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IN THE MAKING:  
UNDERSTANDING TONI MORRISON'S WORK IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY



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*Once upon a time, in Santa Cruz (California) there was a lonely fish in a fish tank. Vincent, Ann and Pierce move the fish from the small one to the big one where many different fish were swimming in company. They did not know if the lonely fish was going to make it in the new fish tank, he could have been a cannibal fish and eat the rest, or could have not made it because he was used to the solitude. But they felt it was necessary and whole process to move him started that day and many different risks were taken. Vincent called that adventure “the fish who moved from Texas to Hawaii”. A special thanks to them and Signe, for making my stay at USCS a perfect dream in this hard process.*

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Research topic, objectives and research questions

Recent methodological and theoretical approaches are trying to combine Cultural and Media Studies with Literary Studies through the use of the ICT (Information and Communication Technologies). On this basis, research in this area is classified as “collective knowledge” (Rettberg, 2005), “participatory culture” (Jenkins et al., 2007), or “fan fiction” (Black, 2009). Nevertheless, these approaches have a clear departing point: the reader; as well as a clear dominant force shaping reality: technology. Feminist theory started to question this area back in the nineties (Grosz, 1995), by pointing out the necessity to consider authors, readers, style, novels, and context as one unique entity and the same literary object instead of separate entities. In order to create a feminist literary canon, making women more visible in all areas of knowledge and finding a proper “écriture féminine” (Cixous, 1976), that was part of the political strategies of first and second wave feminism. Nevertheless, this was very paradoxical, since the criteria to classify one piece of literary art as feminist were even conflicting each other (Grosz, 1995): is it because of the sex of the author, the sex of the reader, the content of the novel, etc.?, becoming even worse when the category of “woman” started to crumble (Butler, 1990).

A possible solution to this problem is linking the different elements within the relation between ICT and Literature. Linking all these elements implies understanding them as part of the Literary Object, without privileging one over the other, while at the same time, the criteria to identify one work as feminist or not becomes reduced (albeit provisional, as I will show in chapter one). Conversely, it is unavoidable to define the relationship between Literature and ICT as a process not only in Literary Studies, but in Feminist Theory as well. Thus, it is necessary to delve deeper into the connections that ICT, especially Social Networking Sites (SNS), offer to Literature, in terms of communication between different participants, in order to shed light on a possible hybrid object for Literary Studies. Besides, this methodological procedure offers the possibility of exploring Feminist Literature through a wider context, in line with the

present information society, in order to make feminist politics visible. In addition, from a Cultural and Media Studies perspective, the analysis on how the concept of language is changing within digital platforms would enrich post-structuralist analysis of this area. The study of language as a material part of communication implies thinking of communication as the object itself, and not as the medium.

Therefore, I will analyze the communicative process created within Literature and SNS, from a feminist point of view. In this context, writing and reading are understood as collective processes (Rettberg, 2005) that also frame and relate to the SNS within a specific context. In this work, networks about literature take part in creating the process of analysis, and demand a new definition of language that incorporates “new textualities”<sup>1</sup>. Literature is considered socially transgressive (Mitchell, et al., 2010; Rodríguez, 2009), because it presents important reconfigurations on the concept of politics and because it departs from the feminist perspective where the concept of “gender” is performed.

New Materialism is the theoretical framework of this thesis for two main reasons. First, we need to understand the process of communication in its political terms because, in this thesis, the connection between Literature and SNS provides a material engagement in which the former becomes socially transgressive. Consequently, a different understanding of language and text is enforced, which moves away from traditional post-structuralist conceptions. For these reasons, I will conduct a “New Materialist Politics” (Coole & Frost, 2010) analysis, based on situating human bodies in permanent relation with other bodies and their environment, in order to shed light on oppressive mechanisms and infer a change in unequal social structures. In this regard, this conception favors ideas about collective knowledge and active participation between humans and culture promoted by SNS. Secondly, it is also necessary to understand a key concept in feminist politics that is “gender”. It will be defined as an evolving ontology of politics thereby considering it a relational process between *the self* and *the other*, in which both entities are *mutually informed* (Shotwell and Sangrey, 2009: 60).

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<sup>1</sup> The *European Journal of English Studies* devoted a special issue (2007) on ‘New Textualities’ (ed. Portela, 2007) that explains the academic urgency to (re)think language and communication in this digital context, for feminist, linguistic, and literary studies.

Self-identification is the relation with the context, or the others, reinforcing the continuum in which SNS are expressed (Van House, 2011). On the contrary, it reinforces dichotomous stereotypes around masculinity and femininity (Zywica & Danowski, 2008), which has been the focus of much of the research done on gender and ICT (Van House, 2011).

According to Rick Dolphijn & Iris van der Tuin (2012: 19), New Materialism was coined in 2000 with Rosi Braidotti's "Deleuze and Feminist theory" (ed. Buchanan & Colebrook, 2000). It began to be formulated in the early nineties when Braidotti presented the birth of a new strand of thought that "situates the embodied nature of the subject [...] at the heart of matter ... a new materialist theory of the text and of textual practice" (Braidotti, 2012: 20). According to Braidotti (ibid, 21), this movement was born as a methodology, an onto-epistemology and a political stance, in order to disrupt "social relations of power". In addition, she positions the focus of this theory on the genealogy of feminist methodologies that begins with Adrienne Rich's "politics of location" (1986) and Haraway's "situated knowledges" (1991), to move away from relativistic practices involved in Sandra Harding's (1993) "standpoint theory", just as Sheyla Benhabib (1987: 88) did: "[w]hat I would like to question is the assumption that 'taking the viewpoint of others' is truly compatible with this notion of fairness as reasoning behind a 'veil of ignorance'". New materialist researchers claim that a social constructivist approach to matter and reality is not enough in order to understand the shifts produced in reality with "the contemporary context of bio-politics and global political economy." (Coole and Frost, 2010: 6).

In summary, in this research, I propose to redefine concepts such as "gender", "politics" and "communication" through interacting Literature and SNS, in order to provide a feasible, empirical analysis. To do this, I have chosen Toni Morrison and Facebook, -the former, a female contemporary author, and the latter, a popular SNS. Thus, the main objective of this thesis is the following: the analysis of the communicative process between real readers and a real author, like Morrison, through a virtual space like Facebook and all the implications it has for feminist literature. This objective is specified with two sub-objectives: to identify the strategies by which gender is

(in)visibilized in virtual spheres; and to detect the strategies by which Morrison is spreading new materialist politics through gender and language.

Thus, the leading question of this research will be: *How does the interaction between literature and technology affect the communicative process between Morrison and her readers from a feminist perspective?* This will be specified by the following two sub-research questions:

- How is gender (in)visibilized through the interaction in the debates between Morrison and her readers on Facebook?
- How does the relation between social networking sites (SNS) and literature reconfigure feminist new materialist politics?

## **2. Research motivations**

This research offers possible solutions to theoretical debates present in Literary Studies, as well as in Feminist Theory. I argue that focusing on the communicative process allows the identification of a research object for Literary studies deprived of the “subjectivity” in literary critique (Fludernik, 2009). SNS provide an exceptional context in which the concept of reading and writing is altered by readers and authors. In the past, reading was considered a medium by which an author transmitted information to the reader and writing was considered to be just a unidirectional message conveyed by the author. Nevertheless, with the simultaneity and speed created within the context of SNS, reading would become a process in itself, and an active agent within an active context. While, in the past, reading and writing were considered a static process, they have since become an active process. So, the entanglement between reading and writing makes a fluid object of analysis possible.

This project also contributes to the Feminist Theory, making feminism more visible, by building bridges between the Social Sciences and the Humanities (Silius, 2010). The present research intends to explore theoretically what it means to relate authors and

readers virtually, in communicative terms, as is proved by the Humanities, as well as informing this theoretical issue with empirical results coming from the Social Sciences. In addition, this project proposes a re-conceptualization of key terms in Feminist Theory such as “gender”, “politics” and “language”, and provides a different starting point in both fields by proposing a new feminist methodology (“diffractive”) where subject and object of study are integrated. This research on SNS suggests an empirical analysis of terms, such as “gender” and “politics”, which differs from looking at profiles, accessibility, or political participation, in terms of male and female. It aims at relating “gender” and “politics” as a continuum, which is the nature of the communicative process of the SNS.

Additionally, I would like to contextualize the writer, object and subject of this thesis in a national and even European context. This doctoral thesis is the first to explore the relationship between Literature (the classical one and not the electronic one) and SNS, not as a tool for teaching it, but rather as part of the communicative process and object of Literary Studies. There are several doctoral theses dedicated to the study of Morrison’s works, such as Magdalena Vallejo Álvarez’s *La identidad afroamericana y la victimización femenina en la narrativa de Toni Morrison* (1998); or Tessa Roynon’s *Transforming America: Toni Morrison and classical tradition* (2006)<sup>2</sup>. However, none of them includes an analysis of her work departing from a contemporary understanding of her work through SNS.

### **3. Methodological strategies**

Considering the relationship between Literature and SNS, it is necessary to focus on one contemporary writer and one site of communication. I have chosen the writing/reading

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<sup>2</sup> Some other examples are: *La narrativa de Toni Morrison: búsqueda de una estética afroamericana*. (Manzanas, 1993b); *Literature as Prophecy: Toni Morrison as a prophetic writer* (Watson, 2009); *The location of black identity in Toni Morrison’s fiction* (Kwang Soon, 2010); *The uncanny object in Toni Morrison’s fiction* (Wang, 2011); *A psycho-medical approach to trauma in Toni Morrison’s novels* (Beian, 2013).

of Toni Morrison (a worldwide known author) and her official Facebook page for several reasons. First, because she is a Nobel laureate for her novel, *Beloved*. Secondly, she is an important contemporary writer with a long list of publications of novels, literary and critical theory and volume editions. She is also considered the creator of a Black Feminist Literary Canon, given her role as book editor for works written by important black feminist activists, such as Alice Walker. Thirdly, in 2010, Morrison opened a Facebook page where she is continuously posting some of her most famous literary quotes, pictures and audios of herself and her works. Although her virtual space enhances communication in terms of self-promotion, Morrison also spreads her political message, while giving her readers the possibility of expressing their reactions to her work and translating reactions to the analysis of contemporary events (such as the oppression of the black community in the US).

This methodology offers the opportunity to read and analyze objects without presupposing a separate entity of their parts. It is metaphorically based on the diffractive nature of light and embraces the theoretical framework of New Materialism. According to this approach, I use a qualitative strategy based upon Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), close reading, and visual analysis. It will be therefore differentiated into three different levels of analysis, which will correspond to three main chapters of the present thesis. In the first level of analysis I will analyze the performance of the Facebook page, in order to find strategies that (in)visibilize gender. Level two of analysis will include a close reading of the novels to see how Morrison shapes politics. In the third and final level, I will analyze the communicative process as a whole, taking into account both of the previous chapters. The separation of the three levels makes the analysis more understandable and facilitates the communicative process between Morrison and her readers (the main objective of the present research, level three), while focusing on different aspects of it (gender, in level one; politics, in level two). The methodology structuring this thesis is a “diffractive methodology” (Barad, 2007) and its separation has been deduced through a diffractive reading of Barad’s (2007) *Meeting the Universe Halfway* and Leela Fernandes’ (1997) *Producing workers*.

The first level of analysis is what we consider the “apparatus” (Barad, 2007). Theoretically, it will be informed by a review of the concept of “gender” (Shotwell and

Sangrey, 2009) and “affects” (Colman, 2009b; Clough, 2009). Both elements are two of the key concepts in some areas of contemporary feminist theory. The analysis will be articulated via “feminist critical discourse analysis - FCDA - ” (Laazar, 2007) on debates concerning feelings on Morrison’s Facebook page. Feelings produce the more agitated debates on Morrison’s Facebook page; as well as taking on a crucial role in contemporary feminist theories, considered in the present dissertation as one of the most important aspects in understanding Morrison’s work (we will see in chapter three). Gender becomes formulated through the apparatus as the acquisition of certain boundaries, as the relations between different participants/readers. This means considering the context (Kirby, 2011b) where the debates take place through visual analysis of the photographs (Bal, 2003) and news present on Morrison’s Facebook page. The relations between participants will be visualized through the analysis of ‘open categories’ using atlas.ti.

The second level of analysis is what I consider the “event”. It is the articulation of feminist new materialist politics in Morrison’s work. That informs theoretically the main topic of this thesis by the articulation of “new materialist politics”. The novels will be analyzed performing a feminist close reading (Lukic & Sánchez, 2011) and reading diffractively (through each other) the results in level one with the results in level two. Therefore, this operational level uses the literary critique and the Facebook community to create meanings.

The third level of analysis will be considered the “phenomenon”, which explains the main objective of this thesis: the communicative process. In this section, we will elaborate a definition of “language” (Colebrook, 2008) as a *living force*, and “context” as an active agent (Kirby, 2011b), thereby solving the problems of the dichotomy reinforced in some areas of Literary Studies, as we mentioned earlier. I will analyze how the interaction between literature and technology affects the communicative process between authors and readers from a feminist standpoint, and the results of the other two levels of analysis will be connected through Morrison’s posts on her Facebook page. By performing a diffractive reading of her page from a communicative perspective, I will present a relation between Morrison’s material discourse and her readers’ material-discursive meaning.

At this point, it is necessary to add another premise associated with the new materialist theory, referred to pursue non-linear approaches on the object/subject of study. Even though the research has been divided into three different levels of analysis, the Baradian model of “apparatus” entails reading the analysis of the aforementioned three different levels separately, and in a non-linear order. The three levels interact with each other and explain the main objective of the present thesis from different perspectives: gender, politics and language. Measuring the measurement tool, which is focusing on the process, implies the final step that pursues that each level of analysis should be understandable by reading them in different orders. In that way, the analysis has been carried out following a new materialist perspective; each level is treated firstly as an apparatus, which entails theory formation – as technologies of subjectivation – in each chapter. However, the reader should be able to take those parts away to create his or her own process of comprehension analysis, with different results. A brief mention of this aim is included in chapter six. The innovation of this methodology implies a shift in referentiality: the focus on processes instead of on results, and testing the measuring tool, which is the focus of a diffractive methodology. It entails an organization of the information in the thesis, by focusing on processes entangled with the way the reader reads instead of chronological order of events. This methodology will shed light on patterns of change in literature, feminist politics and SNS because the methodology is always entangled with the object of research.

#### **4. Structure of the thesis**

This thesis is structured around six chapters and a final one, in which the main findings of the research will be presented. Thematically speaking, these chapters could be divided into two parts. The first part builds the theoretical and methodological framework. Theory and methodology belong to the first part because, according to the new materialist theory (van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010; Barad, 2007), they are inseparable from each other, since theory is already a methodology, and vice versa. The

theoretical and methodological sections complement each other in a mutual way. This is developed in the first two chapters.

The first chapter corresponds to the building of the theoretical framework, which in this thesis is a Feminist New Materialism. First, I will contextualize the research process through a feminist point of view, with an overview of the debate between Humanities and the Social Sciences. Considering that this research has, at least, three different axes of signification (namely feminist theory, literary studies, and technological studies), in this chapter, a review of the literature on the different fields is provided. After that, the different fields will be put together via the “ethic-onto-epistemological” (Barad, 2007) feminist strand, theoretically informing the empiricism of the research (that is, the data and the thesis’ own standing): new materialism.

The second chapter explains in detail the methodology structuring this dissertation. It is necessary to provide a brief theoretical consideration regarding this methodology, given its innovative nature. It also presents the objectives and research questions, whereby the participants of this research are presented, namely the writer Morrison (on the literary side) and her official Facebook page (on the networking site), since providing this link between these two broad areas needs to be specified with two concrete cases. Finally, the qualitative methods that inform the different levels of analysis are presented.

The second part contains the development of the actual analysis and corresponds to chapters three, four and five. The methodology exposed in chapter two is developed using three different levels of analysis described in chapters three, four and five. The third chapter explains the first level of analysis: the “apparatus” (Barad, 2003). After having completed this level theoretically with a feminist re-reading of the concepts of “gender” and “affects”, I will then analyze this first level. This will entail explaining the debates present on Morrison’s Facebook page: feelings viewed as paralyzing or as motors of social change. These debates will help to articulate “gender” away from binary opposites, by looking at the forces that relate selves: affects. In addition, this chapter offers one perspective of the main objective of my research: the visibility of gender in this new literary communicative process.

The fourth chapter addresses the literary side of the research, by relating literature and politics through the metaphorical figuration of “event” (Ahmed, 1998) and by offering, first, a re-reading of key concepts of feminist politics (such as identity politics and intersectionality). This chapter aims at theoretically elaborating the kind of feminist politics that Morrison pursues in her novels. By taking into account the results of the analysis of gender from the previous stage, a “feminist close reading” (Lukic & Sánchez, 2011) will be carried out on her novels. Likewise, this chapter offers another perspective of the main objective of the present research: the enactment of different feminist politics produced within this new literary communicative process.

The fifth chapter is the last of the analyses and includes the “phenomenon” level (Barad, 2007). First, I provide a theorization of the object of literary studies as a discipline in the information society. I contrast some posts on the Facebook page with how the communicative process puts together a virtual author in permanent connection with her readers. The reader’s responses also will be analyzed, in order to shed light on the different relations created within this active networking context. This will provide an answer to the main objective of the research: to understand the new literary communicative process being developed within the context of contemporary information society. In addition, this chapter aims at providing a possible solution to the debate present in literary studies concerning the impartiality of its object of study.

The execution of the thesis demonstrates that different orders and objectives alter the patterns of analysis. The sixth chapter corresponds to the discussion and experimentation of the methodology and I will pursue one chronological alteration of these levels of analysis. This chapter shows to what extent methodology has always been its own object of study. According to Barad (2007), a diffractive methodology needs to be multi-dimensional and mutually relating, in order to create boundaries that enact reality and meaning. It exposes the possibility of altering the different levels of analysis in order to obtain multiple processes. A diffractive methodology targets at enacting reality in its multiple and “queer linear” nature (Barad, 2012). That is to say, phenomena do not follow a cause-effect pattern. This chapter offers the different readings that this thesis can perform, in order to understand the complexity of the phenomenon under study. This way, on the one hand, it aims at differentiating how the

researcher is involved with the object of research (blurring subject and object). On the other, it shows how different strategies produce different results. Likewise, the methodology must be included in the research process for it to be objective.

Finally, thesis conclusions will provide provisional answers to the research questions, the different lines of research that can be pursued and the limitations of the present thesis, through pointing out different recommendations for future research. I will then present bibliographical references, which will include the author's first name as a feminist strategy to vindicate the female production of knowledge.

## Chapter 1: Drawing cartographies, building epistemologies

*The first thing a feminist critic can do it is to acknowledge the aporias and the aphasias of theoretical frameworks and look with hope in the direction of (women) artists.*

Rosi Braidotti, “Cyberfeminism with a difference”

### 1. Introduction

The digital context of the present thesis situates communication at a global level (people from all over the world are able to communicate simultaneously), while it keeps on being local (it is a specific community participating on Facebook that is being studied). Thus, the theoretical pillars to construct the epistemological framework necessarily entail literary, technological and feminist studies. These three pillars build the cartographical approach in which this thesis is framed. Feminist theory advances steadily very interestingly in matters concerning language, communication, agency, technology, and also, gender, politics and affects. Consequently, this thesis places present debates in three areas informing this work. First, debates present in literary studies concerning the objectivity of their object of study. Second, debates regarding agency of humans and non-humans alike in the field of technological studies. Third, debates regarding the concept of gender in contemporary feminist theories. According to Colman (2009a: 7), “[t]echnological epistemology here refers to the study of the issues relating to the formation and distribution of technical and empirical knowledge relating to screen forms.” The connections between these debates draw a cartographical base of a provisional methodological-epistemological framework. Feminist New Materialism provides the adequate approximation to this particular object of study: the communicative process in literature. The following figure (Fig.1) summarizes the pillars of new materialist framework, while showing the tools used for carrying out the theory and methodology of this thesis.

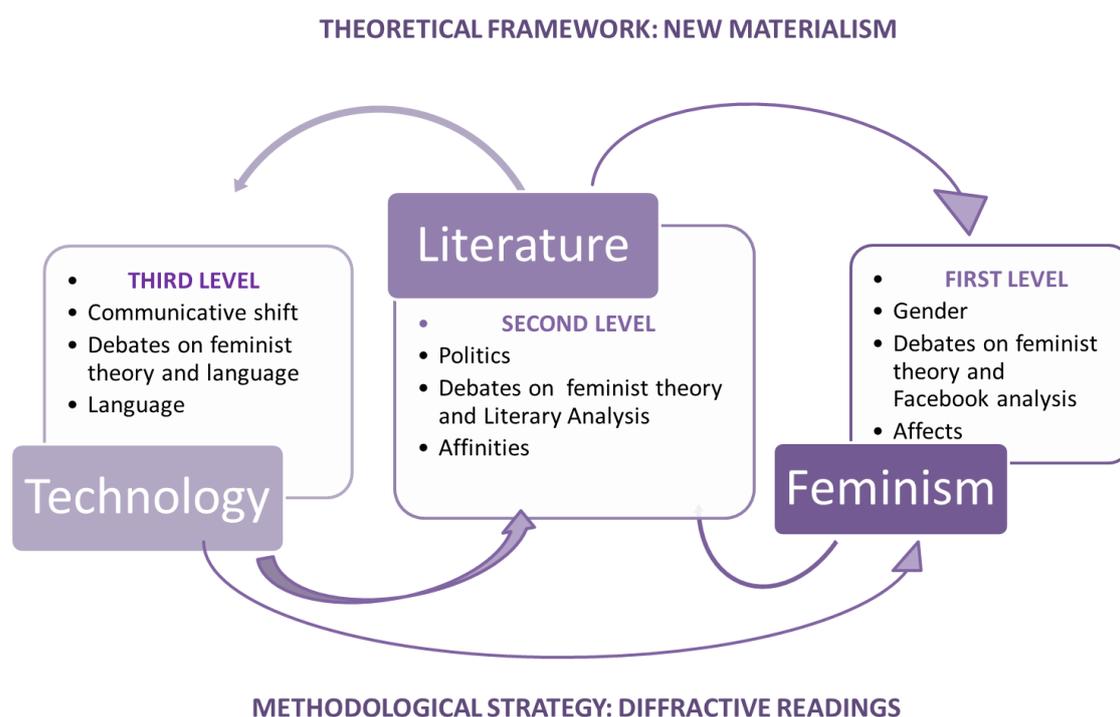


Figure 1: Relation between theoretical debates, methodological levels and core concepts

The previous figure shows that there are three different fields of study: technology, feminism and literature. These three are mutually dependant involved in this thesis fields because it reflects the complexity of the communicative process in literature. Therefore, the concepts mentioned on each square are the concepts which will be reconfigured in each level. However, they are mutually dependant, therefore even though they belong to different levels of analysis and will be approached from different theoretical body of work, they are influencing each other (as the arrows represent). The relations presented in Figure 1 represent the methodological and theoretical framework of this thesis, that is feminist new materialism. Each of the squares are the focus of different chapters in the thesis. Technology is developed in chapter five which reconfigures the notion of communication through language. Feminism is carried out in chapter three which reconfigures the notion of gender through affects in chapter three. Literature is defined in chapter four which reconfigures the notion of politics through affinities.

Beginning with a brief description of the nature of this research, that is a hybrid between the Humanities and the Social Sciences, I aim at situating the research and the reader into the different epistemological relations of the thesis. Firstly, I present the pillar of literary studies to display the complexities regarding its object of study. Afterwards, I produce a connection with feminist theory and how feminist theory is trying to solve the differences between the Social Sciences and the Humanities. To continue, this chapter will show the different nature of literature when relating with contemporary society, regarding the information society. Once the connection between literature and information technology is outlined, I connect information technology and feminism. In this section, I will mainly develop three different areas concerning the relation between literature and technology regarding politics (section 1.6.1.), the virtual discourse implied in gendered bodies (section 1.6.2.), and the presentation of a framework that wants to erase categorical dichotomies (section 1.6.3.). Finally, this chapter includes a framework that works with the three of them transversally: new materialism.

## **1.2. Feminist (in)visible alliances<sup>3</sup>: the importance of methodological bridges between the Humanities and the Social Sciences**

Some authors working on the latent debate between the humanities and the social sciences point out the differences that these two areas carry out when producing scientific knowledge (Spivak, 2003); or more concretely a doctoral thesis (Griffin, 2011). In this thesis, this interdisciplinarity is beneficial for two of the pillars building this research: feminist and literary studies. On the one hand, due to the context in which the present thesis is being developed, that is a huge economic and environmental crisis, feminism is led to necessarily build bridges between humanities and social sciences more than ever (Silius, 2010; Asberg et al., 2011). On the other hand, literary studies

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<sup>3</sup> “(In)visible alliances” makes reference to a panel in the 11th Conference of the European Society for the Study of English. It was a panel designed by Adelina Sánchez, H  l  ne Quanquin, and Martine Monacell. This panel aimed at presenting different examples in literature where the opposition between sexes was not confrontational but relational.

need to explore new alliances in order to avoid problems concerning the “subjectivity” or “accuracy” of its research object, which has been in dispute for quite a while (Eagleton, 2012). However, this is not an easy task, neither to the researcher (because of the differences), nor for the reader (because he or she expects a rigid format that may not be followed in this thesis). I plan to complement each other (the humanities and the social sciences) with the methodology by introducing this bridge at two levels. Firstly, the practical one defining the advantages and disadvantages for a researcher that such a bridge brings in terms of methodology and the writing of academic pieces of work through Gabriele Griffin’s work (2011). Secondly, I include the conceptual and political benefits of this union speaking through Gayatri Spivak’s work (2003) and Patricia Clough’s theory of affects (2009).

#### 1.2.1 Writing a scholarly piece in between the Social Sciences and the Humanities.

The distinction between the humanities and the social sciences is not a clear-cut one in hybrid environments, although there are many handbooks and edited books that present different strategies (Kirszner & Mandell, 2012; Owens, 1997; Cunningham & Reich, 2009; Outhwaite & Turner, 2007). These strategies differ depending on the area of knowledge (even more when referring to writing scholarly pieces). Before continuing, it is important to clarify what is meant by studies coming from the humanities. For the purposes of this thesis, I will take the definition given by Griffin (2011: 91), which she takes from a modification of the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council:

subject domains [...] which include classics, ancient history, archaeology; visual arts and media; literature and languages; medieval and modern history; linguistics; librarianship, information and museum studies; music and performing arts; philosophy, religious studies and law.

Even though the subject areas may differ from one country to another technological studies or sociology are excluded from this classification. However, both of these areas do pertain to the framework of this thesis<sup>4</sup>.

The main problem in trying to combine these areas of knowledge in one thesis often resides in the methodological section. The Humanities do not have a methodological section separated from the theoretical one (Griffin, 2011); or at least not in the way social scientists think of methodology as a straightforward plan in which cause and consequences play a crucial role. That is to say, in the humanities the methodological plan is already part of the theoretical plan since it includes the definition of concepts enabling the plan strategy, while in the social sciences the methodological plans look more like strict instructions of the research field and plan of analysis. Griffin (2011) distinguishes several problems in dealing with a methodological process in the humanities. First, the absence of a proper research method other than “make it up as they go along” (ibid, 93). The second obstacle (although it could be also an advantage) is the increase towards interdisciplinarity. Interdisciplinary research means working in groups from different disciplines but if you are not able to express how you do what you do, the collaboration becomes difficult. At the same time, she also claims that several methods coming from the humanities had been appropriated by the social sciences<sup>5</sup> because both areas are closed. Additionally, the Humanities have a robust set of methods in order to carry out collaborative research, which is the goal of Social Scientists. Griffin’s analysis of the stake of the debate shed light on one possible way to overcome the already mentioned problem with the object of study in literary studies methodologically speaking: “[L]iterary research is much more than textual analysis. The failure to recognize this is a failure of the research imagination. Knowledge of a range of methods enables researchers to ask different research questions.” (Griffin, 2011: 95). Thus, even though the social sciences and the humanities follow a different

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<sup>4</sup> It could be argued that technological studies could take part in the visual arts and media; in fact, there are doctoral theses written on visual arts and technologies. One example of this is Nùria Vergés’s PhD thesis (2012): *Gènere i TIC: el procés d’autoinclusió de les dones en les TIC. Una aproximació des de les tecnòlogues artístiques i les tecnòlogues informàtiques*. However, a tendency towards the demonization of the technologies in the area of Humanities started to develop in the middle of the nineties (Griffin, 2011) and keeps on being relevant nowadays (Bhabha, forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> According to Griffin (2011) the “appropriated” methods are visual methods, discourse analysis, textual analysis, computer-aided discourse analysis, ethnographic research method, and creative work.

methodological structure formally, but the methods used are worth the risk of creating the methodological bridge advantageous between the Social Sciences and the Humanities.

### 1.2.2. Conceptual and political benefits of the bridge.

I would like to start this heading by quoting Gayatri Spivak (2003: 28) from her *Death of a Discipline*:

The confrontation of old Comparative Literature and Cultural/Ethnic Studies can be polarized into humanism versus identity politics. Both sides trivialize reading and writing as the allegory of knowing and doing. Both serve as powerful performative examples of an unexamined politics of collectivity.

Even though Spivak is talking about two disciplines in dispute, it is interesting that she compares those two with humanism and identity politics. Identity politics (as if pertaining to the social sciences) seems to be confronted with the human subject, precisely because of the universalizing essence covers this feminist term. However, humanism is equally criticized here and summarized in contemporary feminist philosophy as the ability to hegemonize the centre of knowledge and reality in the Human. According to Spivak (2003), both of these positions are underexplored political stances. In a similar vein, the Humanities and the Social Sciences separated from each other trivialize, according to her, the political in feminist theory.

Contemporary feminist research deals with confronting arguments about the benefits or even possibilities of relating theory and empiricism (Harding, 2008; Grosz, 2010; Silius, 2010). I have decided to avoid the debate because I strongly agree with Asberg et al. (2011: 13) in the need to become more visible through alliances “between feminist theory, humanities research, and technoscience [...]”, rather than differentiating itself from other areas of knowledge within feminism and in relation with other theories. I argue that the connection is produced with the “theory of affects” (Clough, 2009). Clough’s definition of the body is conceptualized under what she terms “new empiricism” (after Deleuze’s “infra-empiricism”). This theory reinforces the social

sciences after the methodological scissions that the cultural turn has imposed. According to her work, the Social Sciences are in crisis because of the current critiques to representationalism that are produced in contemporary theory. Representationalism is a practice embedded in social constructivism, a turn that has totalized the production of knowledge in the Social Sciences. Moving away from this stance, Clough (ibid) presents her understanding of empiricism, of social sciences, as a post-humanism, and because is viable without representationalist practices. Thus, her empiricism is built upon the reality that we are engaging with. That is to say, affects are part of the gathered empirical data. Her argument is that there is a need to take up a sociological method to regulate bodies through governance and affect by relating “affective capacities at the population level” (ibid, 51). This is an example of what Spivak was pursuing at the beginning. It provides an example of how a hybrid research between social sciences and humanities works for feminist research and a very successful entry point in order to carry out the analysis of this research. For this reason, the first level of analysis will be built up around the theory of affects.

### **1.3. From post-modernist paradoxes for literary studies to post-humanist and post-colonial contributions: mapping literary theory**

Post-modernism has implied an epistemological difference in the referentiality of the objects of study in all areas of knowledge. That is, theoretically speaking, post-modernism has aimed at shifting the object of study in every academic discipline. Literary theory is not an exception (Widdowson, 1999; Wolfe, 2009; Eagleton, 2012; Fludernik, 2009). In this field, Post-modernism generated controversies regarding the “objectivity” of the object of study for literary theory. These controversies have important implications regarding the scientificity of its object of study. Its definition becomes problematic because if we think of everything as text, there will not be any limits for the object of study (Eagleton, 2012; Wolfe, 2009) and these limits are necessary for addressing the relation between author, text and context (Fludernik, 2009). Generally speaking, these debates are grouped in two different areas that have to

do with the idea that everything is text (or more widely the nature of language) and the disruption of the notion of subject in all its forms (which implies differences in the narrative characters and the authors). These results in an accusation to literary criticism of not being able to perform “objective” analyses since the subjectivity of author and reader permeate the analysis of the work (Widdowson, 1999; Wolfe, 2009) and this does not allow the scientific distance presupposed in classical objectivity.

By the beginnings of the 20th century, the American tradition on literary criticism settled the basis of what they considered that literature was about. Before the post-modern turn, the text was all that mattered methodologically speaking (objectivity came just by following the text, which often presented just one “correct” reading) and epistemologically speaking (the text was the object of literary theory) (Widdowson, 1999). Moreover, literature became the most faithful proof of what it meant to be human or what was thought as human values (Widdowson, 1999). Therefore, literature was the most authentic proof of anthropocentric views of knowledge. By the end of the century, it became problematized and the conceptualization of literature as the faithful empirical proof of past and present realities that elevated the category of ‘Human’ as the centre of knowledge became highly problematic.

According to Ahmed (1998: 95), “[p]ostmodernism lacks [a belonging] subject, even if it is produced through narrativisations of its subject.” This means that even when we try to analyze what has commonly been presented as the subjects of literary works, these are no longer valid in order to understand what type of reality a particular author is describing. This is crucial in literary theory because it has always been conceived that what literature did best was the representation of different subjectivities. This representation was even the focus of the literary analysis produced by some researchers (Souter, 2000). With post-modernism, subjects are not narrations of represented realities because subjects become something else, or rather nothing more. Thus, a question remains in literature that conveys all these different concerns by the authors reviewed so far: *what matters for literary theory?* As Souter (2000: 348 [author’s emphasis]) points out:

Postmodern theory conventionally insists that selves are constructed through discourse. Although this is true, it is not the whole story. Selves are constituted through language and discourse, but not *only* through language and discourse.

Language stops being the centre of the object of study and the division performed between subject/object is blurred. The two key concepts used to describe the literary object, namely “text” and “object/subjects” of study, are dismantled and a veil of uneasiness is thrown into the methodological objectives of the discipline. It is precisely here that the crisis confronting the Humanities and the Social Sciences becomes pertinent, since it also produces a crisis in how we understand “language” (Wolfe, 2009). In the field of literary studies, this is translated into a debate between “scholars committed primarily to matters of history and scholars committed to matters of theory” (ibid: 101). According to Wolfe (2009: 103), this means that “the subject matter of literary and cultural analysis loses all standing as a *theoretical* object” (Wolfe, 2009: 103 [author’s emphasis]). Post-modernism goes beyond including epistemology and ontology and implies differences in the way we understand language and subjects. Without an object of literary studies, another question, apart from the matter of literature, jumps into the academic debate. This one expresses other even more important methodological nuance of the problem presented: *how does literature matter?* Souter (2000: 346) claims that so many questions and problems leave the discipline of literature because of relativism in which almost everything is valid. For example, interpreting a novel according to one’s experiences without taking into account certain criteria may lead to an impossible evaluation of a text. Therefore, if literature is a human representation of certain historical period, the discipline faces the ontological separation of the different elements constituting the research object. Barad would explain this paradox as one contained in “Representationalism”, a way of doing science or understanding knowledge by “[...] tak[ing] the notion of separation as foundational” (Barad, 2007: 137). Historically, the debate around the representationalist (or not) nature of language has been very present in this discipline. Literature tries to either retain its representationalist nature as the voice of something that is absent (Fludernik, 2009); or move away precisely from this representationalism and linear perspective offered by it which relate author and reader in a uni-directional mode (Gunew 2009; Bhabha, 1994; Durrant, 2004).

In order to avoid a myriad of separations paralyzing the way in which literature is analyzed, the first step is blurring the distinction between a subject (who does not exist anymore) and object (which is produced entirely according to a notion of textuality in post-modernist accounts). There is a need to find the connection that treats author, context, text, etc. as mutually implicated in each other to acknowledge the many different entities participating in the “literary product” (Grosz, 1995). Otherwise Literature keeps on being understood in several categorical terms: fictional or not, well-written or not, etc. Following these categories, a piece of work is classified accordingly to their fit or not in the literary canon. Throughout the history of Literature this canon is defined differently from time to time and place to place (Eagleton, 2012: 28). In other words, the literary canon is not “objective” and, as feminism has demonstrated, it is also gender and race prejudiced (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979), which turns it into an oppressive structures of power based on androcentric premises.

Therefore, a critical reflection is needed in order to find a methodological strategy for answering the previous question, that is *how does literary theory matter?* Very noticeably, a different orientation for the referentiality of the object of study is produced: we move from what-questions to how-questions (Wolfe, 2009), which is characteristic of the post-humanist turn<sup>6</sup>. Cary Wolfe (2009: 11) bases this move in the work of the philosopher Jacques Derrida, who presents writing as the ontological iteration of meaning. According to him, writing is the entanglement of different material traces in which events become and subjects are involved. “Becoming” is expressed in Deleuzian feminist theory as the act in which subjects, objects, and different events (among many other entities relating in a particular phenomenon) are developed and developing in an intense way (Buchanan & Colebrook, 2000)<sup>7</sup>. While some feminist theory has considered this writing process as part of a linguistic reductionism (Butler, 1990); contemporary feminist philosophy understands it as the inseparability between matter and meaning: “material-discursive practices” (Haraway, 1991) or “the materiality

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<sup>6</sup> This also pertains to the new materialist turn because it is something they both have in common, but it will be explored further on in section 1.7.

