> Ibid., 222.
- <sup>181</sup> Locke, p. 984.
- <sup>182</sup> Morrison, p. 64.
- <sup>183</sup> Ibid., 6.
- <sup>184</sup> Ibid., 220.
- <sup>185</sup> Ibid., 6.
- <sup>186</sup> Ibid., 66.
- <sup>187</sup> Ibid., 209.
- <sup>188</sup> Ibid., 206.
- <sup>189</sup> Ibid., 210.
- <sup>190</sup> Ibid., 214.
- <sup>191</sup> Ibid., 224.
- <sup>192</sup> Dirk Ludigkeit, "Collective Improvisation and Narration in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*", *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*, (2001, Vol. 21 Issue 2), p. 185. Ludigkeit writes, "I am aware that others have tried to give the narrator a female personality...or tried to de-genderize the narrator altogether and personify an abstract concept to fulfill his (her/its?) role...None of these concepts appear particularly useful to me" (p. 185).
- <sup>193</sup> Ibid., 175.
- <sup>194</sup> Paula Eckhard is quoted in Ludigkeit, p. 168.
- <sup>195</sup> Caroline Rody, "Impossible Voices: Ethnic Postmodern Narration in Toni Morrison's "Jazz" and Karen Tei Yamashita's "Through the Arc of the Rain Forest", *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 41, 40.4. (Winter, 2000), p. 635.
- <sup>196</sup> Fish (2004), p. 17.
- <sup>197</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr. is quoted in Philip Page, "Traces of Derrida in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*", *African American review*, Vol. 29, No. 1, (Spring 1995), p. 65.
- <sup>198</sup> Rody is quoting "A Conversation with Toni Morrison." With Bill Moyers. Rody, p. 635.

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- <sup>199</sup> Page, p. 61-2.
- <sup>200</sup> Barbara Johnson is quoted in Page, p. 60.
- <sup>201</sup> Page, p. 140.
- <sup>202</sup> Jardine, p. 73.
- <sup>203</sup> Rody, p. 630.
- <sup>204</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>205</sup> Ibid., 622.
- <sup>206</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, (eds.) Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004), p. 1046-7.
- <sup>207</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel", *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), p. 1192.
- <sup>208</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>209</sup> See note 6.
- <sup>210</sup> According to Ludigkeit, a 'cutting contest' is where "a soloist responds to, complements or contests the band's or other musician's statement, adding his own personal voice and interpretation into the performance" (p. 178).
- <sup>211</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, (ed. and trans.) Carolynn Emmerson, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 7.
- <sup>212</sup> Ibid., 9.
- <sup>213</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin's *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1986) is quoted in Lee Honeycutt's thesis "What Bakhtin Hath Wrought? Toward a Unified Theory of Literature and Composition". It was submitted to the faculty of The University of North Carolina at Charlotte in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of English in 1994. It is available from <<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~honey1/bakhtin/thesis.html>>. The words are, perhaps, a fitting legacy of a man who wrote them in the last notebook entry before his death, published under the title "Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences".
- <sup>214</sup> Carolyn M. Jones, p. 492.
- <sup>215</sup> Morrison, p. 6-73.
- <sup>216</sup> Ibid., 119.
- <sup>217</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>218</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>219</sup> Ibid., 137.
- <sup>220</sup> Bakhtin (1984), p. 195.
- <sup>221</sup> Morrison, p. 16.
- <sup>222</sup> Ibid., 121.
- <sup>223</sup> Ibid., 135.
- <sup>224</sup> Ibid., 137.
- <sup>225</sup> Ibid., 95.
- <sup>226</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>227</sup> Ibid., 112.
- <sup>228</sup> Ibid., 115.
- <sup>229</sup> Ibid., 17.
- <sup>230</sup> Ibid., 146.
- <sup>231</sup> Ibid., 145.
- <sup>232</sup> Morrison, "The Site of Memory", p. 117.
- <sup>233</sup> Morrison, p. 161.
- <sup>234</sup> Ibid., 154.
- <sup>235</sup> Ibid., 160-1.
- <sup>236</sup> Morrison, "The Site of Memory", p. 117.
- <sup>237</sup> Morrison, p. 221.
- <sup>238</sup> Ibid., 220.
- <sup>239</sup> Ibid., 221.
- <sup>240</sup> Ibid., 9.
- <sup>241</sup> Jones (1997) is quoting Morrison's "The Art of Fiction CXXXIV". Jones, p. 488.
- <sup>242</sup> Morrison, p. 9.