<sup>7</sup> This means that subjects and object do not have a definite form. Matter is always in a constant process of developing; that is, it is always evolving. This is a very complex concept which, in this thesis, refers to the fact that different entities participating in a concrete phenomenon or object of study are never finished but always in progress.

of language” (Kirby, 2008). Thus, if writing is *difference* and a subject becomes by a system of differences (Wolfe, 2009); consequences for literature and communication are straightforward. The post-humanist turn has brought literature an important number of difficulties for its analysis (because of media studies, cultural studies, etc.). However, it has also brought the possibility to become its own object/subject of study at a material level, which, for feminist theory, it also implies a political level. Going back to Wolfe’s understanding of Derrida’s thinking, she explains that “difference” is only possible if different elements (or elements composing an event) are relating in time and space. That is to say, literature is always in the making, which is the main contribution of post-humanism and new materialism to the discipline.

Communication is a dynamic process in which author, text, reader, and context are relating to each other in a permanent process of becoming. The affective nature of literature as its own material subject (and not a linguistic representation), and the possibility to understand literature by dislocating time and space (as the virtual context that Facebook shows) is provided by the digital context of this thesis. This offers the differentiation of the literary object by entangling it with the many different elements that “intra-act”<sup>8</sup> (Barad, 2007) in its formation: language, politics, communication, gender, and relations in the making. That is, the literary object will be a process in which language, politics, communication and gender become during the relation and not previously to it. Thus, the literary object is always the combination of these elements together. This understanding of literature implies a resistance to represent new hierarchies of one/other (as critiqued in post-colonial literature), a critique on representationalism (as critiqued by new materialism), and the troubling of one’s own identity (Herbrechter & Callus, 2008) (as critiqued in post-humanism). This produces a conceptualization of literature as a performative act of reading and a political matter implying its own self-transformation. Following Barad’s theory of “performativity” (2003), a performative reading of literature entails understanding literature as an entity with its own agency in order to produce changes in the way society is built. Therefore, during the entanglement between text, author, reader, context, space and time, the

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<sup>8</sup> This concept will be developed in the last chapter but basically it is the priority of relations over related entities.

political of literature becomes a dynamic property of the work itself. Thus, literature is not a representation of reality but matter self-transformation. Whether this is a determined literary work is feminist or not belongs to yet a different step that needs to be pursued. In this thesis, as the following section shows, we will include Toni Morrison as the first exponent of the political in literature being feminist only “provisionally”. The capacity that literature has in order to break with representationalist practices that divide the world into hierarchical structures constitutes a possible answer for the question *how does literature matter*, that is politically through its own self-becoming.

#### **1.4. Literature and feminism: an overview**

In the same way that post-modernism brought uncertainty to the discipline of Literary Studies, it brought strength to Feminist Literary Theory. This can be observed in the work of the researchers such as Silvia Caporale-Bizzini, Pilar Villar, Adelina Sánchez and Eva Aldea. They provide a different definition of literature that regards the aforementioned problems as active possibilities to alter oppressing structures, which otherwise could be used to reinforce patriarchal practices in literature. Taking into account the complexity concerning the concept of subject, Caporale-Bizzini (1995) tries to merge modernism and post-modernism through reading Foucault as part of the feminist political agenda adopting his concept of subjectivation. In this way, Caporale-Bizzini introduces a wider re-conceptualization of the political subject. She proportions different subjectivities in the literary analysis that do not correspond to narrativizations of the story. These subjectivities are political components of the every-day life. On the other hand, and more focused on the debate about text-context, through Cixous’ definition of language and Fanon’s colonized subject, Villar (2006) allows her readers to understand a feminist politics away from the classical identity politics, leading the movement to essentialist approaches. This implies new definitions about the meaning of “text”, which Sánchez (2007: 19) identifies as a process of acquiring meaning “when it [the text] enters the subjectivity of the reader, who is approaching it from different

receptive codes and applying different decodifying systems<sup>9</sup>”. This definition entangles the text with many other entities in order to acquire meaning. Similarly, Aldea (2011) combines all these efforts to re(con)figure the whole notion of literature through the concept of the novel and magical realism following a Deleuzian philosophy. That is to say, she distinguishes “magical realism from its representative function [since] text presents reality.” (ibid, 8).

This effort presents feminist literature as a move beyond the representationalist strand that was outlined in the previous heading. These literary moves present a combination of a set of characteristics being developed by a branch of contemporary feminist philosophy focused on understanding the materiality of language away from linguistic reductionisms. This is the case of Vicki Kirby (1997; 2008), who proposes a Derridean reading of the text by which the text is equated with nature; thus “there is no outside of nature.” It is precisely in this nature where we can find Caporale-Bizzini’s political subject (1995), away from identity politics (Villar, 2006) becoming within the different connections produced in Sánchez’s definition of text (2007) in order to create a literature which is a performer of the world, of nature, of reality (Aldea, 2011). Thus, literature is a self-presentation of an instance of reality with its own agency to change unequal structures of power.

As it has been outlined in the previous section, the literary canon seems to be problematic within a feminist context for several reasons, such as imprecision, misunderstanding, false assumptions or naturalization. As Widdowson explains (1999: 13), “[t]he problem is, however, that the [...] canonizing process is cognate with the discourse of evaluation [...]: the criteria are imprecise, unexplained, tacitly assumed, and thoroughly naturalized.” Feminist theory points out two main disadvantages of this process of “canonization” for contemporary society. Firstly, the before mentioned evaluative discourse belongs to the hegemonic discourse of a certain culture, which even though it varies from time to time and place, to place it always corresponds to an androcentric, sexist, racist and heterosexist discourse. This heterosexist discourse

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9 “[e]l texto en sí no existe [...] Sólo adquiere significado cuando su escritura se adentra en quienes la leen desde diferentes códigos de recepción, aplicando esquemas descodificadores de forma muy diversa”. (From now on, the translations provided in this thesis are all my own).

divides processes into unreal dichotomies of power and agentful Ones versus oppressed and agentless Others. These criteria used by literary canon belong to patriarchy or the oppressive system and are tacitly assumed and naturalized.

Literature and feminism have related to each other differently depending on the moment, framing their object of study. At the beginning (equality feminism), the main attempt was to make visible the different literary works produced by women as well as to find out how many pseudonyms were hiding female writers. Afterwards (feminism of difference), the focus was on what Hélène Cixous (1976) denominated “écriture féminine”, that is to say, “finding a style of women’s own”, which concerns the main worries of women and for women. With the coming of post-modernism a new question emerged regarding the very concept of “feminist” text. For instance, creating a feminist literary canon<sup>10</sup> implies internal debates because feminism has only *paradoxes to offer*<sup>11</sup>. Categorizing one work or one writer as feminist is even more difficult since applying certain characteristics is not enough to define it as feminist (Grosz, 1995). In this regard, Elisabeth Grosz (1995) presents four different lines of thought that identify a text as feminist: a. those defending the feminist nature of the text according to the sex of its author, b. the sex of its reader, c. different characteristics in its style, and d. the content of the novel.

As Grosz (1995) defends, this classification takes those elements as independent from each other and denies the explosive potential of a text. One clear example of the state of this debate is Toni Morrison as a writer. Reviewing the classification provided by Grosz (1995), it can be seen how Morrison’s work could not be defined as feminist. First, as a black female writer, she rejects any kind of racist labelling that separates her from other female writers:

A woman wrote a book on women writers, and she has an apology in the preface in which she explains why the book doesn’t include any black women writers. She says she doesn’t feel qualified to criticize their work. I think that’s dishonest scholarship.

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10 Many attempts to create a feminist literary canon have been produced. As an example see Gilbert & Gubar, 1979

11 In using this expression I am echoing Thiele (2014) who, in turn, echoes Joan Scott.

[...] as though our [black characters] lives are so exotic that the differences are incomprehensible (Morrison, 1994: 121).

She claims the need to unify literary scholarship in order to be able to create alliances in contemporary society. Her novels are not exotic or incomprehensibly different and, because of that, they should not be classified in one type of literature or another. Furthermore, Morrison's narrative is not "teleological" since she does not intend to forget, either to remember some kind of history (as the end of *Beloved* demonstrates). This means that by blurring past and present, she is enacting changes in the future. Thus, she is not rescuing from the past, neither is she denying it. Rather, she proposes an epistemology based on processes that consider time as material, in the sense that time embodies past, present and future (Morrison, 1992).

Secondly, she also denies to be defined as feminist according to the sex of the reader because her work is not centered on a specific reader. Her work focuses on the forces uniting author and reader. These forces create the textual "product" afore-mentioned by Grosz (1995):

My writing expects, demands participatory reading, and that I think is what literature is supposed to do. [...] The reader supplies the emotions. [...] My language has to have holes and spaces so the reader can come into it. He or she can feel something visceral, see something striking. Then we [you, the reader and I, the author] come together to make this book, to feel this experience. (Morrison, 1992: 25)

Thirdly, the style of her writing is not always well received by some people in the general public of United States, due to the many different readings that it offers<sup>12</sup>. Nevertheless, her style is part of the materiality of the text that crosses dualisms in order to potentiate its material nature. She produces self-representations of blackness which are contradictory, and because of that, they can receive multiple readings:

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12 Interview with Morrison (2012): "I want to feel what I feel even if it is not happiness" <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/apr/13/toni-morrison-home-son-love> Last visited: 8/8/2012. Even black contemporary writers, such as Richard Wright accused her of "washing the dirty clothes in public" (Gallego, 1999), and, because of that, of being contrary to the Black movement.

If we follow through on the self-reflexive nature of these encounters with Africanism, it falls clear: images of blackness can be evil *and* protective, rebellious *and* forgiving, fearful *and* desirable – all of the self-contradictory features of the self. (Morrison, 1992: 59 [author’s emphasis]).

Since Morrison does not fit in any of these definitions, how do we know that Morrison can help to move towards a feminist politics? Moving beyond author-reader, text-reality, or men-women dichotomies Morrison becomes feminist “provisionally”. Using again Grosz’s words (1995: 23): “a text is feminist or patriarchal only provisionally, only momentarily, only in some but not in all its possible readings, and in some but not in all its possible effects”. That is why feminist literary scholarship needs to be performed through “close readings” (Lukic and Sánchez, 2011), “provisional cuts” (Lykke, 2011) or “agential cuts” (Barad, 2007); which are part of a new materialist methodology (to be developed in chapter two). Toni Morrison is a maximum exponent of what does it mean to look at literature from a political perspective. Dividing her work into any of the above categories would not acquire the complexity of her work and would only analyse it partially, or in a relative way. Nevertheless, when we understand all of these factors as always already relating, we observe how literature becomes an active agent in social transformation. It is through breaking representationalist practices, dichotomous opposites, and hierarchies of power where literature becomes an act of resistance from social injustices. Feminist literature, as it is case of Toni Morrison, needs to be analyzed from this entangled perspective in which communication becomes the vehicle to produce the analysis.

### **1.5. Entangling literature, technology and feminism**

According to Virginia Woolf (1921), we did not know yet how to make literature, we just move in different directions. I believe that with this statement she was producing a critique to the patriarchal imagery that permeated literature at that time. Conversely, if we read that statement nowadays literally, it can also give us a different reading. Woolf is directing literature to the definition being conveyed in this thesis. The statement can

be read as an attempt to refer to literature not as a passive result of the writer's representation of reality, something that we do not know how to do; but literature as a permanent movement, as an act of becoming in different directions. Accounting for this movement becomes extremely complicated empirically speaking. How is it possible to account for passions and directions performing and performed by literature? How this account is empirically acquired? How do we trace literature in its permanent on going? How do we connect Literature and the Social Sciences?

Terry Eagleton (2012), affirms that the matter for literature is to be found within the division between empiricism and theory, whatever is conceptual (philosophical and abstract) it is more literary than a piece of empirical language (as shopping lists). Thus, the literary object becomes conceptualized through the use that we give to language. If it is poetic in the general sense, it is literature; if not, is part of the “empirical categories.” However, as explained before, it is precisely this “lack of empiricism” what puts in dispute the literary object itself. In order to account for the matter of literature, there must be a transversal approach combining its language, the relations produced between different subjectivities and the material in literature, and its empiricism.

A new discipline called “Digital Humanities” (Berry, 2012) is transforming the Humanities even more requiring transversal approaches to Literature. This relation proposes an understanding of the Humanities (Cultural Theory, Literature, History, etc.) through computational devices that take daily experience and technology as part of the Humanities. However, that such a relationship is mutually dependent is not something new. Thus, in this thesis I aim at finding the social facet of literature via the technological (as it has already been done with music) as well as the different patterns in which both (literature and technology) are mutually influencing to each other.

Coming back again to Eagleton (2012: 30), he says that “[a]mong other things, then, the literary returns us to the ludic roots of our everyday knowledge and activity”. In the following chapter I will argue that SNS is appropriate for “everyday knowledge” and “ludic roots” for our daily activities. Thus, in the present thesis empirical evidences for the social facet of Literature will be pursued in the relation between Literature and Technology. SNS provide an agential and active context for readers in which literature is self-transforming. As Milagros Sáinz (2013) states, SNS are digital platforms created

through different affinities that relate contemporary subjects virtually. SNS are defined as “a new scenario for the study of flow and presence” (Chang & Zhu, 2012). This means that they are configured as spaces where individuals are real by flows of shared information. Complexities dealing with communication arise in this thesis related to the shift(s) produced in the intra-action between Literature and Technology in terms of communication. It is important to analyze its mutual influence and the possibilities that the union between these two areas offers.

#### 1.5.1. Cyberfeminism: going political through the social network.

Cecilia Castaño (2005) offers a critical evaluation of the definition given by feminist theory of “cyberspace”. Cyberspace has been approached either negatively (as a patriarchal domain) or very positively for political purposes. As an example of this last strand, she speaks of Sadie Plant’s consideration of the cyberspace as a place where gender inequalities disappear. It is considered a horizontal space in which individuals can develop their own subjectivities freely. Moreover, it allows a community building by fulfilling one’s own needs and desires without feeling social pressure. Its emphasis on gender, which sometimes tends to make other axes such as race or class invisible, could be cited among the drawbacks that the cyberspace presents. While material limits (accessibility) are also present. Aristeia Fotopolou (2012; 2013) emphasizes the drawbacks that the role of Internet (and specifically SNS) has had offered to feminist politics. On the negative side, SNS are digital platforms which imply certain economical status (to have a personal computer and connection), digital literacy, the ability to speak the language of the majority in a particular platform, and particular limits that each SNS<sup>13</sup>.

In the present thesis, the piece of reality to explore is feminist literary communication and when we think of how literature is mediated in a context to find differences that matter in the way feminist politics is enacted, and even about the concept of gender.

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<sup>13</sup> For example, Facebook, as the chosen SNS, and Morrison’s official page present some limits, such as having access to Internet, a Facebook account, knowing about the author and her novels, speaking English, etc; as well as an economical restriction, because public resources remain open unless it involves private benefits.

Moreover, the particular context is active and dynamically changing beyond the scope of any of the participants, because of the author of the SNS does not have absolute control over it. As we already saw in the previous heading “sharing” is one of the key concepts on which Internet is based.

Haraway (2008) explains her concept of sharing as the possibility to co-exist in a respond-able way. “Sharing” is used here as a possible “figuration” (Haraway, 1991) or metaphor to conceptually enhance the different relations enacting the object of study. This has two important implications for the thesis. This “sharing” involves that many different agents, such as readers, authors, Facebook, space and time share in order to unfold a world in its dynamicity. For instance, in the first level of analysis participants “share” feelings in order to make meaning understandable and the conceptualization of gender is acquired by mutual influence among participants, authors, technology and the researcher. By sharing different opinions and socio-political concerns, oppressions such as the ones presented by Morrison in her novels will not be taken as ontological differences but as possibilities of reworking through each other without erasing their differences. Different elements co-exist with a mutual influence that blurs clear-cut distinctions.

On the other hand, “sharing” also refers to the relation between the researcher and the research. They co-exist and become one through a “respond-able” (Haraway, 2008) move of the researcher towards the research. Thus, I share my knowledge, my materiality and my efforts in order to create something ethically respond-able to social injustices. I look into different inequalities that are voiced in the SNS, but I entangle my own opinion as a researcher with a wider audience present in Morrison’s official Facebook page, that is her readers. We “share” a common political concern that tries to unveil unequal structures of power and we do this by understanding mutually different novels by Morrison or responding towards determined political actions. The socio-political spaces for agitation and contestation come from multiple sites.

1.5.2. Feminist Science and Technology Studies: *How might we theorize bodies as lived and/or as socially situated?*<sup>14</sup>

To answer this question, first we need to understand that or is not an option since there is always a mutual implication on both. Bodies are always entangled with material-discursive practices. Nevertheless, the remaining question after this reflection is also important. Bodies are living and socially situated within a language that is “a living force” (Colebrook, 2008), where knowledge is always situated (Haraway, 1991). The combination of these provides a useful answer in order to understand the type of subjectivities which are created here. According to Castaño (2005: 50),

[n]etworks are not nets to relate oneself with others, but nets to think about oneself, to know oneself, to recognize oneself, to become multiple, to rebel against the system, to belong to a network of realities which are corporeal, social and cultural, technological and animal<sup>15</sup>.

This entanglement of relations leads to Haraway’s (1991) metaphor of the “cyborg.” This metaphor has allowed Haraway to articulate the hybridity of matter and technology in situated bodies. Although this metaphor is not free of criticism<sup>16</sup>, it has been very useful to understand which conditions of contemporary embodiments of matter and information are situating political realities. Besides, Haraway’s metaphor of the cyborg has been considered as “the liberatory potential of science and technology” (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999: 6). This practice of hybridity has not only been applied to bodies but also to the definition of epistemologies<sup>17</sup>, and to the definition of writing as a technological practice (Braidotti, “Cyberfeminism”<sup>18</sup>). Cyberfeminism is not only considered the political activity created in the net but also within technology in general, and writing is also a technological practice. That is why a contemporary writer has been chosen to specify the political in the networking subjectivities. Creative minds need of

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14 (McNeil & Roberts, 2011: 39).

15 “No se trata de redes para relacionarse con otros, sino de redes para pensarse a sí mismo, reconocerse, constituirse en múltiples seres, rebelarse, formar parte de una malla de realidades corporales, sociales y culturales, tecnológicas y animales” (Castaño, 2005: 50).

16 To see a summary of the critical reviews produced towards this concept, which mainly concern relativistic points, see Castaño, 2005.

17 See, for example, Colman 2009a and her concept of “technological epistemologies”.

18 This work of Rosi Braidotti has open access and an unknown date of publication. That is why I reference it with a word, in this case, instead of a year.

new creative contexts in order to move towards a “cybered” feminist politics: “[n]owadays, women have to undertake the dance through cyberspace, if only to make sure that the joy-sticks of the cyberspace cowboys will not reproduce univocal phallicity under the mask of multiplicity” (ibid).

In the relation between Literature and Technology, this will entail to rethink the referentiality of the object of study, as it has been already mapped out throughout this theoretical chapter. As Haraway (1991) and Wacjman (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999) explain, technology is present in our every-day practices; more precisely “technology is a vitally important aspect of the human condition” (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1991:1). In this hybrid condition of the human aspects of life, falling into “technological determinisms” can be very easy. Nevertheless, Donald MacKenzie & Wajcman’s proposal is to acknowledge “the influence of technology upon social relations [since] technology and society are mutually constitutive” (ibid, 23). That is why they do not speak of “social construction” but “social shaping” to avoid “the misconception that there was nothing real and obdurate about what was constructed” (ibid, 18). In this sense, the aim of this thesis is to deepen on the mutual constitution between technology and society in order to establish how the “social shaping of technology” (ibid) influences and is influenced by classical literature. In other words, I am not aiming at determining literature through a technological shaping but rather seeing the mutual relations altering the way both are conceived. Focusing on one particular author (Toni Morrison) and one specific SNS (Facebook) enables a different theorization of this object by changing the research focus. That is, by entangling Literature and Technology we are able to account for a different communicative process that produces relations between the different subjectivities of a literary piece, the audience and their every-day practices, and the possible different political messages that a concrete author is transmitting in their works both, synchronically and diachronically speaking. Using Haraway’s (1991) words, I will be facing the communicative literary process as a “cyborg” in which the before mentioned relations become empirically accessible while materially affecting how we understand the concepts that they relate: Literature and Technology.

### 1.5.3. Third wave feminism: reinforcing dichotomies?

There is a wide tendency among feminist academics and activists to debate on the positioning of waves on the contemporary configuration of feminism (van der Tuin, 2011a). Nowadays, knowledge is created and shared and in the different platforms used for political mobilization. These shifts come together with what has been called information society (Castells, 1996). This leads feminism (politically and theoretically speaking) to also adapt and unfold itself within all these material and discursive shifts directing reality to different conceptualizations and political strategies to unveil structural inequalities.

Van der Tuin (2011a) sketches out a possible conceptualization of feminist waves that does not build upon teleological and linear proximities and distances between feminists. Moreover, waves have mutual influence on each other and are informed in a multi-directional way, for example the relation between teachers and students<sup>19</sup>. Both actors complement each other with new conceptual insights; although this complementation does not always entail identification. Van der Tuin (2011a: 25) calls this process “dis-identification” that “allows for research with waves without repeating the stale pattern of rivalry between women, or the stereotype of an essentialized ‘women’s culture’”. This “dis-identification” means disidentifying while identifying at the same time. Feminists belonging to one certain wave does not entirely identify with each other in the same wave, while they may have resemblance with some others different waves; and feminists identify and distance themselves at the same time producing mutual relations in between different waves.

At present time, feminism has evolved and reformed its postulates (van der Tuin, 2011a; Mestre, 2010; eds. Gronold, Hipfl & Pendersen, 2009). The theoretical framework to be used here, New Materialism, belongs to the third wave feminist epistemology (van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). The third wave of feminism is a re-formulation of the past-present and a future-to-come feminism in the making. That is to say, third wave feminism consists of a re-reading of the classical philosophers,

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<sup>19</sup> A new materialist approach to teaching can be found in *Teaching with Feminist Materialisms* (ed. Hinton & Teusch, 2014).

previous feminist philosophers and a permanent construction of different political subjects (Mestre, 2010: 4). This wave does not pretend to erase differences between women or men/women, but neither does it predicate onto identity politics (considered an individualistic practice) (Thiele, 2014). It is a move towards the multiplicity that hybrid subjects and differing platforms of social contestation are leading feminist research and politics. That is to say, the opening of possibilities, multiplicities, and dynamism is a key factor to understand the hybrid reality that it is being unfolded within real virtualities. Thus, it is necessary to transverse all the different disciplines and multiple dimensions that reality has in order to acquire a sense of the process by which different oppressions and injustices are being developed.

According to Sheyla Benhabib (1987: 80 [author's emphasis]), feminist theory consists of: “*explanatory-diagnostic* analysis of women’s oppression across culture and societies by articulating an *anticipatory-utopian critique* of the norms and values of our current society and culture”. I argue that third wave feminism aims at both with a methodological perspective that goes from the specificity of a diagnosis to the articulation of a more global feminist theory without falling into universalism. In Lazar words (2007: 153):

[...] third wave feminist thinking [...] involves viewing universality in concrete rather than abstract terms, based on acknowledgement of specific differences in the material conditions, contexts, and situations of women’s lives. Only by attending to, instead of negating, difference can feminists identify and theorize more accurately the commonalities of gender oppression, and build alliances among women in tackling specific issues and achieving concrete political goals.

## **1.6. New Materialism: third wave feminist epistemology**

After the previous literary review and specified the characteristics of the object of study involved, it is time to develop the theoretical framework that informs the results obtained in the analysis of the shift(s) produced within the relation between feminist

literature (Morrison) and SNS (Facebook). New materialism is an epistemological<sup>20</sup>/methodological trend that has entered the academic arena not as one of the theoretical frameworks of third wave feminism (van der Tuin, 2009) instead of a contestation theory. It seeks to convey its epistemological cartography by postulating *affirmative readings* of past theories, instead of critical ones. A cartography of feminist epistemology is a methodological practice in which different approaches relate with each other in order to inform a particular theoretical framework. A cartographical approach implies previous bodies of theory by approximation instead of distantiation. This metaphor explains the mapping of the different theories in a horizontal way. As previously defined dis-continuity allows new materialism to be a transversal theoretical framework. In Latour's words (2004 in: Kirby, 2008: 229-30) "[c]ritique as a repertoire is over. It has run out of steam entirely, and now the whole question is, 'how can we be critical, not by distance but by proximity?'". In other words, it advocates for the necessity to avoid teleological narratives that involve the improvement of one theory above the previous one as well as providing *breaks through*, instead of *breaks with* these theories. Breaking through instead of with implies precisely thinking through dichotomies by blurring the clear cut boundaries artificially created between them. A group of contemporary feminists try to break through contemporary paradoxical dualisms such as real/representation (Colebrook, 2000; Barad, 2007; Revelles-Benavente, 2014a), object/subject (Haraway, 1991, 2008; Barad, 2007), or language/matter (Haraway, 1991; Kirby, 2011, 2008; Colebrook, 2008, Sheridan, 2002). They propose "univocity" that means the expression of truth through affirmative relations, and, at the same time, avoiding exhausting dichotomical poles (Colebrook, 2002).

Through this theoretical framework, and taking into account new forms of communication established with the SNS, it is possible to theorize an object/subject of research within the union between text (language), matter (gender) and politics (characteristic of literature enhanced through SNS). These three issues (language, gender, and politics) are dynamic and multiple, and the object of Literary Studies from a

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20 I am aware of the problems that "epistemology" may present in terms of representation of knowledge (Hekman, 2010). Nevertheless, I think that epistemology is part of the breaking up of dualisms that this theory postulates. Thus, epistemology and ontology go hand in hand (Barad, 2007; Tuana, 2008). In addition, I consider the practices of knowing part of the apparatus because of its instrumental character.

new materialist perspective is the need to capture the momentum in its fluid nature. It is precisely because this framework is an ontology of the process (Braidotti, 2012) that this theoretical framework provides a good ethic-onto-epistemological site for political agitation (as it promotes the union between theory and practice Thiele, 2014). Thus, it complexifies and specifies particular stances of reality in order to be able to produce patterns, commonalities or processes in which certain social hierarchies are being enacted in order to produce a change before it has been already materialized. It advocates for a politics of the process instead of a politics of the results (Grosz, 2005). This framework also allows re(con)figuring the category of gender, so in dispute lately, by opening it out with affirmative approximations and multiple dimensions. Situating gender in this information society from a new materialist perspective also implies understanding technology “*as a system of movement* [which questions] what types of structures can this system produce” (Colman, 2009b: 149 [author’s emphasis]). Thus, it involves a focus on the how rather than on the what. This relationship between literature, feminism and technologies involves abstracting reality to the level of an active process instead of a passive result.

#### 1.6.1. New materialist conversations: engaging with the critiques

Joan Fujimura (2006) establishes a methodological framework in order to perform a “Critical Sociomaterial Approach” to the biological sex determination<sup>21</sup>. In this method, she challenges the researcher to question what is considered valid data and what she calls “awkward surplus” (disturbs the results of a scientific experiment). Results not fitting the “researcher’s initial desires” are hidden. She warns the researcher that in any experiment there is a general background in which that type of knowledge is being produced and also directs the research questions. That is, epistemologies are also

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<sup>21</sup> In spite of the fact that the conclusions of the article may lead to a hierarchical position of gender and sex, in which gender seems to reformulate what sex means (social over material), this article is very useful in understanding the politics of the “knowledge economy” in which any kind of research is valid. I am very indebted to the class “Matters of Bodies: Nature Deconstructing Itself” imparted by Karen Barad during the Winter Term (2014) at UCSC and my classmates’ reflections.

political and whatever type of epistemology and critiques are surrounding any object of study matter to understand its institutionalization<sup>22</sup>.

This reasoning highlights the importance of scrutinizing a determined framework before applying it to the research in question. Even though during this chapter I have explained how adequate New Materialism is to understand the phenomenon of this thesis, a further step is required. This step is the review of the epistemological debates that this theory has produced in the feminist arena. New materialist researchers think of their differences (dis-identification) with other feminist researchers through the commonalities they share (identification). However, it is precisely this move that has been criticized (Hemmings, 2011; Davis, 2012; Ahmed, 2008). This practice is important in order to understand the enactment of the affirmative readings, and also the diffractive readings (Barad, 2007) that articulate them.

In order to introduce this debate, I would like to start echoing Myra Hird's (2009: 342) words paraphrasing the editors of the volume *Material feminisms* (2008): it will "spark intense debate". This debate is very interesting because I believe it has produced myriad encounters between contemporary feminists who attempt to explain very important concepts such as language, matter, politics and the body. Its intensity is growing and numerous responses are being thrown in different journals in the feminist academic arena<sup>23</sup>. It started with Sara Ahmed's (2008) contribution to the *European Journal of Women's studies* under the title of "Imaginary prohibitions". Ahmed (2008) opened the debate citing the work of Elizabeth Grosz, Elizabeth Wilson, and Viki Kirby among others by establishing that what Hird (2004) calls "new materialism" is a totalizing gesture that has reduced the history of feminism as an anti-biological move towards the body. Hird (2004: 227) defines New Materialism as "think[ing] materiality without the usual accompaniment of essentialism, where matter is understood as an inert container for outside forms." While this theory appears out of context, or without any other references in order to know who did establish a separation between movement and

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<sup>22</sup> Ana M. González Ramos (2014) pursues a similar critique on science focused on the methodological practices, such as peer-review, that institutionalize the state-of-the-art, the production of knowledge.

<sup>23</sup> Here, it is going to be very briefly summarized because even though this debate is the cause of the specialization of new materialism, an entire chapter would be needed to fully analyze the scientific journals and different nuances that lead the debate to an even institutional level.

matter as self-transforming (Ahmed, 2008; Hemmings, 2011); Hird (2004) also explains that her article is producing a distinction between theoretical framework and cultural theory having in mind a reformulation of matter understood as the body beyond social constructions, and movement of political agitation becoming in different connections. Hird (2004) focuses her critique on accounts of the body in the psychological and the physical dimension (reason why Ahmed considers her account totalizing), but Hird's article (*ibid*) is just a cartography of contemporary thinkers re-working matter as a dynamic movement. Later on, she (Hird, 2009: 329-30) expands her conceptualization of the body through "engag[ing] with affective physicality or human-non human encounters and relations" and providing names for the division of matter as passive and culture as active.

New Materialism has been accused of being totalitarian (Ahmed, 2008), nostalgic or rescuing (Hemmings, 2011) and repetitive (Sullivan, 2012). That is to say, two of its most outstanding nuances (being an affirmative theory while not teleological) are put in dispute. As Kathy Davis (2012: 280-1) states, feminism is a "travelling theory" that in her own words means "a set of ideas which move from place to place, are taken up and rearticulated in different ways [...] between the global and the local". New materialism does so by presenting different cartographies in many areas of reality. That is with meteorological settings (Tuana, 2008), questions of language and nature (Kirby, 2011), diffractively read with contemporary theories such as post-humanism (Thiele, 2014), or taking as empirical examples non-human others (Haraway, 2008). It does not deny previous theories, but neither does it engage gracefully with all of it. New materialism draws important cartographies assisting to understand the way we think with-in the world. According to Coole and Frost (2010: 7):

[New materialists'] wager is to give materiality its due, alert to the myriad ways in which matter is both self-constituting and invested with – and reconfigured by – intersubjective interventions that have their own quotient of materiality.

According to Ahmed (2008: 25) "viewpoint is partly a matter of an impression that has accumulated over time". It is thanks to these viewpoints that we can "sustain multiple readings" (Hird, 2009: 343). New materialism does not deny the embodied experience that each researcher has as part of her becoming feminist researcher. Simone de

Beauvoir (Kruks, 2010), Judith Butler (Kirby, 2006), and the cartographical approach presented by Dolphijn & van der Tuin (2012) represent this affirmative reviewing practice. All in all, new materialism accounts for encounters between humans and non-humans. This is an advantage for this thesis since communication is not about relating humans and technologies. It is about productive encounters between realities and virtualities, humans and technologies, agential and self-transforming presentations. All these elements are present in what van der Tuin (2011c) calls the “a-human” of new materialism. Communication is an ontological performance involved with meaning in order to create, perform and share knowledge, and that feminist accounts on these matters *matters*.

#### 1.6.2. Putting new materialism to work: implications for the relation between Toni Morrison and Facebook.

New materialism is about matter self-transformation, queering cause-effect relationships and a reconfiguration of agency (Coole and Frost, 2010: 9). Thus, gender will be self-transform(ed)ing in the development of this thesis, as well as cause-effect relationships will be avoided by the testing of the methodology. In addition, positioning Facebook as an obvious agential participant will provide the agential space required by new materialism. Before following the explanation of this theoretical framework, and since this is a feminist research, I would like to point out implications that new materialism has for “gender” as a political term. If gender pertains as much to the material as the discursive (as we will see in chapter three), it means that gender necessarily needs to go beyond existential implications of binary sexes, as well as the presence of the technological advances is embedded in this configuration of gender. Keeping in mind that the use of SNS has become one of the most important and relevant activities in this information society in terms of politics (Castells, 2012; Revelles-Benavente, 2014b), it all leads this research to new materialism as the best theoretical framework to be building knowledge with.

New materialism combines the political and the theoretical without engaging in categories, or paradoxes, of either/or which have been contesting different movements

in feminism (such as the afore-mentioned debate on feminist literature). This provides “alternative lines of flight for thought, and enable a feminist practice of difference ‘in-difference’ to the still effective opposition of either a politics of equality/equal rights or a politics of difference as exclusive identity politics” (Thiele 2014: 11). Furthermore, this onto-epistemological framework opens up a conceptualization of ethics (so important in feminist theory and politics) that enables the methodological strategies to focus on specificities in order to reach global process. In Kathrin Thiele’s words (ibid, 15):

only when we let micropolitics have the greatest (global) impact, will we move beyond the stale opposition of a feminist politics aiming at equal rights within the dominant order, and a feminist philosophy of difference that is said to have no ‘real’ political effect

To conclude with this “put into work” it is necessary to come back to the before mentioned theoretical debates regarding the nature of ‘Literature’ or ‘Literary Studies’ or how their analysis can be performed if performed at all. In my opinion, one of the main contributions of this thesis is the enactment of a hybrid methodology between the Social Sciences and the Humanities. This methodology helps to discern the subject/object of Literary Studies from a feminist perspective. In this thesis, Literary Studies is considered a transversal discipline in a new materialist sense. This means that while an essentialist view is not pursued, it is necessary to know *how does literature matter* in a feminist new materialist way. Thus, following the methodology to be presented in the next chapters, the first one is to specify or locate the phenomenon itself in what I consider the most important characteristic of Literature (communication). This focus defines Literature away from fixed identities (through the dynamic relation with SNS as everyday practices); contextually digital, which separates Literature from its conceptualization of the most faithful proof of androcentric views of knowledge; and a re-definition of the concept of language. Literature produces a different kind of matter, as well as a different kind of language<sup>24</sup> (Deleuze, 1997: 229). According to Deleuze (ibid), it is a delirium that at the same time is an affect produced in and out the mind of

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24 The different kind of literary language was already discerned by Richards (1924) in *Literature* (Widdowson, 1999).

the writer. This is how the writer becomes involved in the literary product. It is in “literary production where language is also an actor independent of intentions and authors, bodies as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic generative nodes” (Haraway, 1991: 200). Thus, we need to understand literature as “entanglements”, as processes or fluxes of information (this is precisely what the diffractive methodology was about). Connecting literature more than ever, literary criticism is able to show how politics is viable even without having a fixed identity; the political nature within literature is already almost unquestioned throughout the huge majority of scholars on the topic (Bhabha, 1994; Deleuze, 1997; Spivak, 1988; Aldea, 2011; Gilbert, 1998)<sup>25</sup>. If we start analyzing literature from the political perspective before described, we can include matter into literature turning literature into the agent of knowledge, instead of the passive recipient of research. Thus, literature is being re(con)figured as an act of resistance, which mainly, but not always, depicts some mechanisms in need of change and moved away from its representationalist function (Morrison, 1992; Gunew, 2009; Bhabha 1994; Durrant, 2004). Women’s literature has especially proved to be socially transgressive by crossing the fictive threshold (Rodríguez, 2009). Literature becomes a material enactment of reality able to alter symbolic social structures of power by liberating language from its epistemological and dichotomical imprisonment. Literary language becomes one and the same with the reality being materialized in the novels (Hayles, 2002), as for example the multiplicity of Morrison’s work. In other words, literature becomes a processual ontology of feminist politics by understanding unreal structural dichotomies through each other because “[w]riting in post-modernity is not only a process of constant translation, but also of successive adaptations to different cultural realities.” (Braidotti, “Cyberfeminism”).

## 1.7. Conclusions

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<sup>25</sup> At this point, it is also important to illustrate the other side of the debate; that is, that Literature belongs to the realm of the fictive (Widdowson, 1999). In this thesis, I prefer to retain Literature as part of the real, as intra-acting with the real, and that is why I have avoided thinking of Literature as a fictive production aside from reality. It is the political, the piece of reality that it presents and how it inter-acts with present society that concerns this thesis.

At the beginning of the chapter, the theoretical debate that prompted the research question was outlined: how does literature matter? Due to the present technological changes that information is suffering and people strategies to communicate in global terms, a reformulation of the concept of literature was enhanced during this chapter. This means that literature moves away from androcentric historizations of the canon to be situated dynamically with the information society and goes towards a conceptualization of the object of Literary Studies as a communicative process. By proposing literature as an act of communication, I have shown how different entities take equal part in the political ontology of literature by which it is understood as an active agent. It has been explained that the work of Toni Morrison presents these characteristics confirming not only the suspicions of the attempts to a different conceptualization of literature, but also the need to find a different theoretical framework, that is new materialism. Taking into account that the main contribution of this debate was linking Literature with SNS to provide empirical solutions to analytical paradoxes. This way a link between the Humanities and the Social Sciences was prompted to decentralize the figure of the literary critique as the only one performing an analysis of the novel according to his or her own background.