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- <sup>243</sup> Ibid., 221.
- <sup>244</sup> Ibid., 220.
- <sup>245</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>246</sup> Ibid., 229.
- <sup>247</sup> Ibid., xvi.
- <sup>248</sup> Ibid., 229.
- <sup>249</sup> Rody, p. 627. “Whoever You are Holding Me Now in Hand” is a poem by Walt Whitman from *Leaves of Grass*.
- <sup>250</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>251</sup> Whitman, pp. 2-53.
- <sup>252</sup> Tanja Rajanti, “City as the Social Space of Modernity”, (Tampere: Tampereen yliopisto, 1991), pp. 1-2.
- <sup>253</sup> Rajanti is quoting D. Frisbys’ *Fragments of Modernity*. Rajanti, p. 38.
- <sup>254</sup> Alice A. Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Women and Modernity*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 68.
- <sup>255</sup> Rajanti, p. 13.
- <sup>256</sup> Ibid., 101.
- <sup>257</sup> Jardine, p. 24.
- <sup>258</sup> Ibid., 76.
- <sup>259</sup> Rajanti is quoting Walter Benjamin. Rajanti, p. 40.
- <sup>260</sup> Rajanti, pp. 19-37; Jardine, pp. 70-71.
- <sup>261</sup> Cary D. Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, p. 20.
- <sup>262</sup> Wintz is quoting Claude McKay’s “The Harlem Dancer”. Wintz, p. 71.
- <sup>263</sup> *Fire!!* was the only magazine both produced and devoted to the artists and writers of the Harlem Renaissance. It represented a joint effort by most of the younger writers who associated themselves with the Harlem Renaissance, such as Hughes, Hurston, Gwendolyn Bennett, Richard Bruce, Arna Bontemps, and Countee Cullen. They created the literary magazine as an outlet for their work, free from the restrictions of other magazines. However, it went bankrupt after a single issue published in the fall of 1926. *Fire!!* was intended to shock the black middle class and the more conservative black literary critics, an endeavor in which it succeeded.
- <sup>264</sup> Locke, p. 989.
- <sup>265</sup> Ibid., 987.
- <sup>266</sup> Wintz, p. 93.
- <sup>267</sup> Wintz is quoting Hughes’ *The Big Sea: An Autobiography*. Wintz, p. 93.
- <sup>268</sup> Locke, p. 991-2.
- <sup>269</sup> Morrison, p. 7.
- <sup>270</sup> UNIA was founded by Marcus Garvey in his home country of Jamaica in 1914. Not having much success there, three years later he came to United States reestablishing his association in Harlem. His goal was to unite (under his leadership) all the black people in the world and to create within the white capitalist world a black global economy that would liberate blacks in America from the oppression of discrimination and redeem the peoples of Africa from the oppression of colonialism. He had a genius for capturing the loyalty of the black masses in America. Before his organization ran into difficulties and started unraveling, he had created and controlled a large scale movement among the black urban masses.
- <sup>271</sup> Morrison, pp. 8-9.
- <sup>272</sup> Ibid., 10.
- <sup>273</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>274</sup> Ibid., 10-11.
- <sup>275</sup> Ibid., 35.
- <sup>276</sup> Wintz is quoting James Weldon Johnson’s *Black Manhattan*. Wintz, p. 23.
- <sup>277</sup> Morrison, p. 33.
- <sup>278</sup> Ibid., 7.
- <sup>279</sup> Ibid., xvi-xvii
- <sup>280</sup> Rajanti is quoting D. Frisbys’ *Fragments of Modernity*. Rajanti, p. 38.
- <sup>281</sup> Locke, p. 987.
- <sup>282</sup> Morrison, p. 31.
- <sup>283</sup> Ibid., 32.
- <sup>284</sup> Locke, p. 986.
- <sup>285</sup> Morrison, p. 9.