Once the theoretical framework has been outlined, and after delimitating the theoretical contributions of this thesis, it is important now to know how these achievements are acquired methodologically speaking. This chapter has served the purpose of linking classical literature with the world of the SNS. But taking into account that the main focus of this thesis is on processes and not on results methodological options become narrowed. That is why I present in the next chapter a methodological strategy that pursues the acquisition of the object/subject of studies in an active and dynamic way that is the “diffractive methodology”.

## Chapter 2. Diffractive methodology: relating gendered fluxes

*Measurements are agential practices, which are not simply revelatory but performative: they help constitute and are a constitutive part of what is being measured.*

Barad, "The measure of nothingness"

### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the qualitative methodology to understand deeply one specific communicative process, namely the relation between feminist literature (exemplified by contemporary writer Toni Morrison) and SNS (her official Facebook page). I consider Facebook as the most appropriate and active context to simultaneously explore the relationship between author and readers in place and time. The (re)creation of the novels is enhanced through the debates produced on Facebook. Similarly, the adaptation of the novels to contemporary readership is also reinforced. The diffractive methodology by Karen Barad (2003, 2007) divided into three levels of analysis to reach different dimension of the object of study, is the qualitative methodological approach chosen in the present doctoral work.

This chapter will start with the theoretical definition of "diffractive methodology" mainly through Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007). Following that, I will identify and explain the research questions that have guided this thesis. Next, I will expose why this thesis is focused in the writer/works of Toni Morrison and how the analysis is addressed from Morrison's official Facebook page. To conclude, the different levels of analysis informing this thesis will be outlined with a set of qualitative techniques that are based on feminist critical discourse analysis (Lazaar, 2007; 2005), visual analysis (Bal, 2003), feminist close reading (Luckic & Sánchez, 2011) and visualization of the results through the program atlas.ti and gephi.

## 2.2. Diffractive methodology

In order to avoid simply unifying different methodologies from different disciplines, I present a diffractive methodology (Barad, 2007) that may achieve a rich account of the complexities and fluxes that permeate the society of information (material context of this thesis) and the feminist materialist epistemologies on the basis of this thesis. According to Karen Barad, “[a] diffractive methodology provides a way of attending to entanglements in reading important insights and approaches through one another.” (ibid, 30).

Developing this kind of methodology was prompted by two main facts: the “mirroring effect” coined by Barad (2007: 29) and Bohr’s principle of uncertainty:

I combine Bohr’s notion of apparatuses as *physical-conceptual devices that are productive of (and part of) phenomena* with Foucault’s post-Althusserian notion of apparatuses as *technologies of subjectivation through which power acts*, and with Butler’s theory of gender *performativity which links subject formation as an iterative and contingent process* to the materialization of sexed bodies. (Barad, 2001: 86 [my emphasis])

Barad explains that she has detected a constant effort to explain reality through the ability of the researcher to “mirror” nature through language. Drawing on Haraway (1991), she explains that this mirroring effect comes together with the belief that reflecting is an accurate move in research. “Bohr’s principle of uncertainty” (Barad, 2007) explains how the nature of matter does not become discernible until it is being measured. Thus, it is the entanglement of researcher, results and methodology that makes the nature of matter understandable: “diffraction is not merely about differences, and certainly not differences in any absolute sense, but about the entangled nature of differences that matter” (Barad, 2007: 36). Thus, she changes the “mirroring effect” for the “diffractive effect” to understand matter as the “processing of differences [...] about ways of life” (ibid, 29).

This methodology is performed through the building of “apparatuses”, which are “the entangled effects differences make.” (Barad, 2007: 73) It is a way of understanding reality as a dynamic process in which certain realities are included and excluded at a

certain moment. According to her, “diffraction involves reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge: how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how those exclusions matter” (Barad, 2007: 30). These apparatuses are iterative and therefore what remains excluded in certain entanglements may be part of the inclusion in other unfoldings. This iteration makes the nature of reality always in movement and, for this reason, processes (and not results) are the only certain facts that can be acknowledged. In order to make this movement empirically accessible, I have divided the methodology into three levels of analysis that allow us to see the different relations of inclusion and exclusion produced in the object of study (section 2.4):

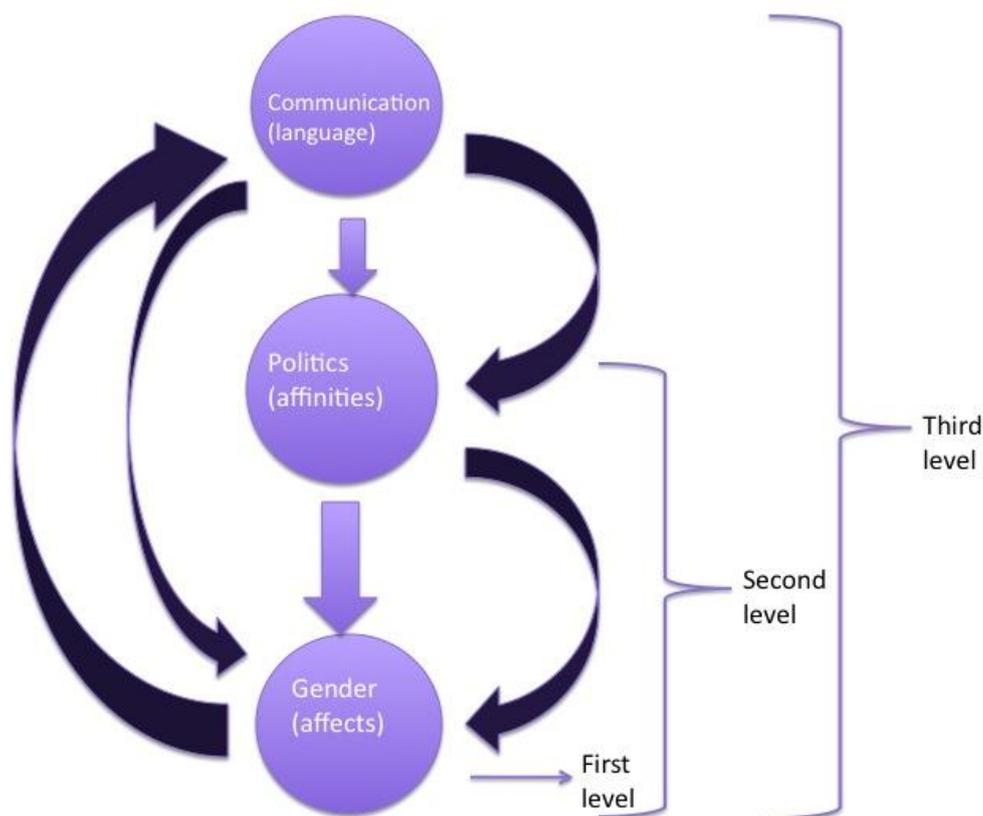


Figure 2: Methodological levels of analysis and analytical agencies

This division develops differences that produce shift(s) in the research according to the specificity of the nature of the research in a particular context (depending on the levels).

Illuminating processes is how we can infer changes in the results before they are produced, which is basic for a feminist politics (Grosz, 2005). Thus, since we are looking for processes, and the methodology is a process itself, the methodology becomes an object of study, *per se*. A further step is then testing the methodology (chapter six), which is one of the contributions of the thesis.

### 2.3. Objectives and research questions

The most important challenge that this research presents is the understanding of the communicative process between authors and readers as the object/subject of feminist literature in the information society context. Linking classical literature and SNS is not as common for contemporary research as it is for the emerging new kind of literature produced for information technologies and literature (known as “Electronic Literature”, Hayles, 2008; eds. Zaldibea, 2014; Adell, 2007, Cayley, 1996). This field has its own literary canon (Hayles, 2012), and variants of it, as popular fiction (Jenkins, 2006) or “fanfiction” (eds. Hellekson & Busse, 2006; Black, 2008; 2009). Recently, there is an increased concern with how these new digital platforms affect the classical hierarchical relations between authors and readers, as Susana Tosco<sup>26</sup> stated in the “First International Conference on Electronic Literature and Visual Arts” (2012). These new non-hierarchical relationships between authors and readers are altering the way literature communicates and *intra-acts* with the audience, which, at the same time, strengthens the political nature of literature. Therefore, in this dissertation, I argue that novels are being simultaneously re-created and re-made as well as multiplied through interactive sites, such as SNS. The research questions (divided in main and sub-research questions) are the following:

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<sup>26</sup> TOSCO, Susana, 2012. Down with the Ivory Tower: New Communities of Readers and authors online”. Paper presentation at *First International Congress on Electronic Literature and Visual Arts*

The main research question of this thesis is: How does the interaction between literature and technology affect the communicative process between Morrison and her readers from a feminist perspective?

- Research sub-question 1: How is gender (in)visibilised through the interaction in the debates between Morrison and her readers on Facebook?
- Research sub-question 2: How does the relation between social networking sites and literature reconfigure feminist new materialist politics?

These questions will help me attain the following objectives, which are ordered according to the main research question and the sub-questions they relate to:

*To analyze the communicative process between real readers and real authors like Morrison through a virtual space and the implications for feminist literature.*

- To identify the strategies by which gender is (in)visibilized in virtual spheres
- To detect the strategies by which Morrison spreads a feminist new materialist politics enacting concepts such as gender and language

This set of objectives and research questions is responsible for the division of the levels of analysis corresponding to the fact that the “phenomenon” is the object of study per se that this thesis wants to explore.

#### **2.4. Selecting the participants**

The anthropologist Frédérique Apffel-Marglin (2011) using diffractive methodology, establishes two steps before encountering the data: explain the research process and clarify the selection. Following Apffel-Margling’s approach, this thesis will follow a bottom-up approach as a departing point. He chooses to let his “hosts guide [the research] rather than being guided by the work of professional anthropologists [...]”

(Apffel-Margling, 2011: 9). In the present research, the people commenting on Facebook will guide the analysis, instead of building upon what other literary critics have said of Toni Morrison's works coming from Literary Studies. However, this does not mean that I will totally avoid other studies, although an extensive review of literature based on Morrison's work will not be provided.

#### 2.4.1. Toni Morrison: performing feminist politics in the information society

Female Afro-american literature is becoming more and more visible and this implies a change in the Black literary canon (Gallego, 1999). Understanding Morrison in the information society is important for the following three reasons. First, we need to point out the conceptualization of gender that she carries out in her novels. Women are the focus of her production although she is not interested in gender explicitly (Morrison, 1983, 2008) or, rather, what I would identify as a classical approach to gender. Her notion of gender is relational, always raced and dynamic (as we will see in chapter three). Secondly, the type of literature that she produces perfectly exemplifies the political nature of literature and a feminist new materialist politics (I will argue further about this in chapter four but this was already explored in chapter one). In her words:

I write [...] what I have recently begun to call village literature, fiction that is really for the village, for the tribe [...] I think long and carefully about what my novels ought to do. They should clarify the roles that have become obscured; they ought to identify those things in the past that are useful and those things that are not; and they ought to give nourishment. (Morrison, 2008: xiii)

Thirdly, she is a contemporary writer and active in SNS, which provides the link between literature and the information society that is a key aspect in the present thesis. Morrison has always been interested in the communicative role of literature as she explains in *Playing in the dark* (1992). Conceptually and politically, she offers various innovative approaches to academic research that have not yet been fully explored. She develops a "village literature" through a global network, as well as connecting the specificity, the "village" (the local) in relation with the global (the information society, via the SNS). She is *situating* (Haraway, 1991) her work.

## 2.4.2. Social Networking Sites: the case of Facebook

According to Gallego (1999: 88), the literature represented by Morrison is dynamic and innovative. However, now we also need to pursue a creative technology for the analysis of Morrison's works. Facebook provides that entry point, since it offers a reflection of literature in a virtual environment that creates a new interactive process between author and reader. As figure 3 illustrates, people make frequent use of Internet for social networking, showing that there are many active users:



Figure 3: Active social network users in Europe. Source: “We are social”<sup>27</sup>

European people use social media an average of one hour and a half per day, as figure 4 shows. And, even in Western Europe Facebook keeps on being the most important social media.

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<sup>27</sup> Both figures (3 and 4) have been obtained from the statistical webpage, “We are social” <http://wearesocial.net/blog/2014/02/social-digital-mobile-europe-2014/>, which gathers the data from the beginning of 2014. Other webpages, such as Comscore (Figure 5), have been consulted but their results belong to 2011. The reason for this is that they compile every four years. The last data produced by this agency is from the period spanning 2007 to 2011.

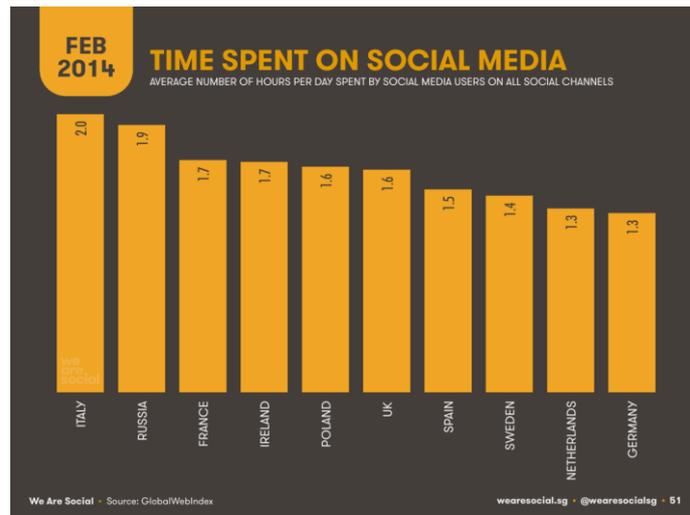


Figure 4: Time spent on social media on the Internet. Source: “We are social”

This means a multiple social scenario (in terms of location, space, time and participants) where Morrison interacts with a wider audience. This communicative process may be exemplified by the numerous SNS, such as Twitter, Flickr or Facebook. However, I am particularly interested in the Facebook role for the following reasons: 1) As shown in Figures 3 and 4, it has a very large community of active participants; 2) the interaction between readers and author is almost simultaneous; 3) the comments allow one to develop full thoughts; 4) Facebook establishes a virtual relationship between real authors and readers, altering the very conditions of this opposite pair, since they become mutually independent. Also, Morrison uses pieces of her own work as quotes to open debates with her readers and we obtain the navigational tools for the “close reading” (Lukic & Sánchez, 2011) of novels from the meanings created by the author on the Facebook page. We will obtain a possible definition of gender, politics, and language in Morrison’s literary production by present interpretation of Toni Morrison, nowadays, that is, intra-acting past and present.

#### 2.4.3. The intra-relation between Toni Morrison and her Facebook page.

Technologies help to combine everyday practices with Literature itself, while at the same time technology finds empiricism and theory mutually dependent on each other. Toni Morrison’s official Facebook page provides a perfect example of this. Her official Facebook page is covered with embodied experiences from people all over the world

who connect their individual meaning of the novels, and the quotes posted on the Facebook page, with their daily practices. Furthermore, the numerous comments, images and posts help to build the empirical data that informs the theory explored thus far, as well as the conceptualization that I will offer in the chapters to follow.



Figure 5: Example of the debates created in the Facebook page

Facebook provides a de-centralization of both the figure of the literary analyst and the subjective descriptions of the literary work, according to his or her own background. That is to say, basing the understanding of the literary work upon what the Facebook community shares offers a different objectivity to the literary analysis.

We are abandoning an androcentric view of knowledge based on the absolute figure of the agential literary critic by sharing the analysis between readers, virtual spaces, the author and the researcher. Thus, it is necessary to build an ethic-onto-epistemological framework (Barad, 2007) that dynamically strengthens digital contexts, literary studies and feminism. In this sense, looking at Morrison's official Facebook page, it can be observed that several debates open with specific quotes from her novels, sparking hundreds of comments through which different readers share their opinions (Figure 6). This creates new meanings through these material discursive practices. Author and readers re-create different meanings departing from some novels written more than thirty years ago, inserting them in the contemporary information society. Thus, SNSs create differing (since they produce a different type of communication and at the same time different physical and temporal contexts in a dynamic way) material-discursive practices.

## 2.5. The research process: the division of the methodology in this thesis

Dividing the research process into these three levels (Revelles-Benavente, 2012) is useful because “they constitute complementary moments of reality” (Apffel-Marglin, 2011: 63). Moreover, thinking through the methodological process becomes essential in a diffractive methodology and for feminist theory, since it is not the same talking about the methods (which operationalize a methodology) versus talking about the methodology (which is the political strategy that a researcher engages with in order to shed light on a given complexity). As Griffin (2011: 93) points out, “‘Methodical’ and ‘methodological’: require systematic deliberation and metadiscursive reflection on the research process.” The three levels of analysis will be separated into three different epigraphs: apparatus, event and phenomenon. They will also be structured into two different parts: the definition of the level (methodological strategy) and the methods used in each one (methodical strategy). Figure 6 shows the methodological process already present in figure 2 but with the name of the levels:

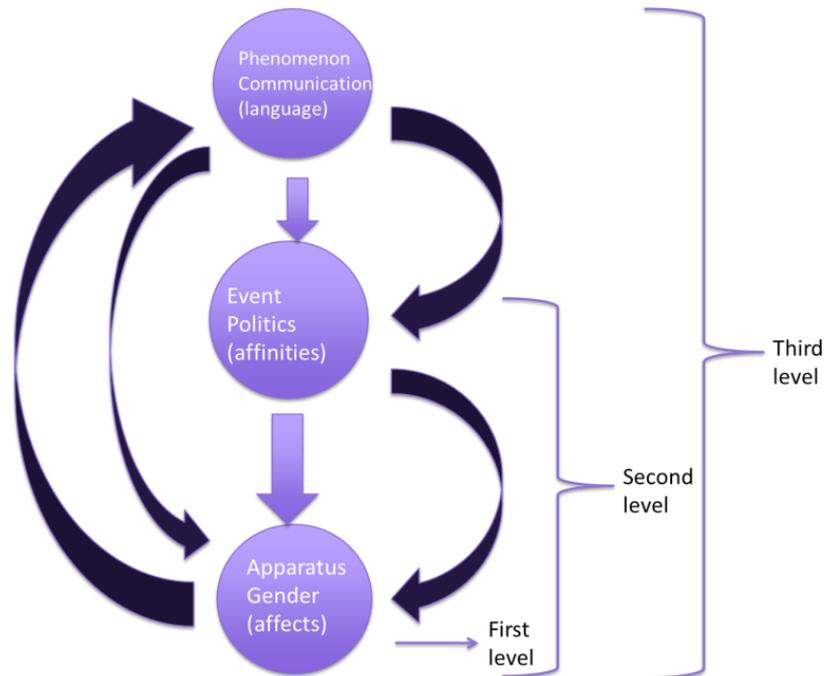


Figure 6: The research process

### 2.5.1. Apparatus (chapter three).

According to Barad,

reality emerges from ‘acts of observation’ and different realities precipitate from different acts of observation. These acts of observation are performed not only by the human scientists and technicians, but also by the experimental apparatuses and everything else. (Apffel-Margling, 2011: 15).

The apparatus is the first level because it is the departing point, an act of observation. In order to be able to start analyzing the shift in the communicative process, we are going to depart from the debates regarding feelings on the Facebook page. Besides, it is the point of departure for every object of study or phenomena insomuch as apparatuses are always phenomena: “apparatuses are phenomena, material configuration/reconfiguring that are produced and reworked through a dynamics of iterative intra-acting.” (Barad, 2007: 231). This will be further explained in chapter 3, but briefly, choosing this departing point comes from the belief that it is through affects that the main characters in Toni Morrison’s novels and Facebook participants relate to each other. Moreover, “affects” have been already used as a possible link between the humanities and the social sciences. That is, as a common entry point (through Clough’s theory of affects). This theory of affects positions individual feelings as the radical units of empiricism (Clough, 2009). That is, embodied experiences are abstract forces relating different subjects and uniting them in an indivisible way; while, at the same time, these same feelings are the conditions of measurability of social change. Given this, feelings become the relational force that enhances gender as a structural difference, while providing the basis for the analysis of the politics in literature.

This starting point is what Barad would denominate the agency of observation or “apparatus” (van der Tuin, 2011a). In the present thesis, it means that the debates on feelings created on the Facebook page will be *a material-discursive apparatus of bodily production because it is “an instrument of power through which particular meanings and bodies and material-discursive boundaries are produced”* (Barad 2001: 80 [my own emphasis]). That is to say, we need to look at the debates as both the “matter” or the object of investigation and as the “agent” that materializes certain boundaries in history; being not just limits, but actors. In Haraway’s words: “*boundaries materialize in social interaction. Boundaries are drawn by mapping practices; ‘objects’ do not pre-*

exist as such". Thus, "matter" is not "a passive agent" (Barad, 2001), one of the core characteristics of this new framework; matter *enacts* a reality that is constantly *moving* and *changing*. The diffractive methodology produces a "qualitative shift" by which the "apparatus" is not concerned only with measuring processes anymore but is also part of the phenomena under study, as a whole. This is why apparatuses become "open-ended and dynamic material-discursive practices, through which specific 'concepts' and 'things' are articulated" (ibid, 334). In other words, apparatuses, events and phenomena are intra-relating. That is, they need to be theoretically defined, methodologically put into practice and empirically tested while, at the same time, they become agents of the object of study.

Barad defines her apparatus away from the ignorance of non-human agency, the passivity of matter and the problematic relationship between the discursive and the non-discursive (Barad, 2003: 809-10). Thus, instead of dividing the research process into subject and object, she develops a different division within the apparatus ("object" and "agency of observation") provided by a "constructed cut" made by the researcher (Barad, 2001: 83). I have applied the division of the different entanglements of the apparatus as follows:

► Agencies of observation (the debates on emotions):

1. Physical-conceptual devices: media (the Facebook page), audience (participants), context and the process of research.
2. Technologies of subjectivation: The conversation flow, the context of the Facebook posts generating the debate, social conflicts at the moment of the analysis, and theories regarding the nature of the object of observation (gender).
3. Subject formation: reality constructed /reality excluded

► Object of observation: Gender (affects).

This separation would seem to be contradictory with the monist perspective (van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010) to which New Materialism moves, because of the human nature of the "constructed cut". However, this can be further explained by the end of the apparatus, the *materialization of its boundaries* (Barad, 2001: 91). This boundary

making, necessary to make meaning (Barad 2001: 105, n. 10), is produced by an “agential cut” that “enacts a resolution *within* the phenomenon of the inherent ontological (and semantic) indeterminacy” (Barad, 2007: 333-4). The agential cut is already beyond the reach of the researcher since the researcher is immersed in the durational wholeness of the apparatus. Intuitively, the researcher can produce “constructed cuts” to study the phenomenon or “provisional cuts” (Lykke, 2011), but bearing in mind that “the referent is not an observation-independent object, but a phenomenon. [...] That is, a condition for objective knowledge is that the referent is a phenomenon (and not an observation-independent object)” (Barad, 2001: 85). That is to say, a diffractive process entangled in the phenomena is what is materializing reality.

The apparatus unfolds time and again (iteratively) in very different ways. When we study a concrete case in a concrete context we do not realize it at first, because we are immersed in the apparatus. “I propose an understanding of reality that takes account of both the exclusions upon which it depends and its openness to future reworkings” (Barad, 1998: 104). These exclusions escape the researcher when looking at a specific time and, as such, I will only be able to provide an account of the *exclusions within* the apparatus or “excluded realities” (Barad, 2003). In chapter three, I will present all the debates on feelings intra-acting with each other. These debates correspond to those concerning feelings during a time comprising from the starting point in October, 2010 until October 2013.

#### 2.5.1.1. Methods used in this level:

**- Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) (Lazar, 2007; Wodak, 2008):** FCDA has been preferred over other techniques such as “discourse analysis” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002) for its close relationship with third wave feminism. This practice is being recently configured as different from CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) for five reasons: it contains a feminist analytical activism; gender configures the ideological structure behind this practice; it reveals the complexity of gender power relations; performing a (de)construction of the term; and practicing a critical reflection of institutions (Lazar, 2007). It is proposed as one contribution to feminist politics because it is “based on close analysis of contextualized instances of texts and talk in a variety of local situations”

(Laazar, 2007: 154). FCDA has been highly criticized for being just “gender-focused” (Wodak, 2008) but at the same time, gender is being defined as the departing point of this thesis. Gender is considered to be “reducing complexity” of the research and “restricting the explanatory power of the analyst” (Wodak, 2008: 197). However, my analysis will include gender as always situated and relating with other social conflicts as will be seen in debates such as the one about the standpoint theory entitled: “Disagree with me but not because I am a black woman”.

FCDA requires a critical position (Laazar, 2005, 2007; Wodak, 2008) and the explicitation of the analyst’s position (Wodak, 2008: 196), I situate myself as a feminist researcher. All in all, FCDA is a focus on “social justice and transformation of gender” (Lazar, 2007: 144). FCDA has as its spinal bone the vindication of gender as not an equalizer between men and women but as a relational process in which different subjects are being enact(ed)ing (Lazar, 2007: 150). This thesis explores ways of doing and being in a gendered virtual community, as are the participants of Morrison’s official Facebook page. The reason why we have a gendered virtual community is that gender is situated in the process. The dynamics are engendered at certain moments and places in the debates. Detailed descriptions with the powerful visual analysis of the main topics of interest in the debate provide the material of discourse. Moreover, I pay attention to the inter-action of the participants, the vocabulary used and the ways of presenting the debates and their stances. Finally, the analysis observes the moment in which the comments have been performed - if the debate takes one day, one month, or one year – because this will infer a change in the intensity of the debate.

I will analyze sixteen debates focusing on those ones that include a feeling in its statement. The period in which they were written comprises the beginning of the page and the first time in which a post containing feelings was repeated. That is, after debate 16 (Table 1, page 67), the post of debate 14 was included again in the page. Therefore, I considered that the sample was representative enough because the iterativity of the apparatus was already explicit.

- **Visual analysis (Bal, 2003):** The object of visual analysis is “things that have a particular *visuality* or visual quality that addresses the social constituencies interacting with them.” (ibid, 8). In this sense, it becomes important to analyze those material constraints of the Facebook page, as well as the relevant images that accompany certain debates, in order to obtain yet a different angle that complements by producing “the effect of materiality.” (ibid). Visual analysis, understood as coming from visual culture, requires an active role of the researcher, because the act of seeing is interwoven with those things that the readers make visible in the debates, as much as what the author chooses to make visible on the Facebook page. In Mieke Bal’s words (ibid, 11), “visibility is also a practice, even a [methodological] strategy, of selection that determines what other aspects or even objects remain invisible.” Besides, this practice has “specific consequences for sexual difference” (ibid, 14), because it presents differential structures of subjectivities. Therefore, it is highly significant, in order to respond to the first sub-question of the present work.

I will analyze those images that add material and visual effects to the materiality of the debate. The images to be analyzed can be found in Table 1 (page 85) which are those accompanying the debates, that is sixteen. That is to say, those images that add material meaning to the debate created in a specific stance. These images come from the Facebook page and they are complementary to the posts that open the debate. They will be analyzed through the following different methods coming from feminist visual analysis such as: “self – exposure” (Buikema & Zarzycka, 2011), “gaze” (ibid) and analysis of the semiotic codes engaging with the visual imagery (Bal, 2003). Self-exposure deals with one’s distribution in the image, whether they are sitting down or standing up, if they appear alone in the picture or with other women, the body language, etc. The “gaze identifies differences regarding the direction of the eyes Kosezi (2008). If the person who is being (in this case) photographed looks down, she or he is disempowered whereas if she or he looks up (for example) she is empowered, although this research shows that this slightly varies depending on the body gesture of the central subject of the photograph. Following Bal’s definition of the object of visual culture, I focus on this empirical data not as a definition of

inclusion and exclusion (gaze as being looked at or looking at), but “in terms of what [the pictures] do” (Bal, 2003: 13). This is why differences appear. According to Bal (ibid, 19), “[e]very act of looking fills in a hole”. Coming back again to Morrison’s own definition of her novels and her literary language is precisely how author and readers relate to each other. In this sense, the gaze of the pictures is going to be the virtual assault of Toni Morrison’s eye/I<sup>28</sup>, part of her subjectivity. This is how the virtual and real become one and materialized into one specific subject. It is useful not only in Morrison’s own shots but also in the different covers produced of her books.

The visual analysis is “[attentive] to the gendered and racialised issues in the process of (self) representation” (Buikema & Zarzycka, 2011: 124). Photographs and other visual images will be considered processes in which a self-representation or self-becoming-virtual performed by Morrison will be analyzed in permanent relation, and always embedded with different textual practices. This implies understanding visual objects as performative and always relating to other semiotic codes (Bal, 2003) in an active context (such as the Facebook page). Thus, these semiotic codes will be analyzed according to the distribution performed with the following tool. That is, I will identify those aspects of the photograph that complement (either by proximity or distance) with the different open categories identified with the atlas.ti.

- **Atlas.ti** (chapters three and four): This is a social scientist software that provides the analysis of relations between different texts and videos by matching similar words with their qualifiers. Even though it may seem to be particularly text based, it is extremely useful to consider the *mutual influence* that the three levels of analysis have on each other. I have applied a copy and paste process of all the debates analyzed in Facebook (for chapter three) and the same one with the novels (in chapter four). Atlas.ti involves a series of codifications, albeit my analysis considers these codes as ‘open categories’. This means “to abandon

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<sup>28</sup> This sentence echoes what Buikema and Zarzycka (2011: 122) defined as the replacement of the scopholific practices, which are embedded in traditional definitions of the concept of “gaze”, that is “the assault of the eye/I”.

predetermined categories altogether in favor of open ones. These open categories will be defined within the framework of a particular empirical analysis and whatever comes up as relevant in this specific context” (Lykke, 2010: 148). For example, ‘feelings’ will be one of those open categories to be subdivided into ‘anger’ or ‘happiness’ (for example) to see the different concepts relating with the different feelings building the discourses. That is to say, even though coding will be used in order to organize the data, the focus of the analysis will be the connection between codes, and not the categories themselves. Open categories relates to the organizational process of the atlas.ti therefore implying, that even though a particular sentence has been codified with one code, it is multiply related as well, while belonging to the atlas.ti codification system.

The four groups that come up relevant (to paraphrase Lykke) in the analysis are “gender,” “politics,” “language” and “feelings.” These groups coincide with the objectives of the thesis, as well as with the radical empirical unit affecting the forces that relate them as mutually dependent: feelings. In this sense, feelings have been divided into two groups: embodied (adjectives) and abstract feelings (nouns and verbs). Pointing out this division corresponds to two main facts, namely, that as the units of analysis, feelings have been the criteria in choosing which Facebook debates to analyze. That is, in this thesis I have produced a FCDA of those debates that include a feeling in the author’s post. The second is that feelings are the empirical units of affects, which is the theory that complements the definition of gender proposed in this thesis. Besides, the virtual community identifies differences depending on the form of the feeling: the material effects are not the same with “anger” as with “angry”, for example, as chapter three shows. Thus, the codification as open category allows me to manipulate the atlas.ti according to interpretational ideas of the analysis (abandoning pre-determined categories and relating with those offered by the community and the theoretical approach accompanying this thesis); while at the same time, retaining the relations that provide the mutual influence of the different levels.

Thus, in chapter three, I have been adding those codes depending on the feeling (and the expression of it) that appears in the debates. Later, “gender” has also been divided according to different aspects. For instance, interventions that express relations are codified as “gender/relations”, depending on the sex of the participants “gender/men\_women” or “gender\_women” “gender\_family”; and I have used the situatedness of gender (explained in chapter three) by which gender becomes explicitly referred to race: “gender\_race” or “gender\_black women”. Likewise, the group “politics” is always related with “gender” (because gender is the structuring difference of this thesis), being here one moment in which the form of the feelings becomes pertinent again. This group is mainly divided into “individual” and “collective”, depending on whether the acts promoted by the individuals have a direct effect on a particular subject, or whether they are oriented towards the benefiting the community (this becomes particularly relevant in the analysis of the novels in chapter four). Thus, embodied feelings mainly are oriented to the participant’s self-development, while abstract feelings mainly refer to the community and, more often than not, because they tend to create universal values in the community. Therefore, in the codification of the novels, I have used the same codes as in chapter three and added all the feelings appearing in the novels. This is particularly relevant, in order to be able to produce the alteration of the order of levels in chapter six. Lastly, the codification also includes language, in order to make it pertinent for chapter five. In this group, I have identified not only the material of language (manifested in statements in which the division between images, feelings, and language was blurred; but also literary techniques, such as “intertextuality”, in order to find out how all the novels intra-act with each other to produce boundaries that create political meaning. There are many more codes but they are self-defined because they are the product of the relevance in the different elements (novels or Facebook).

#### 2.5.2. Event (chapter four).

This level of analysis corresponds with the second sub-research question concerning the spread of feminist new materialist politics in Morrison’s novels. Event is a term coined

by Sarah Ahmed (1998) to refer to an encounter produced between different subjects in a determined context. The event allows the subject to become its own subject in the encounter and the different subjects are the different novels written by Toni Morrison or apparatuses. Ahmed is concerned with the intersections of feminism and race, which becomes a helpful base for understanding the enactment of politics in Morrison's work. She defines "events" where subjects become subjects as relations, in which "acts of interpellations" are produced between different entities:

[...] the act of interpellation is a relation between subjects (or, to be more precise, the event of becoming a subject involves a relationship with another – equally imaginary – subject whose speech authorizes this instant of becoming). Interpellation entails an addresser and addressee: the constitution of the subject is predicated upon an (elided) inter-subjectivity. (ibid, 114).

In this sense, this second level of analysis entails two different apparatuses mutually intra-acting: the debates from Facebook and the novels. According to Ahmed (ibid, 117) subjects are created only temporarily in a determined context through a permanent negotiation of differences. This means that events are those material frames in which certain relations are identified, in order to create gendered and raced subjects. That is why I want to complement the proposed diffractive methodology with Ahmed's notion of event. In this sense, Ahmed describes subject creation as always contextual and fluid while, at the same time as potential and material markers. This allows diffractive methodology to empirically discern how potential subjects (Morrison's characters) do entail differences that matter in the context: such as the virtual creation of an audience in Facebook and the performative reading of Morrison's novels there, which differentiates the context in three different ones, that is, the time and space in which the novel was written, the ones referred to in the novel, and the contemporary ones. It is another empirical plane and "constructed" cut of the iterativeness of the apparatus and, therefore, of the methodological process that explains this research.

Thus, each novel would entangle its own apparatus by taking into account their content, their moment of production, their context and their own reception on the Facebook page. Therefore, following the new materialist approach, I have treated the novels individually, focusing on the aspects that the novels consider more relevant. The event

level entails relating a reality “excluded within” in previous apparatus. In keeping with the logic with which this process is developed, the “previous apparatus” is the analysis of the first level. The apparatus that articulates this level will be the relations produced between all the novels. Thus, it will be this relation that will be entangled and empirically resolved in the following way:

1. Analysis of the total of ten novels, one by one, using atlas.ti with the codification mentioned before.
2. Analysis of the intra-action between the novels, relation subject formation in the different events. How are these subjects (main characters) becoming in the intra-action between present (Facebook) – past (novel release and time plot).

#### 2.5.2.1. Methods used in this level.

- **Feminist close reading (Lukic & Sánchez, 2011):** Close reading is an interpretative framework that includes context, the situatedness of the reader, the socio-critical standpoint of the text analyzed, and possible oppositional readings, which have to do with reading the text against its apparent meaning (ibid, 116). In this sense, new codifications will appear since in the main code “language”, “intertextuality” will appear to reflect when the novel is referring to other novels written by Morrison or by other writers; allowing new feelings to enter the codification. All the feelings appearing in the novel will be specified, since the inclusion of the “excluded reality” entails bearing in mind the different feelings that appear in the novel and how they do differ with regards to Facebook. Therefore, taking into account that it is one interpretational method that will be reinforced by atlas.ti as well, the close reading applied in these novels will be an interpretation entangled with the data obtained in the first level (which included authors, readers and the researcher) and the texts themselves, and the relations created among them. Thus, there will be two levels analyzed simultaneously: the first is the meaning obtained after the analysis of chapter three, while the second is the relationship between feelings and politics and its effect on Morrison’s gendered characters in order to treat this element (the novels) as both, entangling

with the previous element and separated (crucial for altering the order in chapter six).

- **Gephi** is an application working on the atlas.ti outcomes that provides a useful visualization of the codes previously analyzed. As I analyze ten novels and the creation of codes surpass two hundred, relating to this program will help to identify which codes are transversally meaningful.

### 2.5.3. Phenomenon (chapter five).

This level of analysis provides the answer to the main research question, which is concerned with the communicative shift produced in the intra-action between literature and SNS. The “phenomenon” “refer[s] to particular instances of wholeness” (Apffel-Marglin, 2011: 57). This means that the phenomenon is the object that I want to explore bearing in mind that if the researcher is always in the research, it will be only a part of it instead of the whole. It is a provisional resolution for the object of research.

The results informing this level belong to the previous two sections regarding debates (sub-research question one) and novels (sub-research question two) and the relationship between them is what this section tries to address to answer the main research question. Thinking of the research question as a phenomenon “underline[s] that the ‘object’ of research must be explored *both* as a constructed result of the processes of ‘siting’ and ‘sighting’ *and* as an agent acting objectively and beyond the control of the researcher.” (Lykke, 2010: 153). Apffel-Margling (2011: 59) describes the phenomenon as follows:

The phenomenon is always contextual; it is always a particular instance of what Bohr calls ‘quantum wholeness’. It can never be a universal. Agential reality cannot be a fixed universal; rather it is always reconstituted through our material-discursive intra-actions.

Thus, the phenomenon is contextualized in a certain fixed period of time (through the Facebook page) with a determined subject as focus: Toni Morrison. The results will provide certain processes and patterns of action for feminist literature, its vindicative

nature, and the shifts produced in the entanglement of literature and SNS. Different apparatuses will be intra-acting with each other: Toni Morrison's novels, her non-fiction work pertaining to the Facebook page and the different debates. All of them will conform with Toni Morrison's virtual subjectivity intra-relating, at the same time, to her work, her audience, the time frame and the literary and feminist theories. As a result, the Facebook page will be considered an agential element in which a space for multiple possibilities is provided, since only the information contained on the Facebook page is leading the research; whereas, the object of literary studies will be a process of communication and not a static object. That is why I believe that "[...] referentiality must be reconceptualised: the referent is not an observation-independent object, but a phenomenon. This shift in referentiality is a condition for the possibility of objective knowledge". (Barad, 1998: 97-8). This "qualitative shift" is the condition for an "objective knowledge" (Haraway, 1991). I will produce an analysis of the interventions regarding language and communicative purposes on the official Facebook page and their interventions, using the same techniques as the first level of analysis.

#### 2.5.3.1. Methods used in this level.

- **Diffraction reading (van der Tuin, 2011b):** As previously stated, diffraction in physics is a processual stage of the light by which the nature of this element remains uncertain, though not undetermined as Bohr states (Barad, 1998). Thus, diffractive reading is a method coming from the diffractive methodology that allows the researcher to read several elements together without assuming a separate nature (van der Tuin, 2011b). In my thesis, this will be performed in two different contexts. First, I will use diffractive readings in chapters three (the debates on feelings), four (the close reading of the novels) and five (the literary communicative process between Morrison and her readers), in order to conceptualize gender, politics and communication accordingly. This step is crucial because epistemologies are always political and part of the object of research. Besides, they belong to the technologies of subjectivation of the apparatus itself. Understanding the analysis of chapters three and four together, without assuming a separate entity, is part of the entanglement of the phenomena. Therefore, the data used for this level belongs to analyses

previously made but that move beyond those insofar as the intra-action between them is able to perform results for the phenomena itself.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

This methodological section has defined and introduced a hybrid methodology between the Social Sciences and the Humanities that is the diffractive methodology. This methodology consists mainly on reading different elements together, without assuming a separate entity among them. However, as a researcher, I had to introduce an intervention, in order to draw a methodological plan able to shed light on the processes that are producing a different type of communication, in the relationship between literature and information technology. This intervention constitutes my entanglement with the object of research in order to blur the limits between these two elements. This provisional intervention divides the process into three levels of analysis: apparatus, event and research, each responsible for answering one research question. These three will be developed accordingly, in chapters three, four and five, and altered in chapter six.

With this methodology, it is possible to shift patterns as to how communication is being shaped by the different participants interacting within it. That is, humans, SNS, literature, and time and space contextual frames: “[technology] matters not just to our biological and physical environment [...] but to the way we live together socially” (McKenzie & Wajcman, 1999: 1-2). Living together socially is precisely what the SNS of Facebook provides empirically to the theoretical level of the thesis. This methodological reflection provides the basis for understanding the theoretical approximation taken on by this thesis: which is a new materialist framework. Dynamic movements, relating processes and political strategies are the focus of this thesis, and precisely what this methodology is about. Having explained the epistemological and methodological strategies that have been presented in this first part of the thesis, it is time to move onto the second part: the analysis.

**Chapter 3: Approaching gender through feelings: researching Toni Morrison's Facebook page as apparatus**

*Gender is, therefore, one of the most common figures for thinking the basic differences  
or difference from which all life emerges.*

Claire Colebrook, "Gender"

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter discusses defining gender as situated and relational, within the context of the present thesis. Gender moves beyond oppositional terms (such as men and women) by understanding it relationally. This relation is captured, thanks to the forces uniting the different elements observed in this research. These forces are the affects, defined as the "intra-actions" providing the empirical link to think about gender as always sexed and racialized. It is the first level of analysis, which has already been identified as "apparatus". This means that I need to engage with the elements participating in this object of research, which are technologies of subjectivation, context and subject formation. Differing from a chapter in the Social Sciences, this analytical chapter presents empirical and epistemological results (just like in chapters four, five and six). As stated in chapter two, theory formation takes part in the object of study and because of that, a critical review of the concept of gender is presented at the beginning of the chapter.

Following the actualization of the technologies of subjectivation informing the object of research in this first level of analysis, the "apparatus" of research will unfold. So, bearing in mind that affects are used as the empirical links to understand how gender is performed, at the first level of analysis I take those debates on the Facebook page concerning feelings as empirical evidence of the object of research. Thus, I will produce an FCDA on each debate, a codification of atlas.ti that provides the links between them and a visual analysis. This chapter will present a diffractive reading of each debate, which will provide a description of the different processes through which gender is articulated in this specific context: the literary communication between a contemporary author (Toni Morrison) and her readers taking place in a digital platform like, Facebook.

### 3.2. Gender: a new materialist approach

A classical approach to gender would not explain the relational nature of the realities present in her characters (Goyal, 2006). This can be observed in the literature that revises Morrison's work, which in its origin was articulated through post-colonial theory and racial issues (Bhabha, 1992a, 1992b; Morrison 1983, 1992; Powell, 1990). On the contrary, from the beginning of the 1990s through the first years of the twenty-first century, a revival of gender issues started to cover her literary production (Gallego, 1999; Vallejo, 2007; Eckard, 2002; Grewal, 1998 – among many others). Gallego (1999) defined Morrison as a “daughter of the diaspora”, implying then that a twist in literary review was demanded to fully understand Morrison's literary production. This tends to lead Morrison's production to post-colonial feminist issues. However, contemporary definitions of the concept of gender that could fulfill analytical expectations can produce an innovative approach to her work, in order to learn about the complexity of Morrison's political message.

#### 3.2.1. *Gen(d)ering trouble*: sexual difference and multiplicity

Some contemporary voices in feminism have criticized Judith Butler for trapping the body into endless social discourses (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2013<sup>29</sup>). Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) is a key reference on the body/discourse controversy. The book is accused of producing a mechanistic determinism in which matter is always released as passively represented through continuously active linguistic webs. As a consequence, gender becomes predicated as a linguistic inscription on bodies that become socially constructed. Therefore, “difference” is predicated as either socially constructed or a

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<sup>29</sup> In their chapter compiled in *Deleuze and Race*, Dolphijn & van der Tuin (ibid) criticize the opposition between gender and sex as ontologically and politically disadvantageous for feminist theory. They express their discomfort with terms such as gender, identity politics or intersectionality because, according to them, Butler has encapsulated these terms into the realm of the symbolic and the linguistic.

pluralistic diversity rooted on essentialist terms. To Rosi Braidotti (1994) and Sara Ahmed (1998), this type of difference is the ontological encapsulation of "the Other" as always less than "the One:" a never-ending trap. Besides, Morrison specifically refers to this division as a "western notion" (Morrison, 1993: 112), since the body is neither just sexually conceived, nor should it be disassociated with the mind or the cultural regulations of each context.

Leaving behind linguistic inscriptions on bodies, Elizabeth Grosz (1995: 32) establishes the body as a political and sociological threshold. According to her, gender equality can only deny women's specific positions. Similarly, Braidotti (1994) states the necessity to even recognize a third level of difference (the first one being the differences between men and women, and the second one, the differences between types of women) produced among each woman. Although differing on their postulates, both of them see the dichotomic opposition between men and women that has been a problematic issue for feminist theory and politics. As a possible solution, they propose the concept of "sexual difference". In Braidotti's words, sexual difference is a feminist "political practice and a discursive field" (Braidotti, 1994: 3). Sexual difference is a doing, a philosophy of new ways of thinking based on relations rather than on confrontations.

However, this philosophy of doing instead of theorizing, this ontology of the process (Braidotti, 2006), is not exempt from criticisms. Ahmed (1998: 107) warns feminists that the philosophy of doing can imply an encapsulation of the subject as always inside the logic of "the Same", an "exceptional signifier" enabling the patriarchal system. In her words (ibid), "[t]he sexual subject is here constituted through the pragmatic limits to the play (of the signifier). [...] That play can hence be viewed as an aspect of (in the sense of being framed by) a pre-existing, determined and material system." That is to say, as a political epistemological framework, the idea of sexual difference makes an attempt at theorizing the body as always active and political. However, for some subjects, presenting sexual difference as the ontological difference also presupposes that the material is dangerously led to the terrain of the essential and, therefore, a part of a pre-existing signifier. This does not mean that she pursues the social and natural death of sex. On the contrary, Ahmed (1998: 109) aims at retrieving the marked nature of the subject. That is, conceiving sexual difference as a performative ontology in which

different subjects are always marked in different ways. Ahmed (1998) attempts at incorporating marked subjectivities into this ontology of difference in order to avoid “androgynous” positions. This would mean to encapsulate the female body again in the logic of the Same, that is the sexually oppressive order.

In all this debate, how are we to decide upon linguistic imprisonments or material oppressions<sup>30</sup>? Ahmed’s proposal works with gender and sexual difference together and defines gender as, “simultaneously phantasmatic *and* material, an illusion of presence that marks the subject, unattainable in any ideal or integral form, but which is normative and regulative in its constitution of subjects as already sexed.[...]” (Ahmed, 1998: 113). Trying to re(con)figure a way for thinking these terms as constituents of subjects, she provides an initial step, albeit linguistically symbolic. Therefore, although Ahmed provides a bridge to think of gender affirmatively, a step beyond this reading remains necessary. In order to take this a step forward, I will read Karen Barad, Sheyla Benhabib and Claire Colebrook diffractively.

Barad (2003) produces a very interesting reading of Butler’s work in order to understand sex and gender, as relating to rather than opposing each other. Even though Butler (1993) keeps on thinking that sex and gender are separate entities in *Bodies that matter*, she produces a link between gender and the materialization of bodies. Barad (2003: 808) understands this first step as a possible starting point for her “posthumanist performativity”: “[I]t is possible to read my posthumanist performative account along these lines, as a diffractive elaboration of Butler’s and Haraway’s crucial insights”, which argues for giving matter and language its proper place in order to understand a dynamic reality. Posthumanist performativity is an elaboration of material and discursive practices together, in order to think of matter as an active element in non-anthropocentric contexts.

Barad’s posthumanist performativity can already be traced in the eighties. Benhabib introduced a theoretical system by which gender and sex were only configured through their embedment. In her words:

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<sup>30</sup> Of course, both strands have been summarized by the studies of a couple of authors, in order to illustrate the debate. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this thesis, the objective is pointing out that thinking of gender and sexual difference exclusively can be problematic for feminist politics.

[F]or feminist theory the gender-sex system is not a contingent but an essential way in which social reality is organized, symbolically divided and lived through experientially. By the “gender-sex” system I understand the social-historical, symbolic constitution, and interpretation of the anatomical differences of the sexes. The gender-sex system is the grid through which the self develops an *embodied* identity, a certain mode of being in one’s body and of living the body. The self becomes a mode of psychically, socially and symbolically experiencing its bodily identity. (Benhabib, 1987: 80).

Thus, bearing in mind Barad’s and Benhabib’s warning, I have decided to root our concept of gender Colebrook’s (2004) “sexed gender” defines gender as the *model of all difference*. Colebrook (2004) offers the possibility of reading sex and gender throughout each other in order to find possible solutions to work through inequalities rooted in contemporary society by taking into account material and discursive practices, as many other contemporary feminist philosophers claim (Haraway, 1991; Barad, 2007). Additionally, this model includes difference in its multiple explosions as the essence of an always sexed gender which, therefore, includes other inequalities taking place at a specific time and context. Gender appears as a *situated* concept intra-acting with many different forces in a dynamic and multiple way. Thus, as Gloria Wekker claims, “gender is not a monolithic category that works for all women in the same way” (Wekker, 2002: 17)<sup>31</sup>. Gender is not performed equally in contemporary writers like in early nineteenth writers. Thus, we cannot compare Toni Morrison to Jane Austen. Conceptualizing “gender” like this allows a concept of woman as a “political project because our way of understanding women is not descriptive, but political<sup>32</sup>” (Mestre, 2010: 31). This unites the conditions that Linda Nicholson (1994) requires for a contemporary definition of gender, that are avoiding strategic essentialisms and social constructivism.

### 3.2.2. Relating selves: gender as a processual ontology.

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<sup>31</sup> This is also quoted in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> “De modo que el significado de mujer no se presupone sino que se construye colectivamente como un proyecto político en sí, porque nuestra forma de entender a las mujeres es en sí política, no descriptiva” (Nicholson, 2003, 77 in Mestre, 2010: 31).

In order to conclude our definition of subject, it is necessary to come back yet again to the main theme of the present thesis: the literary communication in contemporary knowledge society. In this context, where everything is fluid and in movement, one last intervention is needed: processes. Thinking of the dynamics through which reality develops itself, movement appears as a core concept where static categorizations clearly remain out of place. Thus, gender becomes performative only through movements, intra-actions between present-past, and relations between many different participants. Barad (2007: 87) argues that gender can only be conceptualized as “in-the-making”, in order to produce a critical thinking that includes social factors. This implies a conceptualization of gender beyond linguistic representations and socio-demographical variables. In this regard, I want to argue for a possible re-reading of the concept of ‘gender’ as relational (Shotwell and Sangrey, 2009). Alexis Shotwell and Trevor Sangrey (2009: 60) propose to “see gender operating in [specific] moments; and then suggest a re-reading for these moments aimed at investigating relational models of selfhood”. I define “gender” as a dynamic processual ontology of politics, empirically rooted and shifted within the discussions produced within the SNSs. In this sense, gender is enacted there durationally (that is in process), and not as the establishment of different categories, since “gender and gendering are relational processes” (Shotwell and Sangrey, 2009: 72).

Gender as a political ontology of the process touches upon four key points of new materialism (subjectivity, power, agency, and ethics) described by Cole and Frost (2010). It unfolds the multiple possibilities in which relational selves are always partial subjectivities that only become complete subjectivities when relating to others in determined encounters. Likewise, agency is shared among human and non-human and society becomes shaped to disrupt unequal structures of power hierarchically based upon sexual principles. This is how I understand gender as an orientation (Ahmed, 2010a), or departing point. Gender is the material bond through which subjects are (re)created within communities at multiple levels: literary critics, popular opinions and political debates. This is politically, processually and ontologically different and multiple and empirically accessible through the Facebook page and the articulation of “feelings” as the intra-actions between subjectivities.

### 3.3. Gender and race: affected intra-action.

Gender does not apply to every subject in the same way. Morrison's literary production requires a definition of gender as always raced<sup>33</sup>. In this thesis, affects are the empirical units that help the research to analyze the relationality of gender. The use of affects as a methodological practice is not something new. In a very different context, Eve Sedgwick (2003) uses "paranoia" as an example of a reading process that undervalues the researcher's work. For example, she finds that in a paranoid reading there is an "insistence that everything means one thing,' that is 'sharpened sense of all the ways there are of meaning it.'" (Sedgwick, 2003: 136). Thus, in defining a reparative reading against a paranoid one, she is pursuing the multiplicity of meanings that a particular affect may have depending on the context. To her, approaching feelings as a first instance means to "look within everyday [...] experiences." (ibid), because they are always situated. Thus, taking into account that I pursue a definition of gender as situated, I introduce "affects" or feelings (which are the everyday life expression of affects) as a basic guideline relating gendered subjectivities to detect oppressions and strategies to disrupt them.

This strategy helps to empirically access those relations and produce desired connections between the different levels informing this thesis. Feelings are the point of departure to understand gender and race as inseparable, while always relating to each other (Shotwell & Sangrey, 2009; Perry & Shotwell, 2009). As Nicholson (1994: 103) states:

Maybe it is time that we explicitly acknowledge our claims about women are not based on some given reality but emerge from our own places within history and culture; they

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<sup>33</sup> This link has been provided through the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). Briefly, because this will be fully explained in the following chapter, intersectionality takes the definition of different axes of oppression and interlinks them in a subject of study. However, thinking gender in a new materialist way implies that the relation should be prior to the terms relating with each other.

are political acts that reflect the contexts we emerge out of and the futures we would like to see.

Keeping gender in focus and retaining race as part of the becoming of the subjects, involves “situating gender” (Wekker in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2013) in this specific “sexed nature” (Colebrook, 2004). For the purposes of this research, the notions of gender and race have similar properties. It is in the relation of the two, where the meanings are created differently from the subjectivities of African American women. Being a “woman” and “black” do not have the same meaning when taken separately as when they are used together, which indeed can be empty of significance for a political project. That means that it is the relation between both what historicizes meaning, and not the other way around. Considering that Clough’s theory of affects (2009) takes them as the radical units of empiricism, I aim at developing a definition of gender and race through the different affects constituted contemporarily on the Facebook page, something with which I can relate. Feelings are embodied differently for the very condition of life. However, the embodied experiences that they provoke in subjects are more easily related than gendered or raced identities. Thus, without looking at every subject in the research’s identity, a community of epistemological knowledge is created within the Facebook page, by relating through affects. Situating gender means contextualizing its processual ontology in a particular moment. In this case, it is specified in digital platforms, contemporary cultures, and the particularities in which each individual – on the Facebook page – develops their own gendered process.

### **3.4. Creating boundaries: the debate on feelings as apparatus.**

The “apparatus” is the focus of the present section. It enables the understanding of a particular process from a global context (Facebook) in order to retain objectivity. So, in order to differentiate the apparatus as something methodologically visible, it is necessary to specify the elements partaking in the apparatus. Barad (2003) discerns two main components of the apparatus: the agencies of observation (in this case, the debates about feelings) and the object of observation (situated gender). Similarly, the agencies

of observation consist of the physical-conceptual devices (Facebook and context), technologies of subjectivation (theory making, the debates on gender) and subject formation (which empirically speaking includes an analysis of the debates dealing with feelings happening on the Facebook page). Hence, there are two kinds of posts: quotes by Morrison with her name under it (like in Figure 2) and news about her.



Figure 7

In this thesis, I focus particularly on the first type of posts because the connection is produced between readers and authors. However, the second type of posts, those concerning news, is also interesting, in order to know how Morrison's public persona is being constructed. Facebook's structure creates a context of virtual social communities where the audience is spatially multiplied and temporarily dis-located. That is to say, although time and space do not coincide across the globe, they are also local since there are differences as well as similarities, depending on the person who is opening the screen. This means that this context activates the global in the local and, consequently individuals partake with the totality of the community in their own meanings, beliefs and specific situations. Facebook is conceptualized here as an epistemological community where different elements participate to create spaces for possibilities. Thus, Facebook does not include different social categories, but a particular social agent in which the global is embedded within the local which, in turn, is part of an affirmative engagement with SNS. Meanings are created by different elements simultaneously while at the same time affecting each individual particularly. All the debates included in this analysis are summarized in the following table:

Post/entry provided by the page	Image	Number of comments	Time of the debate
<p>1. HAPPINESS. Morrison tells her students to look beyond happiness</p> <p>May 17, 2011</p> <p>Annex_33<sup>34</sup></p>		5	17/05/11
<p>2. HATE: "Gimme hate, Lord," he whimpered. "I'll take hate any day. But don't give me love. I can't take no more love, Lord. I can't carry it...It's too heavy. Jesus, you know, You know all about it. Ain't it heavy? Jesus? Ain't love heavy?"</p> <p>June 30, 2011</p>		49	30/06/11 to 07/02/12
<p>3. ANGRY: "I get angry about things, then go on and work"</p> <p>July 2, 2011</p>		17	02/07/11

<sup>34</sup> Those entrances refer to those posts on the official Facebook page in which an external link to a different webpage was introduced. The first word appearing in capital letters refers to an orientative title, in order to identify them better.

<p>4. WORRIED: “She is worried about how the language she dreams in, given to her at birth, is handled, put into service, even withheld from her for certain nefarious purposes. Being a writer she thinks of language partly as a system, partly as a living thing over which one has control, but mostly as agency - as an act with consequences.” — Toni Morrison</p> <p>July 9, 2011</p>		<p>25</p>	<p>9/7/11 to 16/7/11</p>
<p>5. LOVE: “Dorcas has been acknowledged, appraised, and dismissed in the time it takes for a needle to find its opening groove. The stomach-jump of possible love is nothing compared to the ice floes that block up her veins now. The body she inhabits is unworthy. Although it is young and all she has, it is as if it had decayed on the vine at budding time”.</p> <p>July 18, 2011</p>		<p>22</p>	<p>18/07/11 to 21/7/11</p>
<p>6. ANGER: “Anger ... it’s a paralyzing emotion ... you can’t get anything done. People sort of think it’s an interesting, passionate, and igniting feeling — I don’t think it’s any of that — it’s helpless ... it’s absence of control — and I need all of my skills, all of the control, all of my powers ... and anger doesn’t provide any of that — I have no use for it whatsoever.”</p> <p>July 30, 2011</p>		<p>70</p>	<p>30/07/11 to 05/08/11</p>
<p>7. LONELINESS: “There is a loneliness that can be rocked. Arms crossed, knees drawn up; holding, holding on, this motion, unlike a ship’s, smooths and contains the rocker. It’s an inside kind- wrapped tight like skin. Then there is a loneliness that roams. No rocking can hold it down. It is alive, on its own. A dry and spreading thing that makes the sound of one’s own feet going seem to come from a far-off place.” — Toni Morrison- Beloved</p> <p>August 7, 20</p>		<p>69</p>	<p>7/08/11 to 31/05/12</p>

<p>8.SOCIAL JUSTICE: “Please don’t settle for happiness. It’s not good enough. Of course you deserve it, but if that’s all you have in mind — happiness — I want to suggest to you that personal success devoid of meaningfulness, free of a steady commitment to social justice — that’s more than a barren life. It’s a trivial one.”</p> <p>August 31, 2011</p>		<p>62</p>	<p>31/08/11 to 23/05/12</p>
<p>9. BLACK FEMALE: “I really think the range of emotions and perceptions I have had access to as a black person and as a female person are greater than those of people who are neither”.</p> <p>November 11, 2011</p> <p>Annex_61</p>		<p>77</p>	<p>9/11/11 to 14/12/11</p>
<p>10. PAIN: “Pain. I seem to have an affection, a kind of sweettooth for it. Bolts of lightning, little rivulets of thunder.</p> <p>And I the eye of the storm.” — Toni Morrison, Jazz</p> <p>Novemeber 27, 2011</p>		<p>69</p>	<p>27/11/11 to 14/8/12</p>
<p>11. HAPPY: “If happiness is anticipation with certainty, we were happy.” – Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye</p> <p>April 4, 2012</p>		<p>142</p>	<p>4/04/12 to 23/03/2013</p>

<p>12. <b>LOVED:</b> “Something that is loved is never lost.” — Toni Morrison, <i>Beloved</i></p> <p>August 21, 2012</p>		<p>248</p>	<p>21/08/12 to 7/02/13</p>
<p>13. <b>WORRY:</b> "I don't want to know or have to remember that. I have other things to do: worry, for example, about tomorrow, about Denver, about <i>Beloved</i>, about age and sickness not to speak of love. But her brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day." - Toni Morrison, <i>Beloved</i></p> <p>November 9, 2012</p>		<p>300</p>	<p>9/11/12 to 25/12/12</p>
<p>14. <b>SORROW:</b> “It was a fine cry - loud and long - but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow.” — <a href="#">Toni Morrison</a>, <i>Sula</i></p> <p>December 16, 2012</p>		<p>284</p>	<p>16/12/12 to 24/02/13</p>
<p>15. <b>SAD:</b> “Come on, girl. Don't cry," whispered Frank. "Why not? I can be miserable if I want to. You don't need to try and make it go away. It shouldn't go away. It's just as sad as it ought to be and I'm not going to hide from what's true just because it hurts." Cee wasn't sobbing anymore, but the tears were still running down her cheeks.” — Toni Morrison, <i>Home</i></p> <p>January 30, 2013</p>		<p>121</p>	<p>30/1/13 to 2/2/13</p>

16. LOVER: "Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly, stupid people love stupidly, but the love of a free man is never safe." – Toni Morrison, *The Bluest eye*

February 7, 2013



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7/2/13 to  
26/3/2013

Table 1: Summary of the debates analyzed in this level

These debates, which will be analyzed one by one in section 3.4.2. of this chapter, belong to her most famous novels, as it is specified at the end of the debates. However, some of them belong to a different source. These are the ones named “worry” and “worried” are quotes which are part of the speech given the day she was conferred the Nobel prize; “anger” and “angry” belong to two different interviews that she gave in the eighties and the nineties, respectively; the one on “happiness” and “social justice” were part of a speech she gave to graduating students; and the one on “black female” is the only one with a different source, because it is a post dealing with a newspaper. All of these ones are particularly interesting because they help to relate the author nowadays with the novels she wrote more than thirty years ago. Thus, by including the analysis of these debates, Morrison is re-working her own work through the comments posted by her readers. Even though the last one has a different source and it is not referring to any particular feeling, it is talking about emotions and it is also the one that pertains to subjectivities the most, by making it explicit. That is why it is also important to include it in this group.

### 3.4.1. Understanding the debate: context matters. Facebook as the intra-action between space and time

The notion of context has been extensively argued in all the different theoretical foundations that frame this thesis (Van Dijk, 1998; Lazar, 2007; Haraway, 1991, 2008). The context is understood as the physical conceptual devices intra-acting in the object of analysis, that is Morrison’s Facebook official page:

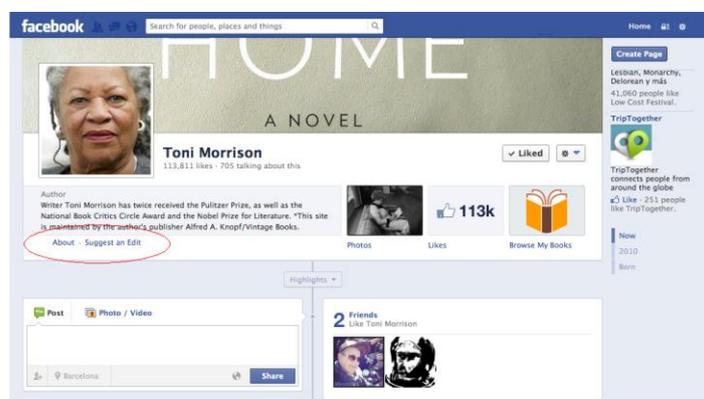


Figure 8

Via Facebook, Morrison can target more than 200.000 people, who simultaneously can interact, in order to adapt and re-write her novels. It is very significant how Morrison has doubled the number of likes in one year: 216, 704 in August 2014. Nevertheless, the factors for this have been multiple and its analysis falls out of the scope of this thesis. Being part of a group is implicit in this type of SNSs (Van House, 2011). Therefore, participants “must speak or write as group members” (Dijk, 1998: 32). This interlocutory act is framed within a hegemonic discourse in which participants are expected to agree upon different issues, such as gender, race oppression, civil right movements, African-American literature, etc. These are gluing connections that belong to the field of affinities in a given dislocated space and time and become materialized within the specific structure of Facebook.

Visually speaking, two elements stand out above the rest in Figure 8: Toni Morrison, and her new novel *Home*. *Home* is what Facebook names the “cover photo” and Morrison’s picture the “profile photo”. The profile picture aims at broadly describing who the person is behind the page. The focus of the present thesis is to visualize gender strategies and those that (in)visibilize it. The profile picture and the cover photo can be considered part of such strategies. The profile picture presents just the face of a woman gazing directly at her interlocutor. The intertextuality is clear: this digital context is directed by a black woman who feels secure of herself, and in whom the audience can trust.

The cover photo is an attempt to cover the totality of the page, the meaning of the page, and, consequently what can be seen in a bigger size. It is the book cover of her last novel: *Home*, which is an attempt to blur two of the most divided spheres, since the second feminist wave: public and private. In personifying herself through the picture, and then mix it with her embodiment as a public persona and writer, Morrison demonstrates that the “personal is political”. An additional nuance appears when we look at the administrator of the webpage, Morrison’s publishing house. We then find out that this site is part of the marketing industry around Morrison’s novels. The communicative objectives become twofold: neoliberal practices of buying and selling, turning the object into a commodity, and Morrison’s subversive political message. One of the main objectives of this chapter will be to shed light on the different mechanisms

through which the community subverts these neoliberal practices of buying and selling in a global term<sup>35</sup>, and at the same time, translated into feminist theoretical terms, the participants subvert this idea of the “political economy of sex” (Rubin, 1974). The individuals participating in this social site disrupt the economical term of the marketing industry, at the economical level. They also disrupt the possessor/possessed scheme that slaves suffered in many of the novels written by Toni Morrison, as well as females disrupt the commodity theory which makes them interchangeable objects in many different forms (as will be shown in the next section). The buttons marked with a circle in Figure 7 directs you to another link of Morrison’s official Facebook page, which contains additional information about the author and the page administrator: Alfred A. Knopf Vintage Book.

Visually speaking, the administrator of the page is not part of the principal webpage. This information is considered secondary because it may condition the number of participants, since it contains more personal information of the author and her interests. At the same time, that secondary page contains information presumably known among those who share an interest in Morrison. Besides, the more general knowledge (instead of concrete details), the wider the population who can fit in this group (the core of SNSs). On the other hand, this link also directs to the editorial house. Thus, identifying the administrator of the page as someone else would break a little the trust enhanced by the format. A large majority of the participants seek to communicate with the author, not with her editorial house.

Using this site as a sharing community destabilizes the concept of gender rooted in Black Nationalism<sup>36</sup> in particular, but in general it can really be applied to any kind of patriarchal system. As Gina Dent (1998: 7) points out:

In [...] airing our dirty laundry so to speak [we] challenge the resurrection of communal privacy that relies on extending the paradigm of the bourgeois family to that of the ‘race’. And they go against the version of Afrocentrism that, in scribing privacy at the level of

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<sup>35</sup> It is important to also identify neo-liberal strategies of global economy since they are part of an “essential” nature of these websites (Fotopoulou, 2012; 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Black nationalism is a political and [social movement](#) prominent in the 1960s and early ’70s, in the United States, among some [African Americans](#) that fight for equal rights for the black community.

community, attempts to hide the gender relations that benefit ‘our men’, calling it the protection of ‘our women’. Or, worse yet, that treat our cultural circumstances as so distinctive and isolated from the larger community’s that the gender economy no longer applies.

Indeed, it is this very act of “airing the dirty laundry” for which Morrison has been so criticized by some of her colleagues, like Richard Wright. By making public the gendered relations from which the characters of her novels suffer, she is creating the sense of community to free women individually, according to their own everyday life experience. This Facebook page prevents the individuals from being isolated in their uniqueness, dividing them from the rest and encapsulating them to an ontological oppression. Thus, agency is promoted in this Facebook page as this space of possibilities, where silence becomes disrupted by a digital community; commodities become individuals partaking in their empowerment through different relating subjects; and, affinities are created throughout the feelings relating all the elements. In the next section, I will provide an analysis of how feelings and affects become disruptive forces of gendered oppressions.

3.4.2. Technologies of subjectivation: flow of the conversation, social conflicts, theories of gender.

Following FCDA, it is necessary to critically reflect on the socio-political context referred by the participants, as well as what remains absent from the discussions. This is also a historical context since, according to Barad (2010) past, present and future are entangled in the creation of meaning. Thus, they are part of the conceptualization of gender. Visible for the community are four different elements. First, the current economic crisis (and its multiple cultural or environmental implications, among others) is present through its connection with the feeling of happiness. Happiness is considered the acquisition of economical values, a contrary feeling for a critical mass theory, spread around through neo-liberal practices of monetary exchange. According to Toni Morrison, the “acquisition of property” is the motor of happiness in debates 1 (happiness) and 8 (social justice). Second, the human massacres during the course of the

last few years in Connecticut and Norway are also referred to (although this last one was only mentioned twice), in terms of sorrow, as part of a circular sorrow without beginning, nor end (echoing the words of the novel *Sula*). Third, it is the improvement of the welfare state, a law that was being implemented by the Obama administration that interestingly did not make any reference to the strong Black women's movement (composed by mothers and women from the lower class with a very low income) that pursued the improvement of their welfare in the seventies (Orleck, 2005). To conclude with this overview of the socio-political environment, a strong religious atmosphere seems to compose the discourse. Not only are the female characters compared to those in the Bible, but also references such as "amen" or "god bless you" permeate the webpage. The predominant religion is the catholic faith, clearly contrasting with Morrison's message, as observed in *Paradise*.

It is important to point out also what is "missing" or invisible from the context on Toni Morrison's Facebook page. Apart from the aforementioned historical welfare fight lead by women, it is very curious that slavery, or female slavery, does not seem to be a prominent topic on the page. The context of the webpage is very contemporary, which means that the patterns through which gender is developed are rarely historically connected. Gender is contextualized in the present, but the differences between how gender was performed in the past, and how it is now are not present. Therefore, gender is de-historicized in the community and, because of this, is presented as a universal oppression instead of being situated. Thus, the patterns to visualize situated gender oppressions, and because of their pertinent situatedness also racist oppressions, are focused on nowadays, which makes it hard to construct a political strategy for a better future without looking at the past, something highly recommended by Morrison in many of her novels, for example, *Beloved*.

#### 3.4.3. Subject formation: presenting all the debates

Gender is materialized on Morrison's Facebook page as an embodied experience that frequently relates different selves. It becomes visible through the embodied experiences of the participants as well as the participants' perceptions of the different characters.

These individual experiences become simultaneously collective experiences without invisibilizing individual subjects through the power of “affects” (intra-actions empirically accessible through feelings). This “gender-in-the-making” relates different selves with a wide range of feelings that connect participants in an abstract way (the noun that expresses a determinate state of mind such as happiness) or in an embodied way (the adjective that expresses the state of mind of an individual). This difference also produces differences that matter.

This section is divided into two different sections dealing first with the analysis of each one of the debates and, then with the visualization of the relationships. For clarity’s sake, I will introduce each debate in bold letters by the name given in table 1. Taking the previous section and this one together, I will produce a provisional definition of gender that will guide the close reading (together with the new elements appearing in the novels), as well as a provisional answer to the sub-research question one (at this stage of the thesis).

### 3.4.3.1. The analysis of the debates

#### **Debate 1: Happiness**



Figure 9

This thread (in figure 9) has only four comments but it is important to briefly reflect on it since it is the point of departure for what can be considered a way of doing politics through affections. It is one of the most important debates, because she encourages readers not to conform to “happiness”, in the context of

the strong economic, health, educational, and moral crisis that Europe and United States were facing at that time (and, indeed, still keep facing today).

In order to understand how this is started, it is first necessary to know how she defines happiness in the context of a strong social conflict, like the current global economic crisis:

So I suppose happiness is an epical improvement over a life devoted to the acquisition of land, acquisition of resources, acquisition of slaves. Still... I would rather he [Jefferson] had written life, liberty [long pause] and the pursuit of meaningfulness or integrity or truth. I know that happiness has been the real if covered goal of your labors here. I know that it informs your choice of companions, the profession you will enter, but I urge you please don't settle for happiness, it's not good enough. Of course you deserve it. But if that's all you have in mind, happiness, I want to suggest to you that personal success devoid of meaningfulness, free of a steady commitment to social justice, that's more than a barrier in life, it's a trivial one. It's looking good, instead of doing good [applauses]. (Toni Morrison, Commencement<sup>37</sup>)

The pursuit of happiness is not enough as a tool to enact political activism, since it is an implicit way of covering neo-liberal practices such as the “acquisition of land, of resources, and of slaves.” Thus, throughout a “strategic reflectivity” (Lazaar, 2007) Morrison presents happiness as a “negative agency”, with two main elements: self-irony, using “of course”, and a set of limited choices acquired over others. Thus, she names happiness as the material presentation of oppression (acquisition of slaves, lands, and properties) and then includes the audience (who gratefully agree with their applauses) to relate the problem with a contemporary solution: pursuit of meaningfulness and social justice. Moreover, happiness entails covering power relations that divide society in two groups: those who can acquire properties and those who cannot. Relating this to the

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<sup>37</sup> Every time that this thesis refers to this speech from now on, or quotes are extracted from it, it will be referred to as “commencement”. It can be found on the Internet at the following link: <http://commencement.rutgers.edu/commencement-and-convocations/2011-university-commencement-videos> I have found it on the Facebook page, as well as the rest of the information.

previous theories of gender and race, the acquisition of happiness leads also to the conceptualizations of One/Other. Thus, an asymmetrical power is enhanced and differences between One/Others ontologize what Morrison considers should be avoided.

Visually speaking, in this debate, the picture shows Morrison in a “listening manner”, hands in her face and with a receptive attitude. This enhances assertiveness with the direct gaze towards her readers but also reinforces a self-reflection, by which she is sharing personal matters with someone else. Taking into account that SNSs aim at being personal pages in which people unfold their inner selves, the picture reinforces an intimate climate which afterwards contrasts with the audience present in the Commencement speech. Nevertheless, coming back to the specific frame of the page, even though this post is liked by 79 people, just 4 comments are written to agree with those “needed and important words”. This promotes an intimate sphere for her to start developing her own way of doing politics for gendered and raced subjects.