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 33. The turn of the century saw an upsurge in racial violence. While the number of lynchings went down, they increased again during WWI. In Tennessee three thousand spectators responded to an invitation of a local newspaper to come and see a “live Negro” being burned. There was also a marked increase in the number of race riots which were not confined to the South. After the war, in the summer of 1919 riots erupted in more than 20 cities, both in the North and the South. The novel mentions some of the riots of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the symptomatic ones of New Orleans, Louisiana (1866), Greensburg, Indiana (1906), and Springfield, Ohio (1904, 1906). In addition, white gangs frequently assaulted blacks in large Northern cities, while several towns in Ohio and Indiana sought to avoid racial order by simply preventing blacks from settling there. In the novel the situation is captured in Joe’s words when he describes how in 1893 his hometown of Vienna, Virginia was burned to the ground, “Red fire doing fast what white sheets took too long to finish: canceling every deed; vacating each and every field; emptying us out of our places so fast we went running from one part of the country to another – or nowhere”. Morrison, p. 126. For information on the racial situation of the turn of the century see, for instance, Wintz.

<sup>288</sup> Morrison, pp. 9-10.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>291</sup> Wintz is quoting Hughes’ *The Big Sea: An Autobiography*. Wintz, p. 23.

<sup>292</sup> Rudolph Fisher, “The City of Refuge”, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2004), pp. 1225-35. King Solomon Gillis had shot a white man in South Carolina and had fled, with the aid of prayer and an automobile, via Washington to Harlem which he had always longed to see. Fisher’s vivid description of the multifaceted street life of Harlem brought him to the attention of the Harlem literary circles.

<sup>293</sup> Morrison, p. 117.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 32-3.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 117-8.

<sup>300</sup> Gay Wilentz is quoting Toni Morrison’s “Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation”. Gay Wilentz, “Civilizations Underneath: African Heritage as Cultural Discourse in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*”, *African American Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1, Women Writers Issue, (Spring, 1992), p. 61.

<sup>301</sup> Morrison., p. xvi.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 196-7.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 226-7.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>314</sup> The image of a flapper, the “jazz baby”, has been depicted in such epitomic novels of the Jazz Age as F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925). She has come to symbolize the era with her short beaded dress and bobbed hair wearing a jeweled headband, holding a glass of champagne, and dancing the Charleston. For a further description of the bobbed hair and flappers, see note 126.

<sup>315</sup> Rajanti, p. 5.

<sup>316</sup> Morrison, p. 227.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 220.

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<sup>321</sup> Relational reading can be defined on the one hand as “a strategy which refocuses the readers’ attention from the text...to an awareness of the mediating practice inherent in reading” and on the hand as a practice of reading across a wide range of fields “that succeeds in “unsettling” the boundaries between them that we have come to expect”; to account for intratextual and extratextual interactions and relationships. Glenn W. Fetzer, “Reading Relationally: Postmodern Perspectives of Literature and Art (a review)”, *SubStance*, Issue 101 (Volume 32, Number 2), 2003. The article is a review of Laurie Edson, *Reading Relationally: Postmodern Perspectives of Literature and Art*, Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2001. Available from <<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/substance/v032/32.2fetzer.html>>.

<sup>322</sup> Bakhtin (1984), p. 8.

<sup>323</sup> Gosselin.

<sup>324</sup> Gay and bisexual black writers and artists, men and women, have existed not only both inside and outside movements like the Harlem Renaissance but also in official black culture as well. Outcasts and rebels, for instance the lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgenders of the 1920s Harlem existed in a penumbra of otherness that could alternately feed their creativity and cripple it.

<sup>325</sup> There is a term, “colorism”, which is used to refer to prejudicial or preferential treatment of people based on skin color. It is generally applied to a color consciousness among and discrimination of same-race people, a kind of light-bright-right notion. In discussions of black people it is talked about for example in the context of W.E.B. DuBois’ concept of ‘double consciousness’. Also labeled as ‘colorism’ is discrimination of lighter skinned people by darker skinned ones of the same ethnic group. In black communities the preferential treatment of those with lighter toned skin by whites dating back to slavery has at times been counteracted by darker skinned blacks discriminating against them. The “Black is Beautiful” movement which begun in the 1960s was aimed at generating race pride and stopping black people from straightening their hair and bleaching their skin.

<sup>326</sup> Her novel *Beloved* (1987) examines the slave era and society. *Jazz* (1992) depicts the time of the Great Migration shifting to the urban black experience of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Harlem while moving between different points of time to trace the Southern rural past and roots of the migrants such as Joe and Violet Trace. In her next novel *Paradise* (1998) she portrays a small all-black town situated in rural Oklahoma. In the course of the novel she traces the lives of the characters and the fate of the town in a series of flashbacks and interwoven stories. In the process she moves between, among others, the Reconstruction era, the 1940s, the Civil Rights era, and the 1970s, which is the present time of the novel.

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