## Debate 2: Hate



Figure 10

The debate in Figure 10 ran from June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011 until February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012, and comprised a total of 46 comments. The thread reads as follows: “‘Gimme hate, Lord,’ he whimpered. ‘I’ll take hate any day. But don’t give me love. I can’t take

no more love, Lord. I can't carry it...It's too heavy. Jesus, you know, You know all about it. Ain't it heavy? Jesus? Ain't love heavy?" and it is from the novel *Song of Solomon*, which is a quote from Milkman, the male protagonist of this novel. Visually speaking, the screen shot is contradictory. On the one hand, there is a smaller picture of Morrison's house "hit[ting] the market". This one can have two interpretations: one, is the obvious neo-liberal practices by which everything related to Morrison is a potential hit in the market; the other, is the possibility of opening-up her inner self with the Facebook community by showing her house and sharing her private life, which is the house where she lives. On the other hand, there is a picture of the cover page of the book in which the quote can be found. It stresses the fact that the quote belongs to her second novel and emphasizes the publicity industry of the publishing house, since the picture is the cover of a book and not an image reflecting on the novel. Thus, these two pictures may reinforce the marketing industry around Morrison's public persona. However, the flow of the conversation rejects the ideological discourse intended by the administrator of the page, Vintage Kopf Books.

Regarding the flow of the conversation, it was very fluent during ten days. More than one comment per day was posted. After the 11<sup>th</sup> of July, 2011, there were nine comments that extended the conversation until the 7<sup>th</sup> of February of the following year. These latter comments make reference to how much the readers loved the book *Song of Solomon*. Thus, they reflect a "positive agency" (Lazaar, 2007) to remain accomplice with the author and her novels. These comments are also timeless, since they are dis-located in time, which make the author as "forever" loved and admired. Indeed, the last comment of the post is as follows: "Toni Morrison is the greatest!".

After having commented briefly on the visualization of the quote and the flow of the conversation, it is important to note the quote itself. The quote refers to one recurrent need in Morrison's characters: love is a burden that not all of them can take. This novel was written at the end of the seventies and supposedly depicts a contemporary situation when the Civil Rights Movement had a massive presence in United States society. Nevertheless, straight from the very first comment, we

see how this situation has not changed much: “Amazing that we live in a culture where negative emotions, fear and hate are lighter to carry within your heart than love and compassion”. The use of the present time indicates contemporariness; that is to say, the seventies and 2011 are parallel and past, with past and present becoming one in a cyberspace in which geographical spaces are blurred to confirm Morrison’s statement. This is a “rhetorical strategy of disclaimer” (Lazaar, 2007) in which “love”, a traditionally positive cultural value is used to depict oppression at individual and political levels. It is individual because certain characters and people agree on the comment and some recognize that material suffering. It is also political because immediately after, the burden of love becomes a site of political agitation since this quote, and Morrison, is referred to as “Africa’s eternity and voice”, “voice to the voiceless” (which is repeated twice).

Thus, if love is a political burden, hate becomes a generator for the individual’s change, as the quote shows. This becomes particularly interesting because, in spite of the traditionally negative meaning of “hate”, the quote is paralleled with Obama as a president, thus with contemporary politics:

Remember when Barak Obama was first running for president and they asked him who his favorite author was and what book. When he said Toni Morrison I went bonkers, right then and there I knew who he was [...] when u don’t really know how to love and u’v been programmed to be negative that DEprogramming hurts.

Contemporary social conflicts are implicitly re-evaluated by reinforcing the public official political discourse. Thus, contemporary politics in United States is associated with this “burden of love” in this occasion.

To conclude, it is important to relate all the comments with the initial thread. Milkman finds it impossible to look for something else than hate, in order to generate change at an individual level. Negative critiques (which only one is produced) are ignored quickly through positive references to the novel:

“[Randon Ryland](#) Oh please, that ol' crazy bird was just too horned up! Making all that ruckus from the roof in a neighborhood busy with conflict. Don't make no damn sense. LMBAO! [June 30, 2011 at 3:48pm](#)

[Evergreen Black](#) My absolute favorite book in the WHOLE WIDE WORLD!!! Powerful!! [June 30, 2011 at 3:56pm](#) · [Like](#) · [4](#)

[AW Momak](#) This has been my all time favorite, ever since reading it at a German University in 1984. Thank you so much for it! [June 30, 2011 at 4:20pm](#)”

Even “self-irony” (Lazaar, 2007) is used to re-define Morrison in traditionally negative attributes to marginalize the centre and affirm the outside: “You’re a bad writer; love you!!!!!!!” Through different relations a community creates a voice of their own in which race and gender necessarily acquire a different dimension in order to produce a contemporary change. The relations between the participants co-opt dynamically to secure and challenge hierarchical structures of oppression.

### Debate 3: Angry



Figure 11

In this small but very illustrative debate, I focus on a few salient aspects of the political subjectivity of Toni Morrison. This debate consists of seventeen comments and 289 likes. The support is huge and sometimes, silence or, in this case low activity and the huge number of people liking the post, can be an indicator of agreement. This post is accompanied by a picture of Angela Davis and Toni Morrison and clearly denotes a strong political connection between

them. The picture was taken the 28<sup>th</sup> of March, 1974<sup>38</sup>. It shows the political and personal friendship of Toni Morrison and Angela Davis. The fact that the picture itself is historicizing meaning makes it worth explaining. At that time, Morrison was still the editor of Random House (until *Song of Solomon* in 1977) and had only written two novels. Angela Davis was just released from prison one year before and was acquiring a different political presence because she formalized her affiliation with the Communist Party of United States and ran for the Vice-presidency of her country. This year is the year of publication of Davis' autobiography, thanks to Morrison, was promoted by Morrison's editorial house. Focusing now on Morrison, the picture shows the political commitment that Morrison has always had for the African American women. Having published the autobiography the same year of the photograph, Morrison here seems to be conveying the meaning that things are not always what they look like. Davis just got out of prison and Morrison fought for telling her story, because it mattered politically and personally. The picture shows the strength between female alliances, the power of writing, and the importance of movement for political change.

Morrison is on the right side of the picture and it is inevitable to read the quote: "I get angry about things, then go and work" and not seeing her already moving as she is doing in the picture. Thus, even though this post has no visual picture with it, the picture next to it equally strengthens the post. This last quote is very representative of Toni Morrison's strategic public persona, since it has appeared several times in several public accounts (such as Twitter). This becomes one of her political statements and receives agreement by the huge majority of the participants of the debate. Time is especially relevant in this occasion, since several of the participants include references to their contemporary situations. It implies the embedment of the participants' personal experiences with Morrison's Facebook site:

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.newyorksocialdiary.com/node/752319>

“[Trina Cox](#) Amen Toni my sister you couldn't be more timely!!! Thanks for that post! I need more strength!! Keep it coming especially this wknd! [July 2, 2011 at 3:03am](#) via [mobile](#)

[...]

[Patrice Michel](#) so relevant to my current condition ... thank you ... what I needed to hear [July 2, 2011 at 3:18am](#)”

The two participants above show a strong connection with Morrison through what Wodak (2008) identifies as an intensification produced by the possessive pronouns. They are producing close relationships through the interchanges between ‘you’ and ‘me’, as well as daily conversations with signs of agreement from the spoken language as ‘Amen’ or ‘what I needed to hear’. Especially relevant is the first participant mentioned here. Even if a clear geographical origin is not specified, I have assumed that she is speaking from the sociopolitical context of the United States. A brief search on the internet<sup>39</sup> shows that that same weekend (“wknd”) a law was being proposed in the United States to ensure public health insurance, which was going to be debated in Parliament the following day. The picture suggests that historical backgrounds conflate with the immediateness of the present since historically black women have fight for their own welfare rights (Orleck, 2005).

Now, changing focus towards a “micro-analysis” (Wodak, 2008) of the debate produced, it is necessary to turn to the field of Linguistics to illuminate the meaning of the quote, because it is important for the community, as the following comments show:

“[Nora Wilburne](#) Pondering the statement, there's great space between what happens after the comma and the word "then". Does the anger motivate to "then go on and work" or is it a dismissing of the anger which should stop the work but doesn't? If the latter, its not a "like" for my life right now. [July 2, 2011 at 3:24am](#) · [Like](#) · [1](#)

[...]

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<sup>39</sup> “First Study of Its Kind Shows Benefits of Providing Medical Insurance to Poor” (July 7th, 2011) <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/07/health/policy/07medicaid.html>. Last visited: June 7th, 2013

[Neil Daniels II](#) Maybe the "great space" is neither dismissive nor motivational. Perhaps it's being true to yourself and dealing w/ the emotion that you feel at that moment and then realizing that regardless of what or how you feel, life is still moving on and the time has come for you to do the same, also... [July 2, 2011 at 4:00am](#) · [Like](#) · [4](#)

[...]

[Anne-Marie Kennedy](#) Well said Neil Daniels III! I see that pause as a subtle click of perception as the situation and the role I can play to 'right' it becomes clear - could be a moment may be decades but without that readjustment the anger clogs rather than liberates the creative flow... [July 2, 2011 at 8:31am](#) · [Like](#) · [2](#)

This conversation shows differences in understanding language when it is being "writingly spoken". This debate establishes which feelings direct the subject towards his or her own development. The rules of the English language explain the use of commas in this particular case as a consequence or the equivalent of "so". Then, the sentence would be "I get angry about things so go and work" in its written form. However, the same sentence in spoken language depends very much on the pause spent between words as one of the participants state. The ambiguity of the sentence can be only clarified in one way, the consensus of the community.

There are three participants trying to give meaning to the sentence. One of them doubts about the meaning and the material consequences of anger as promoting work (short pause) or anger as dismissing in order to promote work (long pause). The other two participants (who received four and three likes each) explain that anger is a liberating system of creativity when it is enacted in its proper time. Therefore, the community agrees on a short pause, which gives anger the meaning of motor for social change. Moreover, this material feeling already had its own form of expression. 'I', Toni Morrison, use this particular feeling to obtain certain results. This 'I' is raced and gendered in an oppressive context.

#### **Debate 4: Worried**



Figure 12

This debate in Figure 12 has no picture to reinforce its power, but this may be due to the fact that it does not need it. The original text is institutionally powerful enough. Thus, it does not need to be reinforced by what Gillian Rose (2001) identifies as the authentic discourse that photographs construct. The “she” referred to in the quote is a woman writer, any woman writer, whose race is not specified. She evokes one “fairy tale”, used in popular culture to teach a moral lesson. It is the story of a blind-woman asked by children if the bird they have in their hands is dead or alive. She does not answer that question but rather affirms that it is in their hands, no matter if it is dead or alive, so whatever happens is the children's responsibility. To Morrison, “the bird [is] language and the woman [...] a practiced writer”. This is the sentence that precedes the fragment presented in the quote. She defines language as something that one can control, but at the same time as something with its own agency. Thus, if the bird is language, language can be either alive or dead. This means that language has its own materiality (Kirby, 2011b).

This debate is very illustrative of what being a female writer (she) is and of the agency of language in this process. The participants in the conversation understand this quote as definitions of language, which include “agency”, “an act that has consequences”, “partly as a system, partly as a living thing...”, “culture”, “power” depending on its use. The politics in language arises with this concern. This worry presents a permanent tension in female writers, and

generally in female subjects worried about the culture and society that they live in. As feminist contemporary theory states, “language is a living force” (Colebrook, 2008), and we need to search for the “materiality of language” (Kirby, 2011b) in order to find our own becoming political. Language is “partly a system, partly a living thing”, it is a permanent tension which cannot hold absolute power (Barad, 2003); neither can it be denied the role it plays in social change.

## Debate 5: Love



Figure 13

This entry corresponds to one extract from *Jazz* and it receives a total of twenty-two comments and 220 likes in the community. It is a very important one because even though it contains fewer comments than some of the other entries, it gives us the description of Dorcas, a black female character. The picture that accompanies the entry shows that this is a very powerful statement, since Morrison is presented there lecturing in an explanatory way (as can be seen by her left hand). Her gaze is directed at the audience, who as the direction of the eye reveals, is in a lower position. This powerful position is also “visually materialized” (Rose & Tolia-Kelly, 2012) with the microphones and the podium. This reinforces power together with the black and white aura of solemnity. Thus, this statement is dislocated within this horizontal type of communication that visualizes the different nature of this particular debate:

Dorcas has been acknowledged, appraised, and dismissed in the time it takes for a needle to find its opening groove. The stomach-jump of possible love is nothing compared to the ice floes that block up her veins now. The body she inhabits is unworthy. Although it is young and all she has, it is as if it had decayed on the vine at budding time. (Figure 13)

In this statement, feelings have a direct reaction on the body and, in this case, they separate the inner-self of its own body: “the body she inhabits is unworthy”, making her not want to live in her body. Morrison is explaining that love splits mind and body in black female characters and materializes the body into an unworthy recipient of the active mind. These are the material implications of love. Morrison is lecturing in this post about the traditional reading of love as a positive thing and how this results in a distorted presentation of the self. The changes that the body experiments through the intervention of love are negatively discarded, since the traditional image of butterflies in the stomach (“stomach-jump”) is *unromantized* by substituting it with “ice floes blocking the veins” by which the heart would stop beating. That is to say, this body is dying and it is presented through the conventional metaphor of nature: “vine at budding time”. The position of this sentence (at the end of the paragraph) suggests that it is the most important part of the statement.

Different turns in the Humanities and the Social sciences have considered nature as the container of culture, a passive recipient of an active culture (eds. Rose & Tolia-Kelly, 2012; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012; Kirby, 2011; eds. Alaimo & Hekman, 2008). However, nature can also be seen as the origin of birth (Kirby, 2008). Coming back to Dorcas, it appears that Morrison is explaining that a black female body is decayed when it is encountered with “love”. Morrison identifies a split between body and mind provoked by love which causes the death of the body, at the very moment that it should be developing: “budding time”. Thus, in order to disambiguate the use of nature in this specific context, it is necessary to look for the participants’ comments. The debate only lasts a couple of hours, starting July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at 2.44 a.m. and finishing the same day, at 9.14 p.m. This short duration implies that the debate was important only for a

few people within the community and that the meaning was created within one specific day.

According to the community, this novel is also one in which the literary wholes of language referred in chapter one are better appreciated. One of the readers in the debate claims the following:

[Paul Logan](#) "Jazz" is improvisational with its "interruptions," turns, and twists. It reminds me of [...] the idiomatic device "break" -- a "temporary interruption of the established cadence . . . which usually requires a fill" -- a fill which might consist of an "informal sequence of improvised choruses as the overall frame for a precisely controlled but still flexible instrumental composition." Morrison's composition invites, requires the reader's participation; it invites, requires him or her to dance with it, to give in to it -- not matter how difficult the dance steps might be or how improvised the music is. [July 18, 2011 at 5:18am](#) · [Like](#) · [2](#)

This statement refers to the active participation of the reader in the creation of Morrison's novels. At the same time, it explains the material implications that such a short debate has for the flow of the page. It is a "temporary interruption" developed within the course of one day in which Morrison is requiring the reader to understand Dorcas in its multiple signification throughout "different turns and twists", by which Dorcas' character is "acknowledged, appraised, and dismissed". Just as she does in her novels, Morrison tends to incorporate many interruptions in her Facebook page.

Immediately after, one of the participants identifies with this situation. She needed to pass through a grieving period and because of that, she understands the vine itself as God and the passage as Dorcas' loss of faith. This is described as "going through the motions with no emotions". This will twist the statement once again since coming back to love as this split between mind and body, this reader would also be entangling this process as the absence of feelings. The religious connotations are reinforced by a participant who includes a brief extract from a different story (intertextuality) in which Dorcas is already dead and equated with the disciple "Tabitha", who is one of the women in the Catholic Bible. Thus, this participant gives the biblical reference to this story

(Acts 9:36) in which Dorcas appears as already dead but resurrected by Peter and presented alive to the audience. In this sense, Dorcas was dead, but returned alive thanks to religion and God, finding her own way to the vine (as the previous participant states).

To conclude, another meaning produced by one participant that relates with the definition of “woman” that the community is trying to convey:

[Thomas Beasley](#) "Jazz", read it not too long ago. Liked it. Her characters give a look "behind the veil" of the black experience, particularly the Black Woman. For the perceptive her characters show cross-sections of the souls of the African-American matriarch. [July 18, 2011 at 9:14pm](#)

When a debate is being produced, the last remarks become the most important since they are indicators of the implicit agreement among the participants of the debate. In spoken English or conversational language, a debate usually ends with the statement of one participant. This activity produced within the Facebook page does not need to reflect otherwise. This intervention has to do with the conventional metaphors of becoming “traditional women” expressed through a link with nature. For this reader, Dorcas (as part of Morrison’s characters) shows what is “behind the veil” of a black woman: strength. Traditionally, behind the veil religious bonds are found (as the other participants show), as well as it shows contradictions between becoming (budding time) and not becoming (decaying), which is what Morrison explains in the main quote. Love splits Morrison's female characters into contradictory tensions very difficult to deal with. Morrison wants the readers to introduce their own twists in her characters, and Facebook is here creating these particular twists that show that “tradition” and “rootness” are dying concepts for black female characters. These need a total different configuration in order to avoid splitting mind and body, which also entails taking “motion without emotion” (one of the participants).

### **Debate 6: Anger**

The following debate pertains again to “anger” but in rather different terms. There is a clear distinction between “angry” – adjective - and “anger” - an

abstract noun - . This debate is visualized in Figure 7 (page 82) and reads as follows:

Anger ... it's a paralyzing emotion ... you can't get anything done. People sort of think it's an interesting, passionate, and igniting feeling — I don't think it's any of that — it's helpless ... it's absence of control — and I need all of my skills, all of the control, all of my powers ... and anger doesn't provide any of that — I have no use for it whatsoever.

— Toni Morrison

This quote is full of what Laazar (2007) would call “analytical activism”. Morrison is describing different kind of reactions or even communities by using the exclusionary “people” and the authoritative personal pronoun “I” in contrasting terms. To Morrison anger is “paralyzing”, “absence of control” and a material implication unable to give you anything or to be used in a meaningful way. On the contrary, there are people who think it is an interesting, passionate feeling. Thus, whereas Morrison thinks of “anger” as an “emotion”, the rest of the people think of it as a “feeling”. An “emotion” understood as an analytical category (Illouz, 2009) is a category that encapsulate the individual according to the properties of that feeling. It is a representative abstract notion that erases the particularities of subjects, the “I” expressed before and homogenize the subject with particular settings. Nevertheless, if we think of ‘anger’ as an “affect” (Colman 2009b; Clough, 2009) it is a driving force that glues different subjects in a particular context. Thus, these subjects are defined after the relation and not previously to that and their development, their characteristics, depend on that relation.

Morrison is spreading an ideological project through what Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak (1997) identify as the combination of different discourses. By mixing liberal political discourses with the discourses of ordinary life and ordinary experiences (ibid, 272), she tries to share with the community a necessity to find different feelings in order to move forward politically speaking. She uses everyday expressions such as “it have no use”, “you can't get anything done”, or even the contraction of the negative form which expresses a colloquial

use of language. She aims at creating her own “rhetorical power” by stressing parallel structures of language (ibid): “all of my skills, all of the control, all of my powers” by constructing a self-perception of her own persona through the use of strong modal verbs, expressing obligation or necessity. At the same time, she is enhancing a sense of community using the personal pronoun “you”, which indicates that “she is just an ordinary person” (ibid, 274). Although the issue of “gender and race” is not explicitly stated, from the moment that Morrison decides to bring her own personal experience to the debate, gendered and raced issues come up front.

Now, turning to the debate itself, it is necessary to reflect on the photograph accompanying it (Figure 2). The community is presented with a picture of Morrison in a sitting position, with her hand on her face, looking up and thoughtful. This background presents a yellow wall which rapidly leads the “critical eye” (Rose & Tolia-Kelly, 2012) towards the symbolic meaning of “yellow” in Morrison’s novels. In one of her interviews (Morrison, 1983), she refers to the “woman-in-yellow” of *Tar Baby* as the desired-becoming of the female protagonist Jadine. Yellow in Morrison is a strong marker of powerfulness, and a symbol for the completion of the black female. Thus, she is involved in this powerful aura, which enhances her ideological discourse. This is reinforced by her thoughtful position which implies a project that is not finished yet, it is in the making. This picture presents a smiling Morrison who invites the “you” (who is not “people” but the individual) to reflect with her in order to build together the potential of affects, which for Patricia Clough (2009) and Felicity Colman (2010) is leading any social movement rather than the affect that could paralyze it.

This debate contains seventy comments and 555 likes. Thus, it implies a vast part of the community agreeing with it, or at least liking it. This debate runs for only six days but explores “anger” from a multidisciplinary angle. The flow of the conversation takes the materialization of anger across different geographical points, timings (past and present are conflated), and personal experiences. It implies its conception either as a cause-effect action, or as an intangible

production. These contradictions are explained in relational terms (defining it through other feelings such as “happiness” or through intertextual references with Nepali poems). To some of the participants, “anger” is a passive recipient of human action, a tangible while agentless matter that is used by humans to infer changes: “the difference is what you do with it cause THAT you’re entirely responsible for.” To others it is the action itself: “anger is needed to mobilize us to action.”

Thus, it results in a very problematic referent for political action. A “micro-analysis” (Wodak, 2008) of the debate is required. According to the first intervention in the conversation, anger can leave subjects “powerless” (as one participant states). This is directly related to a current issue at the time, the tragedy of Norway. Almost every participant in the debate has his or her own opinion about the meaning of anger. Depending on their personal experience they regard it either as a “catalyst for every change”, or as the expression of movement for political aims while also, at the same time, it can be thought of as a paralyzing feeling.

The last comment within this debate relates to a previous one: “It’s an emotion that one must experience..I am sure here it also depends on the magnitude of anger which determines its control over you. Is there any angrometer????”. This is also rather paradoxical since anger is, at the same time, explained through deterministic terms and beyond human control. It is perceived as a participant in the social change with its own agency, which can determine positive or negative effects depending on the personal experience. The last participant comes back to this comment by expanding it with the definition of anger as a “dangerous emotion – it takes lost of control and skill to move past it without losing your mind.” This creates a contra-productive effect since Morrison’s herself previously established the need to have skills, control, and power. Thus, the only way anger can be made use of is by accepting this feeling as agentful in itself and by materializing it through your own personal experience. Understanding this tension together with the tension portrayed in the picture itself (powerfulness and authoritativeness mixed with a desire for common

understanding) provides the clue to understand the permanent tension in Morrison's black female characters.

## Debate 7: Loneliness



Figure 14

Figure 14 shows a photograph of one of the movie posters of the novel *Beloved*, produced, directed and starred by Oprah Winfrey. The photograph shows the actress who interpreted Beloved in an active way (in the sense of movement). Beloved has been said to be the representation of Sethe's murdered daughter, Sethe's mother and the personification of the thousands of black people who died anonymously in the slavery time (Phelan, 1997). In the picture, Beloved is not facing the camera, neither the audience, and her face cannot be seen. Her body posture indicates that she is waiting for something or someone. There is a tree next to her. In the novel, Sethe (the co-protagonist with Beloved) has a "tree", which is a metaphor for the scars of her back, product of several lashings that she received when she was in Sweet Home (a plantation) as a former slave. Thus it seems that Sethe is the person that Beloved is waiting or looking for.

This loneliness is personified in the quote. The verb "rock" indicates the movement by which, among others, a baby child can be made to sleep in his or her crib. Furthermore, this loneliness has crossed arms and drawn up knees, which make reference to body parts of a human body. Nevertheless, this is just

one type of loneliness. The other one is also alive and roams, as the woman in the photograph is doing. Both the photograph and the description make the character of Beloved a material embodiment of this type of loneliness. If Sethe were to be described as the tree in the right side of the photograph, Sethe would be the personification of the other type of loneliness.

At any rate, this type of feeling is an embodiment of experience that makes the body either to move by “its own”, or to wait to be “rocked”. As one of the participants explains: “Loneliness becomes part of our existence and we can’t escape it...” Thus, in order to understand the characters of Beloved and Sethe, we need to understand this feeling that bounds them to each other. This definition of loneliness is explained by one of the participants as both “a display of loneliness and a secret private loneliness” that is “inside like a skin”. Beloved is the corporealization of the female oppression during the slavery times. Thus, as very well expressed here, this female oppression is affected by loneliness. Slave women became isolated from the rest of the community because their experiences were so unique that no one could understand them. However, in affecting this oppression with the feeling of loneliness, as the participant very wisely states, female slavery becomes part of the whole community present at this moment and we cannot escape from it.

This material effect is achieved through Morrison’s unique use of language and understanding of reality. One of the participants claims the following in capital letters (supported by four other people who like the statement): “YOU TOUCH THE DEEP DOORS BEHIND WHICH NOBODY HAS THE COURAGE TO OPEN”. By doing this, Morrison is able to produce the same effect that she aims at pursuing in her novels: an active engagement of the reader in her novels (Morrison, 1992). Morrison wants her readers to actively participate in her novels, but she also actively participates in her readers’ ways of thinking through individualizing experiences. As one participant claims, she has “the unbelievable ability for having the reader feel like she has just tapped into our very own dark recesses! Like – how could you know my heart and recesses so intimately?” This illustrates that the active participation is not only coming from the exercise of

the reader, but it also entails how Morrison jumps into individuals through linguistic doors and bodily experiences. As a writer, Morrison is responsible, as one participant states, for saving the characters with her own use of language in order to make the literary characters fleshed participants of a present that seems to forget its past.

Beloved symbolizes a tension between life and death, Sethe's memory and Denver's present, present and past in order to be future. Through this analysis of loneliness, and taking into account its linguistic materiality, the character of Beloved goes beyond race. However this does not imply moving away from race. In the flow of the conversation, the following analytical reflection is done by one participant in the debate: "BELOVED is the Queen in modern, American Literature. It goes well beyond race and its supreme in importance [...] worthwhile to read and understand". Thus, if "beyond" is understood in the post-modernist sense of including and more (Lyotard, 1979), its nature as an incarnated ghost between life and death allows Morrison to extend the meaning of gender and race as both inside and outside of the character. Morrison universalizes this character and makes it immortal while, at the same, time permanent and beyond (including and excluding) gendered and raced oppressions. Thus, slavery history is perpetuated in the present of United States society through a "loneliness" that looks to be rocked.

## Debate 8: Happiness



Figure 15

This thread (Figure 15) is part of the first speech analyzed in Debate 1:

Please don't settle for happiness. It's not good enough. Of course you deserve it, but if that's all you have in mind — happiness — I want to suggest to you that personal success devoid of meaningfulness, free of a steady commitment to social justice — that's more than a barren life. It's a trivial one. — Toni Morrison

Taking into consideration the number of likes/followers (sixty-two comments and 768 likes within ten months), this thread has had much more impact than the previous one (Figure 9). It is presented with a picture of Toni Morrison lecturing, which differs a lot from the original setting in which this speech is produced. In this picture Morrison is again empowered by the use of a podium and microphones, the solemnity of the room and the fore front photograph. The illumination of the room indicates a huge auditorium and she is very well-dressed, which highlights that maybe the event was very important or a serious public intervention. In this case, her gaze is fixed on the horizon (the same as in the previous one), which indicates that rather than lecturing to an audience seated underneath her, she is again sharing a political project in an assertive way.

In this statement, happiness is being equated with “personal success devoid of meaningfulness, free of a steady commitment to social justice.” Thus, again, as in the first debate, a politically engaged subject can never be happy. Some contemporary feminist theory also urges to not pursue the conventional meaning of happiness (Ahmed, 2010b: 2): “I write from a position of skeptical disbelief in happiness as a technique for living well. I am interested in how happiness is associated with some life choices and not others, [...]”. Hence, as Ahmed continues, happiness is directly related to political choices in which diversity is erased again and easy universalisms, which have always undermined women's realities, come upfront: “Happiness shapes what coheres as a world. In describing happiness as a form of world making I am indebted to the work of feminist, black, and queer scholars who have shown in different ways, how happiness is used to justify oppression” (ibid). This demonstrates a solid link between Morrison's “affective politics” (in which affects are motors for social change) and feminist theory.

Given the importance of this speech, it becomes extremely relevant to understand how the community reacts and devotes meaningfulness (echoing Morrison's words) to it. I would like to start the micro-analysis with the following quote from one of the participants, since it relates closely with the previous idea:

[Sharon Kinsella](#) I know, at the end of the day, that I have spent most of my life, making the world a better place for women and their children. When you help a woman, you change the world. I've raised amazing kids and done 30 years of feminist organizing. I'm very proud. [August 23, 2011 at 4:27am](#) · [Like](#) · [2](#)

This statement is important to many different groups of social activists, but most importantly for feminist and Civil Right movements. Regarding the latter, one participant states: “.....Well THANK GOD I'm a Humanitarian, Civil Rights and Community Activist. I might be in poverty, but my heart and character is RICH!” The influence that these two participants have on the rest of the community is equally important, although very differently materialized. The second participant intervenes four times in the debate being the first intervention the above mentioned and the other two compliments for Morrison. The last one is an acknowledgement to all those people who liked (9) her statement. Clearly, this participant is using the SNSs as a possible way to feel part of the group (Van House, 2011) by individualizing particular relationships through the writing of the names of those who liked her statement. She is attempting at creating a community of committed social activists, like the participant herself and Morrison.

The first participant, on the other hand, has received only two likes. No one answers back to her until eight hours later<sup>40</sup>. This new thread is very interesting:

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<sup>40</sup> This may appear a lot of the time in the chronological timeline but it is one example of how, because of the time differences, communication is produced synchronically and asynchronously at the same time. Eight hours are just simultaneous depending on which part of the globe these two participants are. This is a clear example of how different geographical locations are dislocating time and space (and vice-versa).

[Felix Anthony Williams](#) With all due respect...I think we should be very careful, of what we define happiness to be - for everyone. Happiness for one, may be totally different, for another. And rightfully so. Everyone..is not "called" to participate in social justice [participant number two] on a grand scale as some, or stand in the pulpit to preach [Morrison's visualization in the Facebook page], or be a mother, and to nurture and raise a family [the first participant]. But the "happiness"...in each experience...is just as valid and just as important. Happiness for me...is living an authentic life! I walk and live in MY truth. There was a time, when life for me was miserable - because I lived contrary to my belief system. I now walk in peace ! That, for me, is true happiness! [August 23, 2011 at 1:16pm](#) · [Like](#) · [2](#)

Very probably, these participants were aiming at answering to each other at the same time, since the comment is very well written and aptly summarizes all the different applications that participants have given to Morrison's way of doing "affective politics". Even though the community largely ignores the criticism, this comment receives the like of two people and is preceded by another comment with the same argument: "Happiness is not trivial it is a very complex state and different for everyone. But I agree with the overall point."

The criticism is a useful comment that introduces the end of the debate. They start to define "happiness" in relation to "anger", in order to avoid the dangerous universalisms against which the participants were warning the community. They present "anger" as a solution or the balance between anger and happiness. "Happiness" is defined in relational terms and, as one of the participants states at the beginning of the debate, "happy feels better but it can sometimes feel empty too." As it happened with the previous debate on anger, happiness turns to be absence, and in this case, absence of social commitment towards women. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that the agreement of the community is a different one, yet related. Happiness is not universal, it is relational and in permanent tension; for women, happiness is not enough. As Ahmed (2010b: 2) claims, "such political movements [feminist movements, the first participant] have struggled *against* rather than *for* happiness" (emphasis in the original).

## **Debate 9: Black female**



Figure 15

This thread is part of a piece of news published in *The Guardian* the day before (8<sup>th</sup> of November, 2011). A black female journalist denounces cyber-bullying because of her gender and race. The journalist starts with a reference to Toni Morrison's writings and quotes her: "I really think the range of emotions and perceptions I have had access to as a black person and as a female person are greater than those of people who are neither". Although this debate is not accompanied by a picture of Toni Morrison, it is very significant, because it provides a link to the news in the Guardian, showing a small picture of a white man in front of a computer screen and a big headline. This body position rapidly reminds the reader of a "cyber-spy" who is hiding himself in the obscurity of his room. This situates the white male as the enemy, which is reinforced by the newspaper's headline: "Disagree with me – but not because I'm a black woman".

Before continuing with the analysis, I would like to point out that this is not faithfully what the journalist says in this order. She, whose name is Hannah Pool, originally wrote: "Disagree with me by all means, but is it really necessary to pile on the vitriol?" And afterwards, she continues in another paragraph: "It's neither sexist nor racist to disagree with a black woman, but to do so because of her gender and race, is and to couch your disagreement in terms relating to her gender, race or colour is as juvenile as it is offensive." It is important to point out that the Facebook entry and the actual new do not coincide literally, even more so, taking into account that few participants will read the new as a whole. Just one of them refers to the content of it: "As for those who tell you to leave America for disagreeing with popular ideology [...] well, I think they mean 'go back to your silent place beneath me, where I've decided that you belong'". This

reinforces the importance of looking at the Facebook page by itself and the necessity to recognize its own agency. The Facebook community is only interested in what they can see at first sight, and the meaning conveyed by the screen without going to secondary sources. It is a material link between the screen and the Facebook participant. This bond is invisible, but also indivisible.

Now, turning our view to the characteristics of the debate, it has received 551 likes and seventy-seven comments. It started on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011 and ran until December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011. However, only 6 comments were written in a discontinuous way. That is to say, the flow of the conversation consisted of real questions and answers in real time during one complete day. This means that the debate was truly intense. In fact, there are more or less as many comments in favor of the statement as there are against it. This is very significant because disagreeing in this context is much more difficult, since all of the participants of this particular community share affinities regarding all of what Morrison posts, says or writes.

It is interesting to notice that one string of criticisms in this debate comes from the understanding of the statement on the basis of “Standpoint theory” (Harding, 1986). This theory privileges the marginal perspective in oppressive systems: “I will respect that as her own perception of her experience however I find it dangerous when any human makes such a generalization today. The word greater??? is problematic for me.” This discourse is linguistically expressed through the discomfort that the word “greater” provokes in many of the participants. As one of the participants states afterwards: “Respectfully: If one has never been a non-black or non-female person, how could one know their range of emotions?” Therefore, the debate is lead to dangerous relativistic nets, which has always been the source of criticism with the Standpoint theory (Haraway, 1991). Other participants add, “[n]o two people have the same lived experience [...] Surely a person’s lived experience counts for more?” or “Everyone has a different set of experiences and emotions to bring to the rainbow of humanity.” This debate conveys a perfect example of many

contemporary theories that feminism is dealing with and helps to construct the glasses with which politics will be addressed.

All the characteristics and criticisms of the Standpoint theory are well represented. For example, the pluralism and the meaning of difference is problematized: “Greater? Different, indeed....but reasoning that your emotions and perceptions are greater than anyone else's exclusively because you are a woman and black.... is hubris at the best....sanctimonious at the least.” Only people from marginal groups are able to speak for themselves, in order to avoid Eurocentric representations (Spivak, 1988). In this regard, one participant claims: “If you are not who you are and observe. Th[e]n how is your observation?” Thus, only groups with certain characteristics are able to speak their own truth, as also Harding (1986) defends. Another participant adds: “I have great respect for any woman who has the courage to speak her own truth...” Nevertheless, here the “Godtrick” (Haraway, 1991) enters the scene since, as one of the participants says, “Its not the truth, its an opinion that is false and dangerous”. This statement is taken as a “truth” and the discourse of authenticity stands out (many participants agree with Morrison by saying this is the truth, or “amen”, or “you are right”). As a consequence, the debate leads to a gender essentialism that is not beneficial for feminist politics (Witt, 2011; Mikkola, 2012). If we accept that some kinds of oppressions are better than others, we are reinforcing the patriarchal logic of One/Other.

The flow of the conversation and the gender ideological structure behind it divides the debate into two parts (while at the same time mutually influencing each other): relativism and identity politics. Another participant adds, “[b]e a black woman...walk in our shoes...come back, then disagree”. Those agreeing with Morrison try to take the debate to the side of identity politics, as well as to define “greater as in more not in better” (other participant). The more different oppressions as a subject you suffer from, the better, as in more valid scientifically and politically speaking: “anyone who is in the minority in some category [...] is more aware & sensitive to others’ feelings or gestures/actions towards them”.

No one can know anything about anyone, which has political consequences for the feminist movement. This idea is very well expressed by one participant:

[Nathan Powell](#) I agree with Toni, I did not know how marginalized black women (people) were until I married a lovely ebony partner. It is not to be understood by all, her experience is truly hers, as mine is mine and no one can say that she does not have a perception that is truly unique (greater), read her work. [November 9, 2011 at 12:57pm](#) · [Like](#) · [2](#)

Against this “truthful” discourse, the “real” one is presented. If experience and perception confirm this, the impossibility to share if you do not belong to the particular group, in this case black women, real subjects need to be involved: “Desdemona speaks to me, not because of my gender or my race, but because she is real.” (one participant). By assuming certain categories of “race” and “gender” as stable and in order to build established identity politics not only gender essentialisms are pursued but also cultural and material stereotypes that divide subjects from each other, instead of relating them affectively. As one of the participants expresses: “I’m a huge fan, and I recognize your genius, but I’m sorry, this quote is offensive. I thought you were above stereotyping Toni. I’m disappointed.” This statement receives four likes and a lot of criticisms, thus an important weight in the debate.

Almost at the end of the debate, one participant tries to summarize all comments in order to understand Morrison's writing:

[Marchele TheFirst Green](#) The reason some are having trouble grasping the quote is because they are looking at those that embody it as superior or gifted compared to the “people who are neither”. This “gift” of a greater/vast access to emotions and perceptions is not chosen but developed from living thru select experiences the “people who are neither” will never know. Stating the obvious; everyone has experiences but with different results. The different results are what granted broader access to some and not to others. This “gift” of greater access is not something to be envied or desired by any means just recognized and respected. [November 9, 2011 at 9:43pm](#)

I would like to perform a micro-analysis of this comment, because I believe that it is a concise summary of the whole debate and it is the last comment for that day. Besides, it exemplifies thinking about gender and race through affects, and is an affirmative reading of the debate and Morrison's post. This participant is clearly building a community through the uses of the uncountable pronouns "some" or "they", which as Wodak (2008) explains is the representation of the exclusion us/they. She is explicating that having this "gift" is not synonym of superiority and that this difference should not be claimed as "more/less than". As a consequence, this point of view cannot be seen as a privilege, because it is marginal in order to know "truth". Thus, she sees difference as multiplicity, as the possibility to encounter different results through different ways of knowledge. This multiplicity will be narrowed down by affinities, feelings, and common concerns rather than through categories of "gender" and "race" separated by each other. Moreover, this participant is also outlining how subjects are not only born, but become (Beauvoir, 2005 [1949]). Thus, it is through different lived experiences that some people have access to knowledge and get empowered. These characteristics are not deterministic or essential of individuals. They are an indivisible part of their life-learning project of becoming. "Greater" is multiple, not different not better. "People who are neither' will never know" these particular experiences but "it is not something to be envied or desired". She is trying to provide an alternative thinking in this debate, which moves away from relating in terms of superiority or inferiority.

### **Debate 10: Pain**



Figure 16

The quote written in Figure 16 belongs to the novel *Jazz*, as it can be seen in the above figure. The use of pain (the noun of a physical feeling that provokes suffering) at the beginning of the quote is remarkable. The feeling is not defined but personified in two different ways. First, as a personal preference, “an affection” enhanced by an oxymoron that obscures its meaning: “sweet tooth”. And second, as a meteorological phenomenon: a huge storm. Pain is the storm, and the character is also the storm the “eye”/I; pain begins with the subject and the subject begins with pain. In the flow of the conversation, there are three important aspects to be considered. First, the socio-political contextualization of the novel (Wodak, 2008); second, how the feelings become materialized with the “nature” metaphor and third, the way the relations between participants are being constructed, which Laazar (2007) would identify as a challenge and security for a determined meaning.

This novel takes place in the Harlem Renaissance. In this regard, one of the participants writes the following: “[...] I love the Harlem Renaissance setting and the poignancy of emotions in this novel”. This novel comprises the twenties and thirties, especially in one particular area in Upper Manhattan close to the Hudson River, in New York. This was a very important period for the African-American community, since the birth of music (especially jazz), literature and painting promoted bonds in the community that helped to create a strong political ideology. The Hispanic community is currently settled in this part of the city, so this geographical location has hosted marginal groups from the very

beginning. At the same time, it has also helped to create a culture of its own, in order to strengthen the Hispanic's own "marginality" into a revival of their values and culture. The previous participant, then, establishes African-American culture with the "poignancy of emotions" birth. This creates a socio-political context based on "affective politics", since they comprise different feelings that structure the community individually, collectively and geographically. Although this quote (as well as the novel), is referred to a particular period of time, Morrison's writing ability makes the quote a-temporal.

One of the participants claims: "My right knee and I understand all too well on this cold, rainy morning". This has two important implications, the first being that through this metaphor the message becomes understandable and accessible. The second talks about the way this natural phenomenon is linked to a feeling (pain) with a human subject, materially (and not only discursively) speaking. It is material because the participant feels the pain, because of the cold weather (my right knee), and it is also discursive because it is the "I/eye" that experiences the pain. Similarly, another participant adds: "Its like you are talking about your feelings". In regards to this, almost at the end of the debate, one reader states: "A daily battle for many, including myself, and you have encapsulated "pain" perfectly and all of it's [its] elements." Thus, Morrison defines "pain" as a personal feeling (I) naturalized through environmental elements. Culture and nature become one (Kirby, 2011b).

The third important element in this debate has to do with the way the participants explain the introductory quote. It is interesting that the participants use intertextuality (Kristeva, 1986). That is to say, they refer to some other text in order to understand one particular text. One of them, who receives seven likes states: "My fav Morrison line comes from The Bluest Eye, "because why is difficult one must take refuge in how." amazing...". This statement is given after the participation of another reader at the beginning of the debate: "im now readin the bluest eye for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time at each stage i geel [feel] like im readin abt this girl pecola for the 1<sup>st</sup> time." Thus, the participants agree that reading *Jazz* diffractively with *The Bluest Eye* is useful and coincides with the fact that

Felicity and Pecola are the key figures, in order to articulate a diffractive close reading of the novels. Moreover, they claim the need to pursue the question of “how” instead of “what”, in order to engage dynamically with Morrison’s ideological project. In this respect, one of the participants adds: “It [Jazz] personifies the simple raw truth about how we have to have pain and love pain in our lives to survive... The next step is what do we do after we acknowledge it”. Clearly, “analytical activism” (Laazar, 2007) is implied through a gendered and raced reading of pain.

## Debate 11: Happy



Figure 17

Figure 17 makes reference to a quote extracted from Morrison’s first novel *The Bluest Eye*. The number of likes and comments indicate that this is a very popular quote. The quote is accompanied by the front page of the book itself. If we were to think about marketing strategies, this could be a perfect example of a commercial, since it is an easy way to advertise the novel with almost no additional costs, and to a wide audience. In fact, in the flow of the conversation, many references to where the book can be purchased (for example from Nigeria) can be seen. However, this also reminds the participants of the Facebook page that they need to re-read the book yet another time to fully comprehend it: “I need to read it again”, and this is interesting because a process of re-reading the novel is enhanced. Thus, not only are novels read through dislocated times (for instance written in the seventies and read at 2014) but they are re-read again in different stages of life for certain subjects.

This quote is particularly interesting, since the concept of happiness is explained again from a different angle, by Morrison and the Facebook community, which leads to understand “happiness” as key for this thesis. This quote has been commented until March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2013. It is true though, that from November 2012 until March there were no comments and the last one reads: “Painful”. Thus, the community agrees that happiness is, at the same time, painful because as another participant stated previously: “we are never certain about certainties.” This means that we are never happy.

In order to know further about this type of anticipated and certain happiness, one of the participants in the debate refers to another part of the same novel with the following quote:

[Jessica Chepa Marie](#) "Love is never any better than the lover.<sup>41</sup> Wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love, weakly, stupid people love, stupidly, but the love of a free man is never safe. There, is no gift for the beloved. The, lover alone possesses his gift of love. The loved one is shorn, neutralized, frozen in the glare of the lover's inward eye." [...]

Then, the participant is closely relating this happiness to love and the lover. The same as happiness needs of someone who knows something with enough time, love needs of a lover. In addition, another participant comments the following less than ten minutes later (clearly indicating that an answer is produced):

[Bonifacio Yanguas](#) "He told me not to despair or be faint of heart but to love God and Jesus Christ with all my soul; to pray for the deliverance that would be mine at judgement; than no matter what others may say, I wan not a souless animal, a curse, that Protestants were in error or sin, and if I remained innocent in mind and

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<sup>41</sup> This quote appears afterwards as the entry of one debate. It is very interesting to see how the participants do play an active role in the configuration of the Facebook page. It cannot be said that because of this comment the other post appears, because there is not enough evidence to establish such a cause-effect relationship (nor that this thesis pursues those kinds of relationships). However, it definitely shows that there is a very strong intra-action between those two debates and that the configuration of this debate (the same as the rest) will not be completed until we see the relations.

deed I would be welcome beyond the valley of this woeful life into an everlasting one, [...]

Immediately after, one participant says: “read book 2wice, don't remember that line. Sorry”. He does not remember this line because it belongs to the novel *A Mercy*. “He” is the Blacksmith and “me” is Florens, who was deeply in love with him. The outcomes of this love story were terrible for Florens: the Blacksmith wanted to communicate Floren’s “certainty” through religion, as well as anticipation, in the sense that she was going to know what would happen afterwards. Nevertheless, this future happiness does not imply a relief in the present, since conditions do not change. The future is unreal; it is a “justice-to-come” (Barad, 2010), which can be projected in our present but cannot be the focus of our happiness. Thus, this happiness becomes unreal at a present time, and the only way to pursue it is by looking for it, which will always imply that we do not have it. This complexity is built up from: “pain, the racist tones, the anger and the acceptance of all the character had went through” (commented by one participant). The combination of all is considered happiness, but every attribute of that “happiness” is a negative one that cannot have positive outcomes. This is translated by other participant as “ergo happiness amounts to inexorable change, to absolute nonsense, to infinite permutations of birth and death, and of course, to ignorance :@)”.

## Debate 12: Worry



## Figure 17

In this debate (figure 17) we are presented back again with the movie of *Beloved*. As it can be seen by the likes and the comments, this quote is particularly powerful. In this occasion, the date in which the post appeared is particularly significant. On 22<sup>nd</sup> of December, 2010 Morrison lost her son, aged 45. After this loss, she wrote *Home* and before the publication of this novel, Morrison had some interviews where she mostly talked about loss, grief, happiness (or not) and love<sup>42</sup>.

Furthermore, I would also like to highlight the use of the indefinite pronoun “something” rather than “someone”. This can be understood in two different ways. One is thinking that a beloved one is a possession of the lover, as it was referred to in an earlier debate, and because of that it is more accurate to say something and not someone. This also implies that the “thing” being loved is “neutralized” or “paralyzed”. The second source of understanding is thinking about this quote in the proper context of the novel. This “something” is clearly “Beloved”, the character. Beloved was not human in the novel, but in between the dead-and-alive world. She was a tension between the past and the present of Sethe’s memory and it became fleshed, in order to alter certainties about their daily life.

The photographic shot belongs to one of the scenes in the movie, a movie that makes some of the participants to “[feel] as if I was turning pages visually”<sup>43</sup>. This picture, in black and white, makes the plot of the novel even more real, and does so for the character of Beloved. White and black colors convey the

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<sup>42</sup> 12/04/2012: “I want to feel what I feel even if it is not happiness”

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/apr/13/toni-morrison-home-son-love>

20/06/2012: “Toni Morrison on loss, love and modernity”

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/authorinterviews/9395051/Toni-Morrison-on-love-loss-and-modernity.html>

<sup>43</sup> This feeling is not shared by the entire community. For instance, one of the participants says right afterwards: “[...] I don’t think the movie presents or can present the depth of layers and meanings woven into the storyline”. However, following the affirmative lines on which this thesis is constructed, I believe that an opposition between movie and novel should not be pursued at this moment. I do not want to enter into the never-ending debate about what is best, the movie or the book. I want to explore the combination of the two genres; see Rodríguez & Rodríguez, 2004.

meaning of aging, and this story is supposedly happening a long time ago. So, it provides realism to the story and the debate itself. This is paramount especially in the case of *Beloved*. *Beloved*'s nature is always blurred in the movie but seems to be more real than in the novel. The audience can really see her, interpreted by real actresses just as Denver or Sethe. One of the participants even says: "I was really mad when I found out *Beloved* was fiction. I'd been taken through so much grief and then when I found out there wasn't a real person..." In this particular debate, the character of *Beloved* is very deceiving. There is a tension produced by the movie itself and the photograph. Here, the biggest people appearing in the shot and facing each other are Sethe and Denver. *Beloved*, on the other hand, is facing Sethe's back and she is presented in a much smaller format. It looks like *Beloved* is truly small and, in this sense, has a smaller role than Sethe and Denver. The three of them present scared looks towards the gazer and seem to be moving away from the audience itself, as well as trying to keep something out of vision. This is directly linked to the idea of closeness reflected in the novel. They are separated from the community and scared that someone finds out about their secret. This secret is twofold because, on the one hand, they are hiding Sethe's murder (something that may be seen as Sethe's second opportunity or *Beloved*'s vengeance); on the other, they are also hiding the fact that *Beloved* is the fleshed past, the six hundred thousand slaves who died anonymously.

Similarly, the opinion of the participants can also have a twofold interpretation. Disliking Morrison's characters is not a common thing in the community. In fact, it has not happened so far. One of them explicitly says: "Some things are best left lost *Beloved* was a evil wicked demon child." This type of arguments are not mentioned in any of the other debates dealing with this particular character. Thus, it implies that the reading of this character changes a lot, depending on the genre from where it is being explored. It is not the same from the perspective of those people commenting upon the novel, nor from those commenting on the movie. If people are able to see the character in this fleshy way, they feel betrayed by their vision because, if they have read the novel, they expect a ghost and if they have not, they do not expect that this character

becomes a ghost at the end of the movie. This structural thinking belongs to what Haraway calls the primacy of vision of “scientific objectivity”, which is defined under oppressive systems (Haraway, 2002). I am not claiming that movies, in general, follow this patriarchal objectivity and novels do not. What I am interested in is how this different way of understanding *Beloved* creates differences that matter for the analysis of the novel.

Another thing that strikes me as well is the fact that in the movie, as well as in the shown image, the focus is on Sethe. However, Morrison clearly states in many interviews (as well as in the prologue to the edition used in this thesis) that this novel is about those who could not speak in the slavery time. *Beloved* was murdered and Morrison wanted to tell her story. One of the participants wonders: “I have often thought [sic] of whether Margaret Garner really had a chance to think over her choice and, if she had to do it again, whether she would’ve made the same decision.” Sethe, inspired by Margaret Garner (the slave who murdered her own child, was accused of stealing her owner and went to jail), is at the center of the photograph, and a central part of the flow of the conversation. Indeed, they refer to *Beloved* as “easily killed, never lost” as opposed to the second intervention made in the debate: “Sethe in the end, lost *Beloved*”. These tensions start from a very clear departure point: Sethe. Then, should we read the novel departing from Sethe, instead of *Beloved*, even though it would be the contrary to what Morrison tells us to do?

Going back to the theme that links all the debates together, the solution reappears, by looking at the different feelings. Participants feel empathy, fear, dislike, sorrow, etc, towards *Beloved* and Sethe. According to one of them, “[t]his film presents so many profound life lessons about guilt, redemption, rage, oppression, retribution and forgiveness that it should be required viewing for every sobriety program.” According to another, it is an “exploration of what the trauma of slavery does to the human psyche and the bonds of family”, to which another adds: “when we can no longer see familiar faces understand that they are not lost.” This reading bonds Sethe and *Beloved* inseparably. Relational selves are constructed through each other and they share properties, oppressions and

tensions that can only be solved when looking at the apparatus at its boundary, where meaning is made (Barad, 2007). Thus, it is necessary to read *Sethe* and *Beloved* together, since *Beloved* is inside *Sethe*'s skin, as well as in the material personification of her past and the whole community's past. *Beloved* is a political enactment at the individual and collective level.

### Debate 13: Worry



Figure 18

The full entry of the debate presented in Figure 18 reads as follows:

I don't want to know or have to remember that. I have other things to do: worry, for example, about tomorrow, about Denver, about *Beloved*, about age and sickness not to speak of love. But her brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day. - Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

This year, 2012, *Beloved* is 25 years' old, thus, a celebratory post is included. In the image, we can see one of the first covers of this novel. In this occasion, what is seen on the Facebook page is the book cover and one part of the celebrating statement. To view it fully you need to click on "see more", which indicates that it is not so important. As far as the visualization goes, we are presented with a "celebrating statement" and a quote that reads: "I don't want to know or have to remember that [the prizes obtained by *Beloved*]. I have other things to do: worry, for example, about tomorrow [a political future]". In this sense, the flow of the

conversation is not so much about any of the characters, nor about the quote but about the whole process of reading this book as a dynamic activity changing throughout time. Thus, coming back to the visible part of the quote, the two messages interlinked lead to a conceptualization of reading as a political process affected within literature.

Even more, the participants stress different types of readings. First, the participants distinguish between two different readings: the “scholarly one” and the pleasurable one”. One of them says, “I read *Beloved* first as just a Morrison fan and then subsequently in graduate school and a scholar – I understood the text better with s[c]holarly perspective but that experience never matched my first read which was so terrifyingly emotional...” In this sense, one adds: “I take notes & re-read (again & again, if necessary) paragraph by paragraph”. The reading of *Beloved* is also altered generationally speaking since, for example, one of them says: “I wouldn’t have been able to understand the mother life and actions if I had been younger.” And some others state that they have never fully understood the story: “Still, to this day, years later, that passage is the only thing out of *Beloved* that I didn’t have to reread at least 3 times...or feel like I need a college course to understand [...] It was hard as hell for me to grasp.” This leads to the multiplicity of reading tackled previously in chapter one. One participant verbalizes this as “[v]ery engaging and thought-provoking because it [*Beloved*] can be read and interpreted many ways. A good book to stimulate discussion.” “This is “REAL literature!” (another reader). It also explores the differences contained when reading novels over again since, “It’s a different story every time I read it” and Facebook, in a certain way, reminds the reader “to read it again!”

A couple of participants make reference to other pieces of the novel. For example, “124 was spiteful. Full of a baby’s venom” which is the first two sentences of the novel. Or another one is “I’ve got a tree on my back and a haint [sic] in my house.” These are key elements to engage with the novel since it is important to understand at the beginning the role of the house itself, which is haunted; also, Sethe’s roots are embedded in her own body in the form of a tree,

as it was explained before. Another participant adds to these preferences the “Paul D effect”. This effect names the scene in which Paul D comes back to Sethe and tells her that she is her best thing, at the end of the novel. It is interesting to note that this participant points out just Paul D’s movement and the fact that Sethe was going to die: “I crey [sic] when Paul D comes back for Sethe when she has gone to bed to die.” The figure of Paul D as a hero is reinforced. Thus, in terms of gender, this intervention is very revealing, since it explores the relationship between Paul D and Sethe. That is to say, strong gendered stereotypes fall in this relationship in which Sethe is the victim, as a female and Paul D is the hero. In the novel, there cannot be found any instances of Sethe going to die and rescued by Paul D. On the contrary, Sethe is rescued by the community and Denver, her other daughter. Paul D comes after that moment and, obviously, Sethe is still weak, but she is not going to die. The fact that Morrison puts in Paul D’s mouth the message that Sethe needs to remember, that she is her best thing, leads the community to think in pre-established gendered roles.

#### Debate 14: Sorrow



Figure 19

The quote highlighted in figure 19 belongs to the novel *Sula*. The photograph presents the portrait of a girl with a landscape at the bottom. Contrary to the rest of book covers, this one does not only contain the title of the book, but the protagonist of the book at an early stage of her childhood. Childhood is

reinforced by the sunrise behind the girl. In poetry, this period of time has been symbolically linked to the beginning of life span/lifetime. The sunrise can be easily recognized as the colors presented in the sky are gradually becoming lighter. Thus, the image conveys the material meaning of “a beginning” but the strong presence of the horizon, and the gaze of the girl directs the reading into the infiniteness of this beginning, stressed by the “circles of sorrow”. Sorrow does not have a beginning or an end, like the horizon, only our perception of its beginning and its end. Sula, as a character, seems to convey the same meaning: a becoming subject, always in evolution. We know her origin, but not the multiplicity of her own never-ending development, since she dies at an early age. She is only circles; she is only movement.

The flow of this conversation is closely related to the last debate presented in this chapter, because the entry is repeated twice on the Facebook page. Doing a macro-analysis (Wodak, 2008) of this debate straight away, three different themes can be identified. The first theme deals with the intertextual references that the participants make with other genres and texts. The second theme refers to a very important sociological phenomenon: the tragedy of Connecticut. The third theme has to do with how politics can be performed. In terms of intertextuality, it is important to remark that the readers not only refer to some other novels by agreeing that whoever reads Morrison as an obligation (as paramount in the university or high school) reads the rest of the novels: “Her best is Song of Solomon, which I had the privilege to study as part of my first degree. I had been unfamiliar with her work before that but read several after my degree studies.” They also refer to books that tackle Morrison's literary production. For instance, one of the readers encourages the community to read *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle: The Novels of Toni Morrison* (Grewal, 1998). These two interventions read together point to Morrison as a literary scholar deeply canonized, in the sense that much academic research deals with her work and her presence in higher education is an obligation.

Regarding the sociological phenomenon, it is necessary to look at the context associated with this particular post. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of December 2012, a 20-year-old

man shot children and teachers in a primary school. As a result, 20 children, plus 6 staff people, as well as his own mother died<sup>44</sup>. Previously, we have seen that other massacres have been referred to in some of the debates, like the one in Norway. However, none of them had as many interventions as this one, with a total of fifteen references. One of the participants states, “Why this quote, today?”, a question that had already been answered by a previous participant: “That statement I am sure is how the whole Connecticut feel right now and can’t think about those mothers!” In comparison to the debate about the tragedy in Norway, the one in Connecticut captures the “mood of the nation” (in words of two participants). Thus, it confirms that the United States is the context of Morrison’s novels, as well as the context of the Facebook page, since the community is more sensitive with this terrible fact. Thus, it also reinforces the main objective of Morrison’s work, that is, re-writing the present through the past. However, the fact that there are references to other places in other debates, which are not always the States, explains that even though this Facebook page and Morrison’s novels are more relevant in the States, they are applicable to any other context.

The third source of interpretation explains this quote as a way of enacting “affective politics”. In the words of one of the participants, “Attitude changing story by a master story teller.” How this is concretely achieved in this particular novel? According to one of the participants, this book highlights “women’s friendship”, a recurrent theme in Morrison’s novels. This friendship is able to subvert traditional roles applied to women:

[Albert Sheqi](#) A great novel. Sula vs Nel; the rebel vs the traditional woman. Probing the relationship between childhood friends, between the rule-breaker and rule-follower. Morrison subverts the notions of good and bad as we know them. Simply superb fiction. [December 17, 2012 at 9:37pm](#)

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<sup>44</sup> As an example of that day’s news, click on this link: <http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2012/12/14/police-respond-to-report-of-school-shooting-in-conn/>. The media repercussion of this massacre can be appreciated by the fact that this horrifying fact has its own “wiki” page: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandy\\_Hook\\_Elementary\\_School\\_shooting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandy_Hook_Elementary_School_shooting)

In addition, this way of doing politics, through women’s friendship and feelings, facilitates the relationality needed between genders and races, in order to produce relational selves instead of oppositional selves. One of the participants gives an Irish meaning of Sula, the name of the protagonist and the one appearing in the photograph: “Suile pronounced Sula means eyes”. It is not the first time that this figuration “eye/I” is encountered either, in feminist theory (Haraway, 2002). If we think of eyes as “Is” (not as a verb but as a multiple I), Sula should be thought in a relational way with multiple “Is”, or at least two, Nel and Sula, the female friendship represented in this novel, as always intra-acting with each other in a relational way.

### Debate 15: Sad

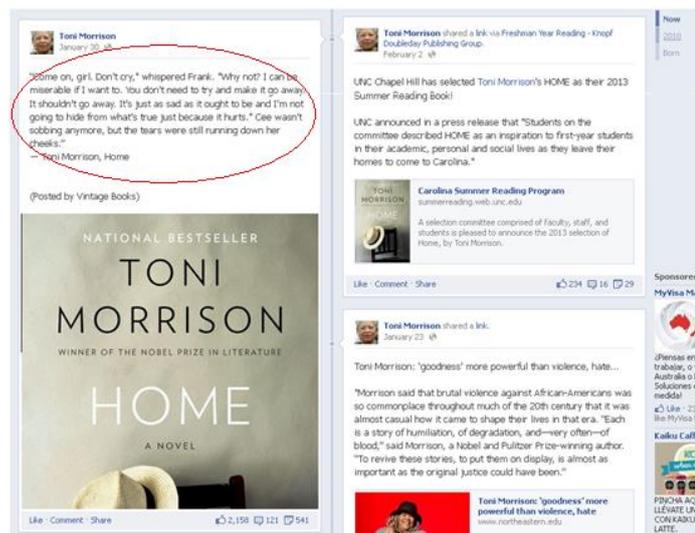


Figure 20

As Figure 20 points out, this quote is from Morrison’s latest novel, *Home*. It has received massive (2,158) likes and comments. The debates tend to be more intense, in the sense that even if there are many more comments, it is produced during a temporary extension of three days. The photograph shows a cover photo, different from the one framed on the page; although both belong to the same novel. This picture is the one most repeated on Morrison’s official Facebook page because it is the newest release. Therefore marketing strategies are enhanced. It does not present a human body but a definition of a human person as a “national bestseller” and the “winner of the Nobel prize in literature”. For some authors (Ponzanensi, 2012), this type of attribute settles

doubts about the political strategies of an author. However, the Facebook community is not as familiar with this book as it is with the rest of Morrison's work. Thus, neo-liberal practices do not apply with the same rules and the subversive political message is heavy enough to be considered separate from these "negative" practices of Facebook as a SNS<sup>45</sup>.

To begin with the analysis of this debate, I would like to make a brief reflection on the discourse of "truth" that accompanies many of the debates displayed, including this one. The fact that Morrison's novels are true to the readers is a constant theme in the debates. This discourse of truth is not only enhanced by the readers but by the Facebook page itself. As Rose (2001: 38) states,

Some historians of photography have argued, for example, that the 'realism' of the photographic image was produced, not by new photographic technology, but by the use of photographs in a specific regime of truth, so that photographs were seen as evidence of 'what was really there'.

Truth is also translated by the community by what is "real". In this case, it is the passage itself that is real: "This particular passage is incredibly moving, and real." This was preceded by another participant that stated: "I love that you don't hide from what's true, just because it hurts." Therefore, two conditions for reality and truthfulness are that they are "moving", that is to say, that provoke certain feelings in the readers; and that it hurts, because everyday life is difficult. Even more so when the reader faces the task of reading the novel and participates actively with it: "I always wonder if I truly understand what she is trying to convey." Indeed, being able to "move" someone is the recognizable sign for one participant of Morrison's own globalism as a writer. This globality is achieved through unique characters and the act of moving a single individual: "How can you move me with just an excerpt?!!! You are a global treasure, Ms. Morrison!" The global turns into local, and the individual turns into the global, blurring dichotomies become the centre of reality for the community.

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<sup>45</sup> To see a deeper explanation of why this should not be determinant of Morrison's success see Revelles-Benavente 2014b.

In this particular passage, or in the flow of this particular debate, feelings and material reality seem to form the axes of reference for the participants. One example of a strong bond between discourse and matter is the following intervention: “Love how you word those emotions none of us want to admit or say out loud.” Morrison is turned into the voicing of the voiceless (as the previous debate stated) and the “wording of emotions”, that is the embracing the material in the discursive and the other way around.

However, one particular comment makes this debate different from the others analyzed so far: “I love this point in the book, where Cee embraces her whole being”. So far, the process of becoming was leading the understanding of certain characters and the relationality enhanced between gender and race. For this participant, on the other hand, it is totally the opposite, since Cee, the female co-protagonist of the novel, achieves this completion. Cee becomes because she accepts her troubled situation. This particular character shows the necessity to understand the socio-political context in which reality is performed even if it hurts and is sad.

## Debate 16: Lover



Figure 21

I would like to comment upon this specific debate (Figure 21) very briefly, since it has already been introduced in a previous one (figure 17), which even shares the same picture. The participant that referred to this quote in that debate did it

on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April, 2012 and this quote was posted on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 2013. To establish such a cause, a closer temporary distance would be required. However, as previously stated, this clearly denotes the intra-actions produced among the different debates.

This quote is paramount in order to understand the materiality of feelings in Morrison's novels. Without embodied experiences, feelings do not have any meaning, as is love, in this case. One participant comments in this respect: "Is it still considered Love if it isn't the kind of Love we know?" Love in capital letters is expressed as an abstract notion, thus unknown by the individual and immeasurable. This is answered by another participant with the following reflection: "only when we let go of ourselves, only when we abandon concept of safety, only when we engage without motives, ulterior or otherwise, do we approach anything close to love." He is claiming that instead of being a human experience, "love" is a temporary and spatial feeling. It is temporary because it is only produced at a certain moment. It is spatial because the individual can only arrive to anything close to love – thus love is unreachable, as if a geographical spot is contained in it. In this sense, love is explained through a different conceptualization of time and space, the intra-action between both.

Thus, "love" is explained only if relational. That is to say, love can be explained through the relationship between time and space, the relation of the feeling with an individual, in particular, and, as Morrison states, the relation between different selves. Love is qualified by an adverb that depends on the lover, never on the beloved. It is not a reciprocal feeling, it is neither outside of the individual (never better than the lover). Therefore, she is defining "love" as a material feeling that connects people differently, depending on their own relation. Barad (2007) explains her concept of intra-action stating that the elements do not pre-exist the relation as they are configured in the relation. For this author, love, lover and beloved are not configured previously to that relation; they are defined in the love relationship.

The participants of the debate remain complicit with this definition of love and through comments, such as "Morrison is so gifted", they assign this novel a

“positive agency” (Lazaar, 2007). Once the conceptualization of “love” is embedded in one’s personal experience, the participants start to define themselves in order to produce better connections with the novel and the community. For instance, one of them says: “Your ‘Bluest Eye’ opened my Brown eyes to a soul loving embrace I had never known!”. This also indicates that such a definition of love is also a-temporal in the sense that it keeps on framing new contexts in different periods of time: “It’s still so relevant today, and the foreword/afterword shows the struggles you faced in trying to articulate such a deep-rooted issue within your community. I will cherish this book and [sic] those sentiments.”

To conclude, I would like to point out the “gender ideological structure” (Lazaar, 2007) that this debate hides, or rather visualizes. Along the different debates, Morrison has portrayed many different kinds of love. This one is that of a man and a woman. As previously commented, this is the difference with any other type of love. It is not safe because it is the love of a “free man” and it splits mind and body in Morrison’s female characters. In her novels, black men have not been free enough time to fully comprehend the new tasks that this freedom entails. They were used to obeying orders and, because of that love, relationships become especially difficult between sexes (as Morrison’s novels shown many times) (Morrison, 1993).

#### 3.4.3.2. Visualization of relations

Before going into the visual relations, I would like to produce a brief summary of the feelings that have articulated gender in these debates, beginning with loneliness. Loneliness is the embodiment of female slavery, personified by the character of Beloved, among many others. This loneliness becomes human on the Facebook page and the participants tend to relate with it in terms of “taking care” of instead of fully engaging with her. In feminist terms, that will be “speaking for someone” (Spivak, 1988), and re-establishing the One/Other positions. It shows how female slavery is certainly alone. This loneliness isolates instead of producing the relating bonds necessary to alter the gendered and raced oppressions. Indeed, by displacing gender from its historical context, the

community is agreeing on loneliness as isolation, and because of that, an affective force that creates boundaries but protection, not connections.

The same happens with love. Love is carefully specified on the Facebook page. It is one of the most interesting affects because its relational nature becomes part of its own ontology. Love is paired with hate and pain, with different results; as well as with male and female in a heterosexual context. In these debates, it was Milkman claiming the need of “hate” as part of his embodied experiences. He could not take love anymore. This is particularly striking if we jump to the debate titled “lover”: “the love of a free man is never safe.” A free man, as Milkman, cannot bear “the burden of love”, since it is immeasurable, as explained in the analysis. In the indivisible relation between love and hate, love becomes a paralyzing feeling that retains the participants their ability to move forward, to come into their own. And because of that it always relates with hate or pain, without meaning by itself. However, love turns into a powerful affect when it becomes the intra-action between men and women. While for men it implies the possibility to possess something, to acquire properties, for women it implies the isolation within the oppression by the patriarchal system, with a historical weight, since slaves were not able to love because they could not even be the owners of their relationships, as explained in *A Mercy*. Since historicity is left out of the context, the affect of love becomes a synonym of the patriarchal relationships uniting black men and women. This reality is familiar to the participants of the webpage, which help create this affect as something to move away from. On the other hand, “love” is different in the debate titled “loved”. This enables a relational meaning of love in which none of the participants in this “love-relation” is previously defined to the relation. When the affects are produced among women there are cries (debates on “sorrow”) and infinite. Therefore, “love” as an abstract concept defines the embodied properties of the participants in the relation and these properties are structured by gendered differences.

Happiness is one of the affects of the second type as well. Similarly to love, it frequently appears relating with pain and it makes reference to the pressure that

subjects imposed on themselves, in order to self-become neo-liberal subjects individually. Happiness is defined as the acquisition of material things in an economic sense (“happiness” debate). That is why a subject would never pursue happiness. As an essentialist feeling, it erases female experiences that are far from the idea of possession (especially during the slavery) but strongly connected with love. This is not something new for feminist theory (Ahmed, 2010b; Butler, 2006). Happiness erases female differences and turns them into these commodities before mentioned. However the de-historization of the meaning produced on the Facebook page does not always shows that. It is true that some participants do define happiness as the acquisition of a meaningful life, or rather they relate through other practices to achieve a “conventional” meaning of happiness, as the participation in social movements. Happiness is as dangerous as love, and not even in its embodied forms does it represent any hope for the embodied subject. Happiness is related to pain and certainty, and those two are part of the black female experiences. However, while its overloaded in the first case of pain, it means absence in the case of certainty. Then, gendered and raced subjects become invisible when they stop to fit heterosexist white male structures of power. Furthermore, this happiness necessarily entails “certainty” (“happy” debate) and certainty is not only a property of stable subjects but also an unreal property, as it belongs to the “future-to-come” thus, to a “justice-to-come”, only real if thought contemporarily (Barad, 2010). Certainty belongs to the realm of the already established, whereas contemporary society is structured under sexist, androcentric and heterosexist parameters that exclude a huge part of the society. Thus, once again, happiness turns into being a “deserved property”, as Morrison explains in her speech, but not “socially desired” (understanding social as pertaining to social justice) and, therefore, the enactment of a collective politics. In this regard, the alliances produced between women necessarily need to be outside happiness, as materialized on Morrison’s Facebook page. They need to be in constant movement, as appears in the picture of Angela Davis and Toni Morrison. However, the participants are still not clear on how to disengage with the conventional meaning of happiness. This is, in part, a consequence of de-historicizing material meanings. Past and present must

merge, in order to pursue a future embedded in our personal experience; this is a key element for feminist politics (as the following chapter demonstrates).

Morrison and the community mainly propose female alliances. Building through each other needs to be pursued. Just beside the quote, “I get angry about things”, is a picture that speaks for itself and becomes the perfect portrayal of Morrison’s personal statement for politics. It is a picture of Morrison and Davis in March, 1974. It shows the strong personal and political alliance that both females had and still have, since Morrison was Davis’ editor. Morrison published Davis’ autobiography that year and it shows the empowerment that writing and the institutionalization of knowledge has for gendered and raced oppressions. Morrison established a Female Black literary canon, thanks to her efforts as the editor in Random House. The strong presence of gender oppressions in her novels and on the Facebook page (“black female” debate) shows how Morrison reconfigures a conceptualization of gender, different from the biological binary. Debate 9 shows the difficulties that contemporary feminist theory also faces, in order to not only define gender but the object of feminist theory and, thus, the goal of a political strategy. Differences among women should be explored by means of multiple and in this multiplicity find the relations that locate affinities among these women. Multiplicity is not a relativistic web where everything is valid (Harways’ God Trick warning), but it is the opening up of space for subject’s agency for its own development. In this case, female differences are pursued in order to create relations among them, while gender is expressed as a continuum reinforced in female alliances, but not against men. Likewise, Morrison enacts this continuum not as a gradual formulation of differences between poles but in the form of different feelings that intra-act and, at the same time, enact the relations that are the focus of this study, and the definition of gender (theoretically and politically). In sharing feelings, we produce connections that multiply our knowledge at the individual level through our life experiences. Morrison exemplifies this through her pictures and her novels on the same page, and the community agrees on a differing way of processing strategies to stop oppressions.

“Angry” and “anger” are two other feelings discerned by the community as different and differing. Different, because they refer to different aspects of embodied experiences that result in positive or negative aspects for the subject and, differing, because the effects on the individual relate either to his or her relation with the community or with his or her process of self-becoming. Angry is an embodied experience while anger seems to have a universalistic nature that essentializes subjects. Take for example “angry”, the grammar of the affect (linguisticity of matter) entirely requires its relation with a subject; while expressed as a noun it receives categorical connotations, absent from any subjectivization. Anger universalizes the embodied experiences under the same parameters with well-known consequences for feminism: invisibilization, erasure of differences, essentialism, unequal distribution of power. Those who define “anger” hold the power. However, angry is the ability to subvert that meaning and empower subjects. Morrison herself states, “I get angry about things, then go on and work” (“angry” debate); while “anger is a paralyzing emotion” (“anger” debate). This points out the need for gender visibilization to distinguish the linguisticity of the affect. How are these subjects relating affectively? How are subjects affected/affecting each other and through what type of feeling? Or, how are they being oppressed by a type of feeling? As an abstract concept it becomes immeasurable, because this feeling is rejected by the community and is then unable to produce a feminist new materialist politics based on processes. Therefore, in order to disrupt gendered hierarchies of power, it is necessary to situate this feeling individually. This will be crucial in order to understand certain behaviors in Morrison’s characters. Female characters will develop their own empowerment, by relating individually to other characters, and their own becoming will depend on this relation, on to whom they relate. Being angry is a motor for social change; anger is a collective experience that paralyzes social improvement.

To conclude with the most important feelings to understand the patterns that visibilize gender, I would like to focus on sorrow, as both the materialization of the present socio-political context and the embodiment of the female subjectivity. On the Facebook page, infinite sorrow that leads the conversation to

what was happening in Connecticut and Norway can be found. In a way, the relation between the participants in the debate and Morrison seems to be an effort to make Morrison's characters a-temporal. Sorrow is infinite and felt by the entire community when Sula died (in *Sula*); the same sorrow the whole community suffers from this loss. However, this issue also leads us to a very problematic question that is beyond the scope of the present thesis. Why is the loss in Connecticut's more important than the one in Norway? That the audience is mostly from the United States explains this aspect. However, why is this death so pronounced? Why does the current situation of black children not receive the same attention? What about the number of dead children in Chicago? Racism and sexism are mainly interwoven in our society. Coming back to the case of Norway, it is easy to see how participants relate to this topic, given it was well-known around the world. Slaves were being thrown to the ocean. As Morrison denounces through "The Toni Morrison society", there was not even a bench to sit on to grieve their loss. So, how can we infer changes so that historicity is introduced in our present day, and gender stops being invisibilized, to properly infer changes in the very conditions of life? It is necessary to break the "circles and circles of sorrow" because, as it will be seen in the novels, Sorrow is also the name of the only woman who achieves her "completeness" in *A Mercy*. As it can be seen by the extensive analysis, gender is a structuring difference, because some of the feelings are highly determinant, depending on the sex of the characters, the race, the type of relationship that unites them, the homogenic cultural discourses, etc.

Now it is time to produce the visualization of the relations between the different open codes. It is a methodological strategy to present the main relations used to produce a summary of how we find "gender-in-the-making" (Barad, 2007), after all the analysis has been performed. In addition, this visualization also puts emphasis on the more recurrent feelings present on the Facebook page. This last aspect will guide the close reading for the next level, since a stronger emphasis for the next level of analysis will be put under the feelings that currently appear in the debates. In order to have a global vision of this knowledge shared in thirteen different debates, I present an interpretational coding system, based both

on the explored theory and the analysis of the debates. With atlas.ti I want to visualize a nexus of knowledge that facilitates the empirical intra-action between the different debates. The frequency of participant interventions provided by atlas.ti is summarized in the following table 2:

Groups	Codes	Instances
Feelings	Abstract / Anger	25
	Abstract / Happiness	13
	Abstract / Love	17
	Abstract / Pain	7
	Abstract / Loneliness	6
	Embodied / Angry	5
	Embodied / Happy	4
	Embodied / Painful	3
	Abstract / Hope	2
	Abstract / Sorrow	2
	Embodied / Sad	2
	Abstract / Envy	1
	Abstract / Hate	2
	Abstract / Heavy	1
	Abstract / Hurt	1
	Abstract / Loathe	1
	Abstract / Madness	1
	Abstract / Sadness	1
	Abstract / Trauma	1
	Gender / Politics / Individual	54
Gender / Politics / Collective	23	
Gender	Gender / politics / collective / connecticut	8
	Gender / relations / women	7
	Gender / Language / Literature / Jazz / Black woman	7
	Gender / Politics / Collective / Norway	5
	Gender / Relations / Man_woman	5
	Pecola.	4
	Eva Peace	1
	"..dangerously free"!	1
	"The Paul D effect."	1
	Easily killed, never lost.	1
	Paul D!	1
	Three Women...	1
	Facebook / Support	423
Support / Beloved	325	
Language	Support / The bluest eye	194

	Support / Sula	190
	Intertextuality / movies	65
	Gender / Language / Literature	56
	Support / Truth	51
	re-reading / Beloved	46
	re-reading / The bluest eye	40
	re-reading / Sula	35
	Support / Home	29
	interaction between participants	21
	Support / Jazz	19
	Intertextuality	18
	questions author	16
	Support / Song of Solomon	14
	temporal reference	11
	Hi Mary....I must get it. Xx	10
	re-reading / Home	8
	re-reading / Jazz	8
	Image	7
	Intertextuality / Beloved	7
	Language / Spoken	7
	Support / Tar Baby	6
	Language / Emotions	5
	Opening / Public discourse / Anger	4
	re-reading / Song of Solomon	4
	Support / Paradise	4
	Opening / Beloved / Sethe	3
	Intertextuality / Sula	3
	Opening / Jazz / Felicity	2
	Opening / The bluest eye	2
	Support / A mercy	2
	Support / Love	2
	Opening / Beloved / Paul D	1
	Opening / Home / Frank_Cee	1
	Opening / Public discourse / Emotions	1
	Opening / Public discourse / Happiness	1
	Opening / Song of Solomon / Milkman	1
	Opening / Sula	1
	Sethe in the end, lost Beloved..	1
	Sula Mae Peace	1
	There was nothing left of the ..	1
	Intertextuality / A mercy	1
	Intertextuality / Home	1
	irony	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1913</b>

Table 2: Interpretative codes

The table above is the representation of the different interventions that have been produced during the sixteen debates. These three main groups relate to the main objective of the thesis (communication through language), the two spheres of it (gender and politics) and the feelings articulating them divided into abstract and embodied (which will be better explained with figure 22). Regarding the section on feelings, it is important to go back to the explanation provided in chapter two concerning the abstractness and the embodiment of the feelings. The previous analysis on each debate has shown how, for the participants, certain feelings were not considered equal, depending on the form of the word, as in the case of angry/anger. That is why I considered it important to differentiate between these two. As thematic groups, they are composed by different codes (which is what was considered in chapter two as open categories). The third column drawn in the table refers to the number of instances that the idea expressed in the code appears on the Facebook page. The table is illustrative of all the contents on the Facebook page, since a codification of the text resulting from copying and pasting the sixteen debates with all their replies has been applied. Besides, it is a guide to take into consideration when analyzing the novels. Which of these ideas (encapsulated in these open categories) are repeated in the novels? This helps to visualize the mutual relationship between the different levels, as explained in chapter two.

Before concluding this section, I present yet another figure that emphasizes the importance of feelings in this level of analysis:

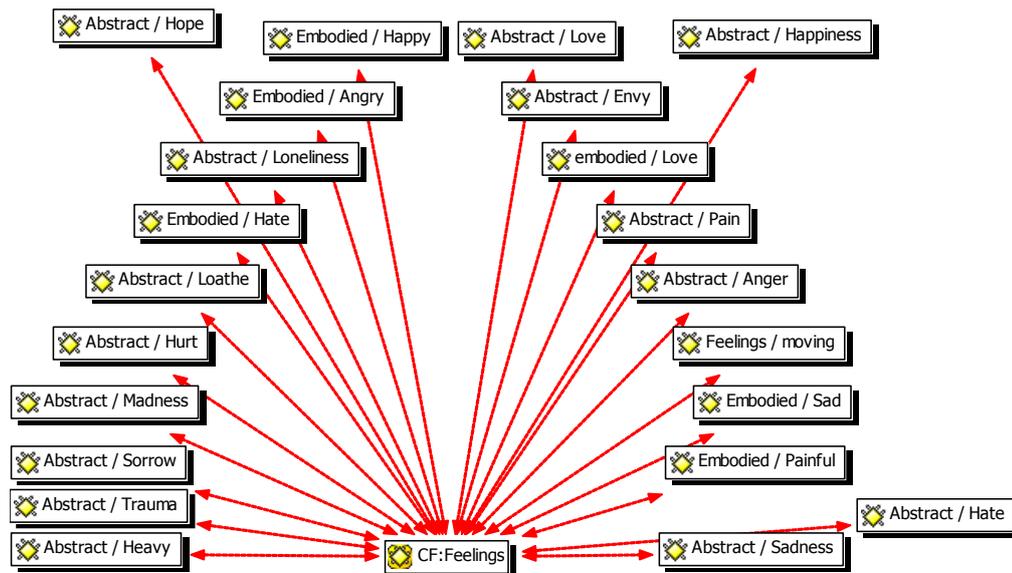


Figure 22: Feelings that appear in the debates<sup>46</sup>

Figure 9 shows the feelings that have been made explicit on the Facebook page. As shown in the analysis of the debates, the form and the meaning of these feelings matters for the conceptualization of gender and the type of relationships. Abstract feelings unified subjects under universal representations, which more often than not had negative consequences. As in happiness, the abstractness of the concept implied a definition of itself, in terms of acquiring property, which re-established the hierarchical oppressions. On the other hand, the fact that one feeling was abstract and not embodied did not always imply paralyzing instances, because it could also be related with the personification of some characters, as was the case with “loneliness”. The radical difference between these two was mainly that the community treated them differently. Angry had different implications from anger, just as happy was different from happiness. Nevertheless, a different case was presented with love. Love, lover and beloved were reproducing hierarchical instances. In this case, I chose to focus just on the feeling of love, because it had the same effects as the other embodied forms. Besides, it is the most important and recurring feeling in the debates, and will show up in the novels as well. Thus, it is the most significant one and it will

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<sup>46</sup> Even though Figure 22 contains four types of feelings at the top of the tree, and they are some of the most important for the analysis, the distribution of the figure does not have anything to do with that. It is for better viewing.

remain as such, in order to understand the revolution of ethics and politics that Morrison is suggesting in her novels, as we will see in chapter four.

### **3.5. Gender: a processual ontology of feminist new materialist politics on Morrison's official Facebook page.**

This section wants to offer a tentative answer to the first sub-research question aiming at detecting the strategies in which gender was (in)visibilized within the Facebook community through “affective relations” (that situate the definition of gender in a raced context). Gender needs to be re-conceptualized as a performative interaction between Facebook, novels, readers, authors, and analysts. In Barad's words (2003: 24), it is produced “[...] between object (including those of its aspects that remained invisible before the encounter), theory and analyst. In this view, processes of interpretation are part of the object and are, in turn, questioned on the side of the analyst.”

Following the epistemological and methodological framework outlined in this thesis, it is important to conclude that *gender becomes an apparatus of knowledge production of the phenomena being studied here*, to echo Barad's words (2007). Thus, it is necessary to specify once again the properties of the apparatus in the Baradian sense, while relating them to the specific configuration of gender. According to her (Barad, 2007: 146) there are six principal properties of the apparatus:

1. They are specific material-discursive practices. Gender has been presented as a digital performance of affects (as embedded experiences), relating racial subjects in the discourse of literary social networking.

2. They produce differences that matter. This conceptualization of gender entails differences in the traditional conceptualization of feelings and female empowerment in a raced context. The traditional conceptualization of feelings dramatically changes in order to produce different strategies to make gendered oppressions visible.

3. They produce material configurations/dynamic reconfigurations of the world. Gender has been a dynamic process relating across time and space in the digital environment. Besides, the historicization of gender will render itself visible in the next chapter and has been introduced already by the epistemological cartography presented at the beginning. It appears as constantly shifting and differing ontologically, epistemologically and empirically speaking.

4. Apparatuses are phenomena. This will be further specified in chapter six. Gender itself is a phenomenon, insofar as its two components, affects and race, produce differences that matter. Affects are intra-actions enacting the performativity of gender. They present themselves as apparatuses of the phenomenon, partaking in the phenomena. At the same time, race has proven to be a factor, provoking differences that matter in the phenomena as well.

5. They are open-ended practices. This will be further developed in chapter six as well. It is important to say that although they are open-ended practices (that is infinite), they are not everything<sup>47</sup>. That is to say, as Barad explained in the footnoted seminar, when something becomes determinate, something becomes necessarily indeterminate, through the different processes of “exteriorities within” the apparatuses. This indeterminacy becomes infinite. In this case, we know particular operationalizations of gender in this determined context of the digital platform. In the next chapter, gender will be re(con)figured once again, because of its connections with the novels and the dislocation of time.

6. They reconfigure space and time. Clearly, modifications in both aspects have been outlined in this chapter. Gender is de-historicized in the digital space through a “representationalist practice” (Barad, 2007) of universal contemporaneity, thus invisible. While at the same time these digital contexts offer the multiplicity, understood as varied differences that the openness of the apparatus requires.

All in all, I would like to provide a “provisional” (Lykke, 2010) answer to sub-research question one, by quoting Barad (2007: 167): “the point is [...] that in this case, material

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<sup>47</sup> This clarification was provided by Karen Barad in her seminar at UCSC, in Winter 2014. The class was called “Performativity Reconsidered/Reconfigured” on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February, 2014.

practices that contributed to the production of gendered individuals also contributed to the materialization of this particular scientific result ('gender-in-the-making')<sup>48</sup>. Gender enacts a resolution of the ontological indeterminacy of the phenomenon under study, in this thesis, and it is "causally" (in Barad's terms<sup>49</sup>) significant and the conditions of the possibility of the phenomena, while also affected by the phenomena itself since this conceptualization of gender is highly marked by the literary communication between readers and Morrison, as it has been seen

### 3.6. Conclusions

To conclude, the main strategy that will guide the close reading in the next level is: female alliances are necessary to develop female empowerment and the disruption of gender as a social and material production of female/male lived experiences. These alliances are needed in order to: a) move away from happiness; b) move away from traditional conceptualizations of love that reinforce gender stereotypes; c) angry as a relational affect between subjects that allows to move away from essentialist notions of feelings and "situated gender" and d) enactment of agency as the location within relations spaces in which openness enacts multiplicities. That is to say, socio-political contexts matter in the novel where there is a need to produce open endings, in order to disrupt "circles and circles of sorrow". In those open endings, characters and readers will become empowered through their relation.

The next chapter will focus on the novels and how these strategies of visibilization of gender become, as they were always, political strategies, in order to dislocate the concept of gender. As previously mentioned in the analysis, the historization of the concept is necessary. The apparatus creates a determined set of processes that enable a "historization of meaning" (Barad, 2003), in order to understand contemporary definitions of gender. In this case, gender is being configured through different strategies that are coordinated by several participants: the structure of the Facebook

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<sup>48</sup> "The goal is therefore to understand which specific material practices matter and how they matter. What we find in this particular case is that gender performativity, among other important factors including anture's performativity, was a material factor in this scientific outcome." (Barad, 2007: 168).

<sup>49</sup> To be better specified in chapter six.

page, the readers, the writer, the limits of the researcher (me), and contemporary theories of gender. This is the reality that can be measured at present time with the methodological approach performed. Therefore, it is time to enfold the apparatus once again, in order to account for those “realities excluded” (Barad, 2001), -the novels-. I argue that since this historization seems to be outside/invisible on the Facebook page, a materialization of history can be found in the novels. The generation of this conceptualization of gender leads to a configuration of politics, in terms of connectedness, nodes of knowledge, and differential bodily experiences.

## **Chapter 4. New materialist politics: understanding the political in Morrison's work as an event**

*We have a hope of moving to a more integrated vision of ourselves and of our fellow humans as generalized as well as 'concrete' others.*

Sheyla Benhavib, "The Generalized and the Concrete Other"

### **4.1. Introduction**

That literature affects the social fabric of culture is not new. In the nineteenth century, writers such as Thomas Hardy aimed at producing alternative readings of contemporary society, in order to attract both conventional and alternative readers (Sánchez, 1997). The relation between literature and society has been widely explored. Nevertheless, justifying the direct relationship between the two is more complicated. Methodologically speaking, the impact that literature has on society and vice-versa is not a cause-effect relationship since multiple factors like marketing industries, cultural ideologies, type of readership, etc. interfere in such a connection. All these factors make an empirical account of this relationship hardly measurable. In the previous chapter, an analysis was drawn of the different patterns by which gender was (in)visibilized and now it is time to see how these conceptual changes apply to a close reading on Morrison's novels. This close reading will be guided by the definition of gender provided in the previous chapter, as well as the different affects articulating it. Thereby, I will look for the strategies outlined in Morrison's novels that can facilitate feminist new materialist politics.

Before delving into the close reading of the novels, it is necessary to go deeper in understanding the politics. If this thesis is aiming to link literature with politics, it is unavoidable to learn how politics is being articulated. For that purpose, I will develop a conceptualization of politics as new materialist feminist politics. Afterwards, I will carry out a literary analysis of each novel. To conclude, I will present a global analysis of the ten novels based on the different feelings that appear on the Facebook page and

the definition obtained in chapter four to provide a definition of what it means a feminist new materialist politics in this context.

#### **4.2. Feminist politics: new materialism**

Feminist theory is inherently political (Guerra, 2011; Dean, 2013), although this does not mean that practicing contemporary feminist politics is unidirectional. Feminist researchers such as Mari Mikkola (2010; 2011) or Charlotte Witt (2011) point out that the creation of contemporary debates on the concept of gender makes a feminist contribution difficult, in the area of politics because gender essentialisms are counter-productive for the feminist fight. However, erasing the concept of woman is equally difficult in order to pursue feminist objectives. As a possible way of thinking of gender in a non-essentialistic way, and out of prescriptive terms (such as using terms like men or women), I have presented a processual definition of gender. This entailed thinking of gender as a relational process between different selves, without losing the ontology of the concept.

Jonathan Dean (2013: 87) states that politics is not only crucial for feminism but feminism is also crucial for a re-conceptualization of politics, in the following four different senses: a contribution to politics epistemology, feminist critiques to hegemonic political practices and institutions, enactment of political change and being by itself a platform for agitation. Morrison's novels are inherently political and I plan to use feminist politics as a contribution to the concept of politics, as well as a platform for political contestation. On the one hand, politics will be re-defined in this thesis as the enactment of agency (understood as the space for possibilities in the epistemological communities created in the virtual context of Facebook). On the other, this thesis also will deal with how feminism (in connection with literature) is a site of political contestation where different hierarchical structures of power are dismantled.

The political theory of new materialism has been developed more concretely in the volume edited by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (2010), *New Materialism: Ontology,*

*Agency and Politics*. According to these authors (as the title of the edited volume suggests), the politics of new materialism needs to be re-configured on the basis of “complex theory”: that is, the study of micro-relations producing life and society in general, as well as by a reconfiguration of human and non-human bodies. In other words, new materialism is not about an agency of enactment but a consideration of the very different ways that materials are altered as well as altering traditional notions of lineal causality, as well as matter’s own self-transformation. In this chapter, I present feminist new materialism as a reconceptualization of identities as affinities, intersectionality as intra-sectionality and SNSs as agential spaces.

#### 4.2.1. Affinities instead of identities: enacting epistemological communities

Toni Morrison’s work has usually been catalogued within post-colonial theory (Ponzanensi, 2012; Durrant, 2004) under the labels of race (racism and slavery) and gender (female characters and female writer)<sup>50</sup>. As a consequence, her work has been classified as belonging to one of those marginal groups from which “objectivity” is better expressed according to standpoint theory (Harding, 1986). Nevertheless, correlating marginalization with objectivity is problematic. This classification entails exclusions (Haraway, 1994). In Morrison’s work, these exclusions would comprise characters such as Rebekka (from *A Mercy*), Amy (from *Beloved*) or the complexity produced in the massive murder of *Paradise*. Defining Morrison’s work as marginal implies accepting pre-established categories affecting Morrison’s characters as subjects and defining their identity. It also implies ignoring its increasing consideration as mainstream literature, mostly in the United States, derived from the national awards of the Pulitzer or the Nobel obtained by Toni Morrison (Ponzanensi, 2012).

According to María José Guerra (2011: 27): “[the feminist task] is to disrupt the present cartography of categories and map it again with new co-ordinates able to deactivate

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<sup>50</sup> She has also been labelled as a “daughter of the diaspora” (Gallego, 1999)

oppressive vectors<sup>51</sup>”. Identity has always been a core concept in feminist theory because of “identity politics” sustained mainly by Butler (1990). Benhabib (1987: 89) defines identity as:

[not only] my potential for choice [...], but to the actuality of my choices, namely, to how I as a finite, concrete, embodied individual, shape and fashion the circumstances of my birth and family, linguistic, cultural and gender identity into a coherent narrative that stands as my life’s story.

This was an important step forward for feminist politics, since it enabled women as a socio-political group to legitimate their own agency by departing from one “self”, that is from the possession of fixed characteristics that conditioned their own development. This concept of identity clearly denoted a Hegelian ontology of the subject as departing point (Kirby, 2011 [2006]), an origin from which every difference departs, while maintaining an invariable essence. Nowadays, the several changes produced within the information society (such as the concept of “cyborg” - Haraway, 1991), the different political platforms (such as cyberspace), and the entrance of the post-human turn have demonstrated that such an essence is very difficult to identify, regardless of the benefits that it can have for the feminist fight. Thus, already over a decade ago, Spivak (2003: 92), echoing Derrida, claimed that “[i]dentity politics is neither smart nor good”. In general terms, the main problems identified in identity politics are its representationalist nature (Barad, 2003; Apffel-Margling, 2011; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2013) and the categorical classification that it implies (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2013).

Dolphijn & van der Tuin (2013: 5) provide a critique to identity politics based on the Deleuzian notion of “becoming-woman”. They define “identity politics” as strategic essentialism. Much more useful according to them would be to define “woman” as “always already be[ing] the sum of trajectories away from the centre of power, an introductory power necessary for any metamorphosis”. Already in the nineties, Nicholson (1999) tried to *break through* categories that implied notions of “either/or” by understanding the concept of woman neither as a biological reductionism, nor as social construction. She demonstrated that while we do not need to define exactly what

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<sup>51</sup> “La tarea es objetar el mapa de las categorías y volver a cartografiarlo de nuevo desde nuevas coordenadas que desactiven los vectores de opresión.”

it means to be a “woman” (as Mikkola also does [2007, 2012]), we do need to know how this concept matters. That is to say, clear-cut boundaries are not easily applicable without falling into relativistic nets or essentialist projects (as post-colonial feminism has pointed out), but “[t]o give up on the idea that *woman* has one clearly specifiable meaning does not entail that it has no meaning (Nicholson, 1999: 74)”

One way to solve these epistemological problems is to shift from identities to affinities, as proposed by Guerra (2011). Instead of looking for identities, I am looking for ways to identify those common affects that produce relations between different subjects: “identification becomes central to a feminist politics of the subject” (Ahmed, 1998: 95). It is a matter of understanding how certain affects materialize bodies differently, as well as which of these create common political projects that help to disrupt gendered structural oppressive differences. Using Braidotti’s words, Mestre establishes (2010: 14) “experience [as] the central notion that sustains the feminist project of female empowerment in a political sense, connecting politics and epistemology<sup>52</sup>”. Selves are always relating with others in order to become selves. This leads the political project to blur dichotomies of one/others that establish hierarchical differences. In Barad’s words (2012: 18): “Individuals are infinitely indebted to all Others, where indebtedness is not about a debt that follows or results from a trans/action, but rather, a debt that is the condition of possibility of giving/receiving.” (Barad, 2012: 18).

Understanding subjects always in relation with other subjects, through a series of affinities happening in a determined active environment, is pursued contemporarily by many feminist academics (Guerra, 2011; Barad, 2012; Puar, 2007, Kirby 2011 [2006], Ahmed, 2010a). The feminist metaphors configuring the cartographical approaches of contemporary politics, such as the cyborg, claim a differential understanding of the relations between the subjects. This includes giving up categorical notions such as gender, race or sexuality that have articulated the identitarian notion of a subject to embrace collective assemblages of affective subjects:

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<sup>52</sup> “Por tanto, la experiencia es la noción central que sustenta el proyecto feminista de empoderamiento de la subjetividad femenina en el sentido político, conectando política y epistemología.” (Braidotti, cf. in Mestre, 2010: 14).

In this view, gender, sexuality, 'race', ethnicity, class, age religion and nation are no longer understood to constitute separate analytics, but an 'assemblage' (Puar 2007, Chapter 4) produced in and through biopolitical regulation. As Puar explains, '[t]he assemblage, as a series of dispersed but mutually implicated and messy networks, draws together enunciation and dissolution, causality and effect, organic and inorganic forces' (Puar 2007: 211). Assemblage analytically displaces identity in favour of a focus on 'affective conglomerations' and 'contingencies of belonging' (ibid.) and ever-shifting fields of possibility [...]. (Posocco, 2013: 112).

Thus, relating gender and race basically means relating different selves, in order to produce epistemological communities based on affinities instead of identities. Recent post-colonial theory rejects identities based on normative, or nominative issues (Bhabha, 1992). Feminist theory is pursuing an ontological politics based on processes (Grosz, 2005; Braidotti, 2012), and Toni Morrison herself is pursuing a different ontology of knowledge created just among women (Morrison, 1983). On the other hand, the readers in the virtual community of Facebook are also producing epistemological communities instead of individualistic identities. The meaning created there is also relational since it is agreed upon, shared by and transmitted among the whole community. In order to acquire feminist politics of the process, two steps are required. The first is moving from the politics of identities to the politics of affinities. The second is understanding categorical mappings as intersectional approaches in the light of Barad's intra-actions.

#### 4.2.2. From inter-sectionality to *intra-relationality*.

According to Sigle-Rushton and Lindström (2013: 130) intersectionality is the "different dimensions of social life (hierarchies, axes of differentiation, axes of oppression, social structures, normativities) [...] intersecting, mutually modifying and inseparable." Intersectionality then is the analytical complexity of the identity of the subjects. Intersectional approaches have been widely used in order to understand the experiences of women's real life, especially black women, victims of several oppressions (Crenshaw, 1991). The relation between this approach and Morrison's works, thus, seems straightforward. However, it is important to bear in mind its

characteristics and how they would apply in this particular context. Sigle-Rushton and Lindström (2013: 130) also warns feminist researchers that intersectionality remains problematic, since “we take on and take in an enormous amount of complexity [...] [b]ut if we sacrifice complexity, we also sacrifice inclusion.” Looking for the multiplicity of/in difference is a statement that resonates in many Deleuzian feminists, such as Colebrook or Braidotti.

Due to the fact that “[b]ecoming a subject is never a finished or closed process.” (Moore, 2013: 205), an intersectional approach complicates feminist politics and an empirical analysis. For instance, in *A Mercy*, Florens (who is a black female slave in love with a black man) and in *Tar Baby*, Jadine (who is a black model in love with a black man) are two heterosexual black females that share many identitarian characteristics, as will be seen in the analysis of this chapter. Nevertheless, considering just these three axes of signification simultaneously (gender, race and sexuality) would mean to ignore their timing, their different relationships, their different social class, and of course the differences in the understanding of each novel separately. Among others, these two characters have different potential affectivities that entail their own becoming and the relation that they share with other characters in the novels. As will be seen in the close reading, both undergo a pursuit of knowledge based on movement but the routes and the knowledge acquired by each one of them differs dramatically.

Furthermore, a political feminist project needs to be proposed in terms of solidarity and flexibility (Mestre, 2010: 25). If solidarity is located in those embedded experiences, we will have concrete moments producing affinities within subjects. These locations are “embedded and embodied memor[ies]: it is a set of counter-memories, which are activated by the resisting thinker against the grain of the dominant representations of subjectivities” (Braidotti, 2006: 199). That way, there will be an establishment of a common political project during the relation and not before, without privileging or excluding experiences. There cannot be a political approximation that confirms the categories that feminism is trying to disrupt<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> “Smart dice que no deberíamos buscar una epistemología unificadora que justifique un caminar político diverso, y más teniendo en cuenta que incluso dentro del feminismo hay maneras diversas de construir y

Yet, as intersectional theory claims, it is necessary to think of the different relations that configure different women instead of homogenizing the term (Crenshaw, 1991). Therefore, if we are moving from an intersectional approach, we are also moving towards a different objective, a shift in the scientific and political referent. Following a new materialist approach, and Karen Barad's agential realism, would imply a referential change in the object of study, a difference in the ontological configuration of the subjects to activate "a politics of the process" (Grosz, 2005), instead of a politics of the results. This means that this analysis, by focusing on the relations between the different subjects through affinities and through the same affective forces that generate the processual ontology of gender, will obtain a series of differential patterns that produce differences in their relations. As Braidotti (2006: 199) explains, "[t]he politics of location, or situated knowledges, rests on process ontology to posit the primacy of relations over substances."

Taking into account that this thesis situates Morrison's political project in the digital area of the information society and within a new materialist framework, it is necessary to locate the relations between subjects (human, and non-human) in this active context. Thus, in order to include this reformulation of the intersectional approach (dominant in a conceptualization of the differential nature of black women), it is necessary to understand how this reformulation of politics affectively shifts the multiple location of the subjects in this thesis (novels and cyberspace). A new materialist politics based on intra-action, affinities, affections and processes is what Henrietta Moore's conveys as also Braidotti's own configuration of politics:

[Braidotti's politics] focus[es] on human and non-human actors in hybrid networks located in space and time. [...] a politics of inclusion in which enhanced or expanded relations with others [...] operate according to logics of reciprocity and co-dependence. The ethical good and the goal of such a politics is a radical relationality, an ability to enter into relationships with multiple others, including the non-human and the post-human. (Moore, 2013: 208).

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validar el conocimiento. A fin de cuentas, las defensoras de este *standpointivism*, aunque admiten que los puntos de mira no son inmutables, nos obligan a elegir una perspectiva (¿acaso podemos trabajar a la vez desde varias?), una categorización por encima de las otras, cuando lo que se ha puesto en cuestión han sido las categorías mismas." (Mestre, 2010: 26).

Therefore, having differentiated these two aspects of feminist politics (that is, intrasecting affinities versus interacting identities), it is now time to look at these agential spaces created by novels and SNS.

#### 4.2.3. Social networking and gender: a multiple space for agency

The relationship between the Internet and its different usages produces an alteration of the way politics have been conceived, especially regarding feminist politics (Fotopoulou, 2013). That is why SNS have an active role in three chapters of the present work. In the previous chapter, SNS have provided the multiplicity necessary for the politics of new materialism, to work through the micro-relations that inspire the “complex theory” previously identified by Coole and Frost (2010). In the same way that Haraway uses the cyborg to explain her concept of a hybrid woman, SNSs provide a methodological figuration to assess the social echoes of literature mentioned in the introduction of this chapter. Empirically, I argue that SNS (in my case Facebook) provide a contextual framework to visualize the social within the literary.

A novel normally has its own time-narrative and its own space-narrative that transverse socially, according to the reader that is behind that novel. However, when novels interface SNS, different agential contexts are created. Space and time are not limited by geographical or narrative borders but are created through and with the boundaries produced in the intra-action between literature and SNS. This nature radically changes the political location of the subjects before mentioned by Braidotti. Taking into account the proposed definition of gender, close reading shows how the novels share the multiplicity of the subjects included with a network of possibilities, which at the same time is Barad’s definition of agency (Barad, 2007). In this sense, reading the novels under this reformulation of politics implies differences in the way gender relations are produced, and also in the way feminist politics can affect and reformulate politics. Therefore, by thinking of subjects through relational affinities, locations as multiple networks, and categories as affective processes, a new materialist conceptualization of feminist politics is enhanced.

### **4.3. Close reading of the novels: (un)doing otherness**

In the preceding chapter, there was a description of how the “apparatus” was articulated in the methodological process. In this chapter, it is time to outline the different elements participating in the “event” in which different apparatuses are conflating in order to understand the “realities” and the “exteriorities within those realities” (Barad, 2001); that is, the combination between Facebook and Morrison’s novels. In this section of the chapter, all the different novels are explored simultaneously together with the rest of the novels, in their mutual influence. That is to say, the different processes outlined in the previous chapter will be the navigational tools that structure the “close reading” (Lukic & Sánchez, 2011) of every novel. Therefore, I have introduced the novels to atlas.ti and codified them accordingly to the same criteria of gender, affects, politics and language used in the previous chapter, as also explained in chapter two. In order to treat these novels as apparatuses each has been scanned, underlining all sentences that referred to a particular code, either by the content of the sentence (in the case of those codes referring to relations) or by the textual appearance of a determined feeling in a sentence. Relating different apparatuses will lead the object of study to its second level, the event level, and it visualizes the intra-action between gender and politics in the literary communicative process. For this reason, an “encounter” (Ahmed, 1998) between the novels and the processes outlined in the previous chapter will be reinforced.

The analysis of the debates enables the understanding of the influence of the present in the past and vice-versa. As observed in the previous analysis, Morrison depicts a past from her present perception and how that account infers changes in the way the readers understood the ongoing reality. Then, a clear relationship between the politics in literature and contemporary social conflicts was produced. It is thereby important to go back to the novels, in order to understand what is being conveyed (in a meaningful way, to echo Morrison’s words) and how meaning is being historicized (to echo Barad’s words). Now, I will perform a close reading of each novel taking into account both, the previous analysis and the most salient aspects of them albeit the relation among them

will be produced in the next section and because of that, the complete analysis will be extracted from reading this analysis and the following one with each other.

#### 4.3.1. *The Bluest Eye*

It is Morrison's first novel and it narrates the story of two childhood friends, Pecola and Claudia, and the different paths each took. Their family context differs dramatically and it is also determining of the way in which each one develops her own subjectivity and her relation with her community. Claudia and her sister Frieda demonstrate a negative attitude towards all what their community sees as "beautiful", which is whiteness. Instead, Pecola follows the flow of the community by stuffing herself into white consumerism, such as the "Mary Jane" candies (who portrayed a white yellow-haired girl), or milk, or her final wish to have the bluest eyes of the world. Pecola is raped by her father, ignored by her mother and despised by her community ending in a miscarriage of her baby, as well as a beginning of insanity that creates an alternative self that only she can see and talk about. All this is nothing but the product of a patriarchal and racist discourse materialized in the relationship that these girls held for each other. While Claudia, and her sister Frieda, will try to fight against their own community until the end, by even trying to produce a "miracle" for Pecola's baby to live, Pecola's development will be disrupted by a dislocation in her own mind, producing an imaginary world in which she has blue eyes and an imaginary friend.

Cholly Breedlove, Pecola's father, is the first character that the reader meets. This introduction is situated in the first stage of the year in the novel, Autumn. This season materializes the cyclical time of the novel since it begins and ends with the different seasons of the year, reinforcing the African American conception of time instead of the Eurocentric lineal one (Vallejo, 2007). Claudia explains to the reader that "Cholly Breedlove is dead; our innocence too" (14), which emphasizes an indivisible bond between affects and gender. Innocence is an emotional feeling related typically with the absence of knowledge, which in support of Foucault's thinking (1975), is power. Therefore, Claudia is already anticipating to the reader how an individual and collective

process of power disruption is prompted. Because of that, the political matter in the novel is announced from the very beginning.

Following Francisco Varela (in González, 2012), I believe that the order in which different ideas appear is extremely relevant for a close reading of the text. The first thing seen is three fragments of a textbook which is handed out in Claudia and Pecola's primary school. As Angels Carabí explains (1988), it is indicative of the becoming of the girls in the novels. However, I would like to point out just the last one that serves as a title for those parts of the novel that take Pecola as the narrator or focus of the narration:

Here is the house it is pre-n and white it has a red door it is very pretty here is the family mother father Dick and Jane live in the green and white house ch they are very happy see Jane she has a red dress she wants to play who will play with Jane see the cat it goes meow meow come and play come play with Jane the kitten will not play see mother mother is very nice mother will you play with Jane mother laughs laugh mother laugh see father he is big and strong father will you play with Jane father is smiling smile father smile see the dog bow wow go see the dog do you want to play do you want to play with Jane see the dog run run do you run look look here comes a friend the friend will play with Jane they will play a good game play Jane play (2).

In this way, Morrison graciously makes an indivisible bond with the materiality of this text, since it is the written expression of the subjectivity of Pecola; while, at the same time it is a literary device that helps to introduce the reader her disorganized world. Thus, taking into account that it is the first item, I would like to start with Pecola. She is a key figure in the development of the novel because it is through her embodied experience that we understand the story. For those means, Morrison uses a fragment of the previous text to introduce Pecola's life (as it is seen on p. 24, for example) and separate the novel into different chapters. It is an example of the materiality of language defended by new materialist thinkers as Vicki Kirby (2008) states. Kuenz (1993: 428) explains that this prefatory "turns from order to chaos with the gradual removal of punctuation and pacing, so too does the erasure of Pecola's body and sexuality lead to her madness and isolation." The disorder appearing every time that the focus of the narration is on Pecola guides the reader in knowing that scenarios are being changed.

To begin with, there are two different political strategies carried out by Pecola at the individual and collective levels. One is her connection with nature, with dandelions (35), via the feeling of love. The first words pronounced by Pecola have to do with “love”. She wants to know how you know that someone loves you (23). Regarding the dandelions, Pecola tells us: “Nobody loves the head of a dandelion. Maybe because they are so many, strong, and soon. [...] Dandelions. A dart of affection leaps out from her to them. But they do not look at her and do not send love back. She thinks, ‘They are ugly. They are weeds.’” (36) Carabí (1988) identifies these heads of dandelions with the white community, but at the same time they are identified with the ugliness, which in the hegemonic cultural discourse of the novel is associated in this context with the black community. Pecola likes it because the head is white, but at the same time she is subverting this cultural meaning. Blurring the whiteness of the dandelion with its ugliness, Morrison blurs static categories of race and unifies whatever is marginal, ugly or distant to the hegemonic material-discourse constructed by the society. While at the same time, dandelions and plants do not love her back. It is a unilateral feeling, therefore a disconnected affect, insofar as Pecola is not receiving their love back. This is due to the fact that Pecola is so disconnected with her own self, as she knows so little about love that she is not able to produce and project the political strategy involved in the dandelion-love. This strategy needs to be carried out, but it cannot be articulated by the feeling of love.

In contrast to this, but also as part of an affective continuum, Morrison presents Claudia’s anger. Claudia explains why this feeling is not adequate for their own project, as individuals and a collective group in an oppressive system: “I could not love it [the white doll]. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable.” (14). Thus, love is a feeling that relates to the hegemonic discourse with the hegemonic culture, but it has nothing to do with the alternative reality that these two girls are living. In fact, there is a division even among the community, since “[p]roperited black people spent all their energies, all their love, on their nests.” (12) Repeating the structure of “their”, which is an exclusive pronoun – “ours” is not used, Claudia is explaining here how a profound scission is performed in the gendered and raced relations between adults and children or, in this case “properited” and non-properited black people. Individually, Claudia exercises a personal anger in excess

towards anything white or adult-related for different reasons. One is the common discourse about beauty surrounding the whiteness, and the complacency that these subjects have merely because of the color of their skin: “No synthetic yellow bags suspended over marble-blue eyes, no Pecola, I felt a need for someone to want the black baby to live – just to counteract the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples, and Maureen Peals.” (149).

By personifying this in three different items, Claudia acknowledges that the problem is not them, but this “universal love” or, in other words, “And all the time we [Claudia and Frieda] knew that Maureen Peal (the candies) was not the enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The *thing* to fear was the *thing* that made *her* beautiful, and not us.” (58) Hate and fear come together and when they do so, the relation produces uncertainty. In this uncertainty they find open questions that are revealing. There is a “thing” that made them beautiful. This quote belongs to a part in the story when the three girls have an argument with Maureen Peal and the audience in the street (adult women, black and white) only hears the racist insults perpetrated to the white girl. Claudia and Frieda are fighting against what McKittrick (2000: 132) identifies as the beauty standards approved by adults (black and white alike).

To conclude, Pecola needs the community, in order to become her own self and liberate herself from the oppressive discourse, as well as from raced and gendered oppressions. As Claudia explains, “she [Pecola] seemed glad to see us” (83). She needs them to create alliances because she is immersed in a gendered oppressive (her own family) and racist structure (the whiteness discourse that denies her own beauty). In this sense, since pregnancy provokes the final scission of Pecola with the rest of the community, she needs to create another self in her own becoming, in order to find someone who wants her to survive her dislocated situation. This dislocation will be repeated, for example, in the monologues by the three characters in *Beloved*, although it is explicitly recognized that in this character it is a product of her imagination. Nevertheless, the power of imagination and the construction of an alternative reality are in Morrison’s novels strong tools to disrupt oppression. It is a way of performing individual acts of politics.

### 4.3.2. *Sula*

This is the second novel published by Toni Morrison, in 1973. Following *The Bluest Eye*, it conveys the friendship of two women, Sula Peace and Nel Wright, up until adulthood, when Sula dies. Their relationship is described in terms of “admiration”, “[j]oined in mutual admiration they watched each day as though it were a movie arranged for their amusement.” (55). Indeed, Toni Morrison explains her own desire of writing this novel as an attempt to demonstrate that black women always have had friendship and respect: “black women have always had that. They have always been emotional life supports for each other. [...] Because when you don't have a woman to talk to, whether it be an aunt or a sister or a friend, that is the real loneliness.” (Carabí, 1988: 142).

Even though the racist discourse keeps on being important in this novel, the gender stereotypes that confine these characters, as well as the black community's lack of initiative, become the most relevant problems. Thus, a strong anti-racist feminist political project is carried out (McKittrick, 2000: 127). At the beginning of the novel, we face the racial aspect via the “nigger joke” (4) in which the community of the “Bottom” is settled. A white owner freed his slave and gave him one piece of land up in the mountain, an unfertile land. He cheated the slave by telling him that that place was in the Bottom because whenever God was looking down on it, it was “His” bottom. Thus, introducing biblical references, Morrison starts by dislocating discursive places and blurring the dichotomies between up and bottom since, at the end of the novel, she will also explain how eventually that piece of land turns to be a rich white community's land. Using irony, Morrison starts the novel indicating that cohesion in the black community is not one of their strengths, while innocence and resignation become the pillars on which Medalion (the town) is based. The issue of politics takes a secondary position (rarely found and if so, it is at an individual level), it is this “absence” that makes this issue even more present.

Sula, the protagonist, is presented mainly through her relationship with Nel. However, Shadrack, her family (especially her grandmother – Eva – and her mother – Hannah), and the whole community take on an important role in Sula's own self-becoming. The relationship between Sula and Nel has been defined by Mar Gallego (1999), for

instance, as two sides of the same coin: Sula as a 'superwoman' and Nel as the conventional stereotype of the Black woman. However, as Gallego specifies (ibid, 82) this relationship is not equally perceived by different members of the community. Likewise, Eva Peace (Sula's grandmother) considers these two characters as "practically equal" (*Sula*, 169).

Contrary to Nel, Sula is introduced by her own full name (30) and not as the daughter of someone else. While Nel and Shadrack need to look into a mirror to be sure of whom they are and that they are there, Sula does not need a mirror to look at herself. She is not the representation of anyone else, not even herself, breaking the dichotomy between real and representation, since Sula is always a process of self-becoming and movement, pure affect. That is, Morrison is very genuinely presenting the readers with the breaking of the "mirror metaphor" of science and objectivity. Through this self-affirmation of Sula, Morrison introduces the materiality of language in itself. Calling her by her name and surname is not accidental and reinforces Sula's position through the omission of the mirroring process, as with the rest of the characters. She is not defined through anyone else at this moment; she is presented as the relation already, as the catalyst.

Sula is one of the characters who carries out the highest amount of individual acts of politics, and certainly the only one who carries out those individual acts (except from Shadrack's institutionalization of the National Suicide Day, which will be explored later) with global consequences, that is, producing changes in the entire community. Nel, on the other hand also accomplishes small acts of self-determination in which her own individual strategy is performed. This can be seen in Nel's change of mind when referring to the "beauty practices" that her mother made her do. Sula never fought were it not to defend Nel and Nel is unable to accomplish this individual act of self-determination until she does not relate with Sula: "[a]fter she met Sula, Nel slid the clothespin under the blanket as soon as she got in the bed. And although there was still the hateful hot comb to suffer through each Saturday evening, its consequences - smooth hair - no longer interested her." (27). Although this act is quite significant, it will disappear slowly. One of the reasons why it happens is because an individual way of performing politics runs the risk of remaining at the individual level, an act that only benefits itself. The implications need to be global, not just local. Sula's acts have

implications for the entire community, whether they react to them positively or negatively. But Nel's remain in the private sphere.

Thus, in order to develop an effective political strategy, it is necessary to transfer the individual acts to the collective sphere. However, it cannot work since people in the Bottom are not used to collective thinking. They do not regard whatever problem is happening to them as a collective issue; instead they erase it from their daily life and concentrate on gossiping about "others". Thus, they create sub-groups in the same community, which does nothing else but help the oppressive system since they do not co-ordinate themselves to produce disruptions in the system. One example of this is the following:

The black people would have disagreed, but they had no time to think about it. They were mightily preoccupied with earthly things - and each other, wondering even as early as 1920 what Shadrack was all about, what that little girl Sula who grew into a woman in their town was all about, and what they themselves were all about, tucked up there in the Bottom. (6)

Instead of being worried about their own life conditions, they need to be worried about the individual lives of Shadrack and Sula, the two principal marginal characters. Thus, Morrison is creating one of those holes to be filled in by her reader, since she anticipates the catalyst effect that these two characters will have in the novel. According to Morrison (Carabí, 1988: 103), "the excessive conformism of black people has caused a standstill in their evolution and, consequently, has confined the possibilities of the individuals, especially the black women's projection."<sup>54</sup> Morrison here is identifying how *a politics of the process* becomes paralyzed when focused on the wrong direction.

These reasons direct the close reading to focus on individual facts in order to understand the way politics is performed. This novel conceptualizes how an individual can partake in agency, since community reveals itself very passive. It is also keen on representing the damages of excluding instead of including, creating sub-groups inside marginal

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<sup>54</sup> "Según la escritora, el excesivo conformismo de la gente de color ha ocasionado un estancamiento en su evolución y ha acotado en consecuencia, las posibilidades de los individuos que la componen, en especial la proyección de la mujer negra."

groups, and exemplify how negatively the “oppositional logic of the Same” can affect marginal groups. It is a point of departure for understanding that a different way of enacting politics is needed in order to disrupt the strong gendered hierarchical oppositions presented in the novel (among other oppressions).

Besides, in this novel Toni Morrison also allows us to find out how the intervention of one individual can be determining for the whole system. It goes without saying that individuals do not hold absolute agency, but small significant changes can be produced. As an example, she includes the institutionalization of the National Suicide Day, which will acquire special relevance at the end of the novel, since Morrison shows its close connection with Sula. The National Suicide Day starts within the material bodily experience of one single character: Shadrack. The narrator explains this day as:

making a place for fear as a way of controlling it. [Shadrack] knew the smell of death and was terrified of it, for he could not anticipate it. It was not death or dying that frightened him, but the unexpectedness of both. In sorting it all out, he hit on the notion that if one day a year were devoted to it, everybody could get it out of the way and the rest of the year would be safe and free. In this manner he instituted National Suicide Day. (14)

Morrison anticipates to us how this National Suicide Day was institutionalized. First, Shadrack explains to his readers that he needed to find an intangible material place in which to locate a concrete feeling: fear. Therefore, “fear” seems to be the affect directing this whole force, not only the individual. This “fear” is “terrifying” because it is not expected, unknown, thus it is the process in which reality changes and modifies itself. So, in a way of trying to capture this force, he locates it in one day (which happens to be his own individual strategy to maintain that force in the remaining of the stable, as a process that “always” happens). Thus, if fear is made “certain”, the community can be safe and free. That fear becomes certain in this institutional discursive establishment. Morrison introduces the following examples of this attempt to make “fear” a discourse:

Some lover said to his Bride-to-be, ‘Let’s do it after New Year, ‘stead of before. I get paid New Year’s Eve.’

And his sweetheart answered, "OK, but make sure it ain't on Suicide Day. I ain't 'bout to be listening to no cowbells whilst the weddin's going on. (16).

Society had internalized this individual practice, although instead of it being through affirmation, it was by its negation. Thus, this practice was initiated by a marginal character, by the "exteriority within" the Baradian apparatus. That is, it becomes part of the apparatus and the social fabric of the community as a possible act of resistance.

However, as Morrison explains to the reader, forces, affects, and eventually "intra-actions" cannot be controlled by the discursivity of language, neither by the cultural constructions, or the agencies of single individuals. When Sula dies, her dead body becomes the "threshold of politics" (Grosz, 1995), by disrupting this institutionalization. Shadrack understands that what he thought was to be confined forever, "always" unchangeable, changes, and fear becomes the control once again. The catalyst that Sula represented for the community, in order to control those fears, to control the morality of the society, to maintain them peacefully quiet, is dead and with this death, everything starts to change back again. For example, Teapot's mother turns back to hit him, as she had been doing before Sula's arrival (153). They are directed with all the material and symbolic meaning of Sula's death but happen simultaneously and not as a pure consequence, since she cannot do anything being dead. At the moment of death, she becomes part of the apparatus of the community and starts working within the community and not as an "exteriority within", as happened with Shadrack.

Thus, fear is a force that should not be encapsulated, because it is impossible. If fear drives the community, and enables a sense of community, it should be kept free and changeable. That is why the community is punished at the end of the novel when the tunnel (symbol of the capitalist fulfillment of the white supremacy) falls on the people participating in the National Suicide Day, which was meant to be the last National Suicide Day and an act commemorating Sula. With Sula's death, not only does Nel discover that what she missed all this time was Sula and not Jude (as she explains at the end of the novel), but Shadrack also finds out that things necessarily change, and after Sula's death the community again loses its own will and directive force, which was the fear they had towards Sula. As a consequence, Morrison implements one particular feeling towards the end of the novel: "missing Sula" instead of "fearing her". Missing her is what Barad (2012) would call a "justice-to-come", an imaginary of justice never

actualized but that drives the community into a collective goodness. Since this “collective goodness” is never a concrete fact (since it would also imply to be universal and that has always had very negative connotations in feminist politics), it is a way to be always “waiting” while “acting”. In this sense, McKee (1997: 38) describes “missing in *Sula*” as “a particular historical experience”, which takes two forms:

[One is] particular persons and things are missed from particular places [and the second] a history of missing *made* by people’s knowledge of what they would never become, places they would never hold, things they would never do [...] To miss these ‘things’ that never were is to locate historical significance in nonmaterial as well as material experience and to insist, moreover, that the historical experience of loss extends far beyond material suffering.

Thus, this feeling is a way of *historicizing meaning through the enactment of boundaries* as both Donna Haraway and Karen Barad claim. Thus, it is a permanent re-working through different affects that one particular character has as a driving motor, even when she is dead, since material boundaries do not exist.

Another salient aspect in this novel is the strong presence of gender stereotypes: “Particularly they [black men] watched women. When a woman approached, the older men tipped their hats; the younger ones opened and closed their thighs. But all of them, whatever their age, watched her retreating view with interest.” (49). Gender roles are present in almost every scene. Everyone has their own way of behaving, and whatever falls out of there turns to be dangerous. It is a reflection that can be made through the Deweys (the twins living in Sula’s house). It is better to keep them together, this way they do not represent a threat. Sula incarnates this danger when she comes back to the village at the age of 29 without husband or children and with a very special perception of the world surrounding her. The complete opposite is Nel, who incarnates the dream she had when she was a child:

When Nel, an only child, sat on the steps of her back porch surrounded by the high silence of her mother’s incredibly orderly house, feeling the neatness pointing at her back, she studied the poplars and fell easily into a picture of herself lying on a flowered bed, tangled in her own hair, waiting for some fiery Prince. He approached but never quite arrived. But always, watching the dream along with her, were some smiling

sympathetic eyes. Someone as interested as she herself in the flow of her imagined hair, the thickness of the Mattress of flowers, the voile sleeves that closed below her elbows in gold-threaded cuffs. (51).

Sula and Nel were one and the same but, with Jude, Nel starts to belong to Jude, becoming another's project and not her own. Before getting married, they could even share Jude "In those days a compliment to one was a compliment to the other, and cruelty to one was a challenge to the other." (84). But when it becomes institutionalized, when they are married, they cannot share Jude anymore. And this is something that Sula does not understand because she does not follow social rules, and because their project of self-determination, of self-becoming, is broken. Sula keeps her flow in order to become herself, but Nel is immersed in another's project and abandons her own. Thus, Nel becomes part of the oppressive system: "[t]he two of them together [Nel and Jude] would make one Jude." (*Sula*, 83). This is explained by Grewal (1998: 47) as "Nel's [...] abandoning of the creative project of her own self-making for his struggle with subordination within the dominant social order, can be read as the project of a masculinist nationalism assimilating and erasing the claims of feminism."

Morrison describes the different processes carried out to establish gendered oppressive systems, racial special classifications, or the individualism perpetuated in the community. Sula is the only one who "let her emotions dictate her behavior" (141). That's how someone gets liberated and free, and in that way can try to stop living in an oppressive structure. Nevertheless, this is not enough, because that someone belongs to the exteriority within that reality. They are the catalyst for everyone else's lives. Thus, at the individual self-becoming, it is a way of freeing oneself from an oppressive community. However, being free is also dangerous. As Morrison herself explains: "She [Sula] was determined to be whoever she was. To be totally free – which is a very dangerous thing, because you have no commitment to anybody, and therefore no responsibility to anybody." (Carabí, 1988: 129). It is in between oneself and the community that acts of resistance are created in the novel.

#### 4.3.3. *Song of Solomon*

This novel won Morrison the “National Book Critics Award”, a most prestigious literary prize in the United States, in 1978. It happened at a very early stage of her writing career. For the first time, Morrison articulates this novel around a black male character (Milkman), although this character “[relies] on a number of women [to] achieve selfhood on his own.” (Grewal, 1998: 74). It is precisely this interdependency that allows his “fly in a liberatory mode” (ibid.). Thus, this novel is a perfect example of how gendered relationships are mutually influenced and influencing other aspects, in order to develop strategies of self-becoming. Besides, it is heavily structured around the concept of the traditional extended family, since familial bounds take a special importance. The following characters (Milkman’s auntie, cousins, father and mother, sisters, relatives – grandmother and grandfather) and the whole genealogical tree take part in his own pursuit towards Milkman’s individual freedom. Thus, Morrison presents this character from his birth to this “death/fly”.

One of those women that Milkman relies upon is Pilate, Milkman’s father’s sister. She prevents him from a premature death and has been defined as the “spiritual agent” in Milkman’s quest (López, 2012: 124), “the recuperation of the dying heritage” (Grewal, 1998: 70), and the “representative of the natural world” (Carabí, 1988: 158). All of these definitions do represent aspects of Pilate’s character. From the very beginning, in their first meeting, Pilate offers Milkman (an isolated child in his family and his community) the opportunity to feel belonging through participating in the exclusion in which Pilate’s family was: “Now he [Milkman] was behaving with this strange woman [Pilate] as though having the name was a matter of deep personal pride, as though she had tried to expel him from a very special group, in which he not only belonged, but had exclusive rights.” (38 – 9) Pilate is the main catalyst through which affections materialize to promote social and individual changes.

Besides, Milkman’s relation with Pilate is not his only influence in his quest for knowledge. During the course of the novel, Milkman dramatically changes his behavior towards women, depending on the new elements taking part in this quest for knowledge. Having been raised to depend on his whole family, it is precisely a family conflict that raises the birth of a wide variety of feelings, initiating his eagerness to know and altering his way of confronting life, in general, and women, in particular. In the first part

of the novel, Macon – his father – explains to Milkman that his mother is not the innocent woman she seems to be by implying an incestuous relationship with her father. After learning of this news, “Milkman’s confusion was rapidly turning to anger” (76) and because of that, his own concept of “love” and his relationship with women changes: “Her [his mother’s] confirmed, eternal love of him, love that he didn’t even have to earn or deserve, seemed to him natural. And now it was decomposing.” (ibid). This turning point does not only have the implied negative consequences mentioned before, since from then on he regards his mother’s love, as well as Haggar’s as “possessive” (ibid). Haggar (his cousin) maintains a love-relationship with him but it is also based on the premise that she loves him unconditionally, even without him earning that love. This will result in fatal consequences. The relationship and its consequences fit perfectly into the traditional patriarchal system. Nevertheless, its naturalness starts to crumble in the development of the novel.

However, it is not yet that his eagerness for knowledge and freedom starts. It only promotes a “chaotic” version of individuality based on “anger” that only encapsulates his individuality on a more isolated plane. He realizes that:

all he knew in the world about the world was what other people had told him [...] Except for the one time he had hit his father, he had never acted independently, and that act, his only one, had brought unwanted knowledge too, as well as some responsibility for that knowledge. (120).

If knowledge is a way of empowerment, he had never obtained this empowerment by his own. Carefully, he was directed into some unwanted knowledge, because it implied responsibility and it is precisely responsibility what he was not ready to assume. This lack of responsibility can be observed in the way he treats women, deals with politics – despite Guitar’s efforts of introducing him to politics – or breaks up with Haggar with a “thank you” note. Thus, propelled by this immaturity as well as escaping from his family, Haggar, and his need for economical dependency, he starts a trip to the South in order to find some gold that his father thinks Pilate has hidden in a cave.

In the South, Circe became his second spiritual guide. This led him not only into the power of knowing more of his family and his origins, but also into a crumbling process

of the patriarchal system that roots black nationalism, which Morrison tries to dismantle in this novel. On the other hand, Circe shows Milkman a different view of the black woman in their first encounter: “I said she [her white mistress] killed herself rather than do the work I’d been doing all my life! [...] Now, what do you suppose she thought I was! If the way I lived and the work I did what so hateful to her she killed herself to keep from having to do it [...]” (ibid, 247). This is a bright statement not only for him as a man, but because of his social status. He cannot even think what it is like to be a maid – his sister Corinthian hides this fact from his family – because he has never experienced it, neither the women he has seen. To him, all women were equal. Circe becomes to Milkman “this entrance into the past [...] his own past, showing both the power and the destructiveness of his heritage, and [she] channels his rebelliousness into a quest for his own identity.” (López, 2012: 119).

However, yet another woman will be necessary in Milkman’s self-development and liberating process of individuality. This woman is Sweet, with whom he will share his last and most important revelation: his origin as part of the “flying Africans” tribe. There was a man, Solomon, able to fly off from the slavery plantation. Solomon went to Africa, to his origins, and left behind Ryna and his twenty-one sons. Milkman went to the South, to Shallimar, and left behind Haggar, who commits suicide exactly as Ryna. As Carabí explains (1988: 189), “It is here that the tension between freedom and social responsibility appears”<sup>55</sup>. Sweet is the one revealing to him two important questions in that entire story: “Where’d he go [...]?” and “Who’d he leave behind?” (328). In displaying many different types of women throughout the novel, Morrison achieves Milkman’s self becoming thereby attempting to infer a change in the black community in particular and the United States society in general. As Grewal states by quoting Adrienne Rich (1998: 66 – 67), “[t]hrough Milkman the novel shows, in Adrienne Rich’s words, that we are ‘born both innocent and accountable’ and ‘cannot help

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<sup>55</sup> “El conflicto entre absoluta libertad y responsabilidad social aparece. Cuando alguien se remonta del suelo ‘someone is always left behind’ dice Toni Morrison. [...] El tema de la canción de Solomon se repite una vez más; de la misma forma que Ryna se suicidó al ser abandonada por su amado Solomon, Hagar al haber sido rechazada por Milkman prefiere la muerte a los cuidados amorosos y desesperados de Pilate y Reba.” (Carabí, 1988: 180).

making history because we are made of it'; what we can do is choose whether or not to 'become *consciously* historical.'

#### 4.3.4. *Tar Baby*

In this novel, Toni Morrison focuses on the relationship between Jadine and Son (the main protagonists of the novel) and the difficulties that they go through, in order to make their relationship work in a post-modern world. Besides, this is one of the most controversial novels since academics in general, seem to take sides to support either Jadine or Son (Mottiff, 2004). This enhances what seems to turn into a fight between choosing race (Son) or feminism (Jadine), as a point of departure for an analysis of politics in the novel. In support of Mottiff's line of argumentation (2004), it is important to keep the relationship between Jandine and Son (the focus of the close reading) since both are complementary and mutually dependent. One of the main reasons for this controversy is the generational issue, since younger and older generations do not share the same life experiences. According to Morrison,

Jadine and Son had no problems as far as men and women are concerned. They knew exactly what to do but they had a problem about what work to do, when and where to do it, and where to live. Those things hinged on what they felt about who they were, and what their responsibilities were in being black. The question for each was whether he or she was really a member of the tribe. (in Ryan, 1997: 82).

This fact is accentuated with the family and post-slavery structure in which the novel is framed. On the one hand, Jadine is a motherless female educated in one of the best colleges of Europe, thanks to the support of a white man, Valerian. As a result, she enters a modeling school in which she becomes a successful woman, according to capitalist standards thus, she becomes part of the conventional ideal of happiness. Valerian, at the same time, is Ondine and Sydney's patron (respectively Jadine's aunt and uncle), and owns a house in a Caribbean Island where he has just decided to spend the rest of his life, after having lived in Philadelphia for a long time as the owner of a famous candy factory. Son, on the other hand, is a fugitive man coming from a small town in the South, Eloë who represents all the traditional patriarchal values rooted in

many years of racist oppression. Thus, this novel does not only present racial and gendered issues, but also class and generational themes that dislocate all the characters building the narrative.

All the characters – Jadine, Son, Valerian, Margaret, etc. - structure the novel inasmuch as they provide the rest of the characters in this novel with different perspectives from those participating in the novel. That is to say, each character holds a multiple subjectivity in which different angles are intra-acting in order to construct different subjectivities. As Mottiff explains (2004), it is impossible to know one character without knowing the other characters' opinions about him or her. Depending on who is explaining them, we will either have one version or a completely different one of this character. For example, at the beginning, to Margaret and Jadine Son is a rapper, to Ondine and Sydney he is a fugitive, to Gideon and Thèrese (two other characters working as servants in the house) he is a hero while to Valerian he is a mere distraction.

This novel does not have any quote in Morrison's official Facebook page. Nevertheless, it is one of the novels in which the multiplicity of the subjects and the non-linearity of the narrative are more present. Morrison tries to warn the reader and society, in general, against using and abusing any type of stereotype, because reality is multiple and complex and it cannot be easily classified by the mere use of stereotypes. In order to shed light on how this is built, I would like to discuss Son and Jadine. Son is the first character opening the novel and tells his own story. He is a fugitive on a boat who starts to starve and decides to hide in the first house he comes across. On his way to the house, he informs the reader that "[t]he sex, weight, the demeanor of whomever he encountered would inform and determine his tale." (3). This clearly indicates that for Son, "sex" will be the ontological difference that will inform and determine the story we are about to know. While Son's story will be determined by others, he also determines others' stories, since "[w]hen Son enters the picture, the stereotyping escalates; his unexpected arrival seems to threaten the established order and roles within the house, requiring the characters to reaffirm their boundaries." (Mottiff, 2004: 15). That is, he influences and intervenes in the definition of those living in that house, while at the same time he is defined and influenced by them. His own subjectivity becomes relational and dependant on the rest of the house. Because of this, Morrison is also implying here

that sex is not only the ontological difference but also it is differing itself relationally. Indeed, this idea is reinforced by the fact that we do not know anything about his past until later on, when he tells her that he killed “a woman” (177) because she was cheating on him. Thus, it is through Jadine that we start knowing different aspects about him.

Therefore, in his own words the only thing we know at the beginning is that “[He is] guilty of being hungry and [he is] guilty of being stupid, but nothing else. [Valerian] knows that.” (163). However, the first time time Jadine sees him, she does not know what to think of him. He appeared in the novel locked in a woman’s closet, in a private room and, later, he confesses a crime. Jadine and Son, and not the reader, can figure out the crime. Jadine can only know him through their relationship. The rest is part of an interpretative context built up first by those in Valerian’s house and by the people from Elae. Taking Mottiff’s explanation on this (2004: 17), “[t]he reader may similarly be trying to ‘figure out’ Son: if he is the moral center of the novel, why does he appear to fall into stereotypes of either protecting or dominating women [...]?” One example of this is the passage in which he is trying to justify his assault on Jadine at the beginning of the novel. Son explains: “[...] I’m sorry. You can figure out why I did it, can’t you? You were so clean standing in that pretty room, and I was so dirty. I was ashamed kinda so I got mad and tried to dirty you.” (162).

Before they begin their relationship, Jadine and Son exchange what happened in the closet with Margaret, the white owner of the house. He is so successful in justifying himself that he convinces the “supposedly-powerful” Jadine (because as mentioned at the beginning, she holds a privileged position in the house) that hiding in a closet and his attraction to her is something desirable (187). This is the second time that Jadine defends Son in front of Margaret, as she realizes that she is “annoyed” by the fact that Margaret thinks that Son wanted to rape her, just because “[a] white woman, no matter how old, how flabby, how totally sexless, believed it and [Jadine] could have shot him for choosing Margaret’s closet and giving her reason to believe it was true.” (ibid.) However, Jadine is not that senseless and she realizes that her feelings are leading her to something totally wrong. She is competing with someone else for the feeling of trying to be raped, which, to her, means being wanted at that precise moment. Although he

was not going to rape anyone, the power of stereotypes leads the characters to the wrong assumptions, “Jadine turned over carefully to protect her raw legs. I am competing with her for rape! She thinks this place is driving her crazy;” (ibid). Besides, Margaret over reacts and insults Son by comparing him with an animal marking Jadine’s reaction: “[Jadine] had volunteered nigger – but not gorilla. ‘We were all scared, Margaret,” she said calmly. ‘If he’d been white we would still have been scared.” (*Tar Baby*, 129). In spite of the fact that Jadine insulted him during the assault with the word “ape” when they were alone, now she is “discomforted” by Margaret using the term “gorilla”. Thus, even though this can confuse the reader, since she or he does not very well know how to read Jadine, it is meant to be so because Jadine loses consistency throughout the whole novel. Thus, nothing is crystal clear and the focus should be on the relations *per se* and not the characters themselves. The characters are the result of a network of people and contexts (Mottiff, 2004).

Jadine is one of the most controversial characters in Morrison’s work. According to Carabí (1988: 188), “Jadine represents [...] a conception of “woman” separated from history [while] Son bears, as his name indicates, the ancestral tradition. In their relationship, both act as a counterpoint of two visions and life styles that differ among them.”<sup>56</sup> Through remembering her life in Paris, Jadine presents herself as a very “successful woman”. In a moment of her life in which everything goes on wheels, she imagines herself in a future life in Paris with a high social position, motor for Jadine’s personal diaspora. She is dressed in a yellow canary dress, as Sula and Hannah were. This image is product of an engagement with “[...] a woman much too tall. Under her long canary yellow dress [...] The skin like tar against the canary yellow dress [with] something in her eyes so powerful it had burnt away the eyelashes.” (42). Just as Sula, Jadine is testing herself, but her dream includes capitalist practices substituting (or adding) old oppressions with “new” ones, such as the beauty industry, class and the acquisition of capital, happiness. That is, even though those oppressions remain the same, their expression (materialization) has slightly changed and therefore they remain

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<sup>56</sup> “Jadine representa, como decimos, una concepción de mujer separada de la historia. Son, el protagonista masculino, es portador, como su nombre indica, de la tradición ancestral. En su relación, ambos actúan como contrapunto de dos visiones y modelos de vida que difieren.”

invisible for Jadine as a post-modern subject. Nevertheless, it is precisely this fact that may direct Jadine towards keeping on looking for her own self-becoming through the whole novel.

In fact, “[t]he woman had made her feel lonely in a way. Lonely and inauthentic.” (45). Jadine feels lonely and inauthentic because her plans included marrying a white who maybe does not really want her, but what she represents: “I wonder if the person he wants to marry is me or a black girl?” (ibid). She shows a resistance to fit into any pre-established category, as she wants to make herself (to become herself). When she sees the woman in yellow so powerful and so secure of herself as to leave some money without waiting for a prohibition to take three eggs, she sees a self-determination that she cannot find in this institutional love with that white man. Instead, Jadine wants to become that powerful and open her own business. As Carabí explains (1988: 195), “[...] in spite of the dramatic negation of her ancestral culture, the heroine of *Tar Baby* lives her separation of history in an anxious uncertainty [...]. The visit to the Caribbean will confront Jadine with her historical heritage [while] her reaction with the past presence will reaffirm her knowledge process.”<sup>57</sup> The following passage represents many doubts that confront this character, which helps the reader to understand that she is incomplete and fully immersed in her own self-becoming process:

She had not accomplished anything [...]. At least in Paris there was work, excitement. She thought she had better go to New York, do this job, and then return to Paris and Ryk. The idea of starting a business of her own, she thought, was a fumble. Valerian would lend her the money, she knew, but maybe that was a sidestep, too. It was a silly age, twenty-five; too old for teenaged dreaming, too young for settling down. Every corner was a possibility and a dead end. Work? At what? Marriage? Work and marriage? Where? Who? What can I do with this degree [art history]? Do I really want to model? It was nothing like she thought it would be: soft and lovely smiles in soft and lovely clothes. (159).

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<sup>57</sup> “Sin embargo, a pesar de la drástica negación de su cultura ancestral, la heroína de *Tar Baby* vive su separación de la historia en una incertidumbre angustiosa. [...] La visita al Caribe le supondrá a Jadine enfrentarse con una herencia histórica rehuida hasta entonces y su reacción ante la presencia del pasado reafirmará su proceso de conocimiento.”

Thus, in this knowledge and self-becoming process that starts through the movement between Paris and the Caribbean, Son is going to enter Jadine's life disrupting Jadine's life values. Even though the novel has been criticized for being "fragmented and highly subjective" without "a single character [representing] a central vision" (Moffitt, 2004: 12), some other critiques justified the theme as Jadine and Son's "relations with each other [...] and their relations with the dominant culture and its institutions." (Grewal, 1998: 80). This novel is about gendered relationships as a whole, and this focus enables the analysis of Jadine's own individual strategies to disrupt the oppressive gendered roles attached to her depending on her geographical location (Paris, the Caribbean, Eloe, or New York) and those intervening in her own subjectivity (Son, Valerian, Ondine and Sydney, etc.). "*Tar Baby* confuses the readers because it is *meant* to be confusing, in the sense of resisting easy categorizing and convenient definition." (Moffitt, 2004: 12). Thus, the novel does not have a protagonist, but a relation.

The first encounter between Son and Jadine alone happens in Jadine's room. He assaults her physically, prompting a second hesitance towards her whole existence. In the narrator's words "[b]esides that fear and the fear of fear, there was another authentic loathing that she felt for the man. With him she was in strange waters. She had not seen a Black like him in ten years." (126) Thus, the racial aspect starts to be troubling, but not only because of being black, as the reader may feel at the beginning, but because "she was more frightened of his good looks than she had been by his ugliness the day before." (158).

During the entire novel, Jadine's and Son's values are inevitably frequently compared with each other and sometimes they try to influence each other, in order to change their life values. When they are back in New York, after having been to Eloe, Jadine encourages Son to study and asks Valerian to pay for his studies. This could be understood as Jadine's own self comfort with the white patriarchal and neo-liberal system but also as Son's discomfort with the hegemonic structure. However, Jadine's process of becoming part of the neo-slavery system is not straightforward. The following passage shows the difficulties that her family had and the reasons why they decided to enter into this system:

[Ondine]: ‘Such a smart little girl, and so pretty. I never minded not having children after we started taking care of her [Jadine]. I would have stood on my feet all day all night to put her through that school. And when my feet were gone, I would have cooked on my knees.’

[...]

[Sydney]: ‘He [Valerian] helped too, you know. We never could have done it without him.’

‘And I’m grateful. [...]’

‘And she [Margaret] never objected to it, Ondine. A lot of wives would have.’

‘I suppose’. (283)

This process is called “rescue” (Ryan, 1997: 78). While Ondine, Sydney and Jadine feel indebted to Valerian for the rest of their lives, the reasons are very different since the first two did not have any other choice and Jadine decided “freely”. Jadine and Son’s fights at the end of the novel come from this feeling of being “rescued” that Jadine has for Valerian. At the end of the novel, we see how Ondine reclaims this “rescue” to Jadine when she tells her that “a girl has to be a daughter first. [...] And if she never learns how to be a daughter, she can’t never learn how to be a woman. [...] I don’t want you to care about me for my sake. I want you to care about me for yours” (283). Ondine is here trying to let Jadine know that thinking of one’s own freedom and liberty is not always a wise option. However, maybe she is doing it in the wrong terms, since Jadine is only picking up one part: “You are asking me to parent you. Please don’t. I can’t do that now” (ibid). The reader is left here without knowing what Ondine really means, that she should parent Sydney and Ondine or that she does not know how to be a daughter, given that she does not have a mother? Furthermore, is Ondine trying to include a certain collective politics based on family affinities or trying to save her own self just as she did not know why she did not talk to Valerian about the baby and Margaret?

Thus, even though Jadine tries to replicate this “rescuing process” with Son, when she realizes that she is not on the right path with her own life, she infers a change in this rescuing process. If Jadine had accepted to stay there, she would at the same time, have repeated the same patterns once and again. This represents a disruption. After this, she decides to come back to what seems the physical excluded reality at that moment: Europe. She takes a plane to come back to where she began: Paris, the place in which

she was free. But it is part of Jadine's own self-becoming, because it is in Paris where the woman in yellow (her own referent) was when they met each other. Ryan (1997: 82-3) explains this as “Jadine [offering] her own response to the question of her membership in, recognition of, and responsibilities to ‘the tribe’, especially the uncle and the aunt who, in their old age, are beginning to need her to hold things together”. Thus, the reader may feel that Jadine is abandoning her own race, her history, in pursuit of her own selfish benefit, and because of that, she is pursuing individualist politics based only on her own self fulfillment.

Nevertheless, Jadine is also the only one in the novel able to recognize the multiplicity of “women”. During her relationship with Son, he constantly compares her to the women in Eloë, whom he considered as perfect women. She is not like them and this implies that she is not good enough or does not know her role in the community. Because, as she explains, “‘There are other ways to be a woman, Nanadine,’ Jadine went on. ‘Your way is one, I guess it is, but it’s not my way. I don’t want to be ... like you. [...] I don’t want to be the kind of woman you’re talking about because I don’t want to be that kind of woman.’” (284). Jadine is, with her own example, bringing multiplicity for the homogeneous black woman. Nevertheless, she becomes another dangerous woman, as Sula. This is not fully understood; in fact, her auntie answers her back with, “There ain’t but one kind. Just one, and if you say another hateful word to me [...]” (ibid).

Changing scenarios, once in Eloë, Jadine fails again to fulfill the category of woman classified by black patriarchy:

Cheyenne was driving a beat-up old truck at age nine, [...]. His mother’s memory was kept alive by those who remembered how she roped horses when she was a girl. His grandmother built a whole cowshed with only Rosa to help. In fact the room Jadine had slept in, Rosa built herself [...]. Anybody who thought women were inferior didn’t come out of north Florida. (271).

Son sees the women coming from Florida as representative of the real femaleness. Thus, Son defends this type of woman, while pushing Jadine to the window at the same time. Jadine represents to him the betrayal to tradition and to black nationalism. Hence, Son

perpetuates one of the most common types of female oppression: essentialism, that one woman is all women:

That fucker in Europe, the one you [Jadine] were thinking about marrying? Go have his children. That should suit you. Then you can do exactly what you bitches have always done: take care of white folks' children. That's what you were born for; that's what you have waited for all your life. So have that white man's baby, that's your job. You have been doing it for two hundred years, you can do it for two hundred more. There are no 'mixed' marriages. It just looks that way. [...] You turn little black babies into little white ones; you turn your black brothers into white brothers; you turn your men into white men and when a black woman treats me like what I am, what I really am, you say she's spoiling me. (ibid, 272).

This is a very strong argument against "mixed" marriages and taking care of white children. Thus, it is a simplification of the reality of yet another type of black woman. Making equal their work to mixed marriages is a traditionally patriarchal discourse belonging to the reality of black women. Here, just as with Jadine's modeling career, we have another blurred situation in which the process is developed by itself.

Thus, in Jadine's constant fight to be acknowledged as different from the rest of black women, she develops a strategy that focuses on anger and work: "But she couldn't shake it and it kept her angry and the anger was good for the photographers and the agency and the telephone company and the apartment managers. Everybody took notice and got out of the way." (ibid, 263). Through this anger, she finds a way to benefit herself from her own career. In spite of the beauty ideals that this career entails, they empower her in two senses (Carabí, 1988: 187): an ironical use of the beauty standards and a new angle for female social behavior. Thus, whether we may like or dislike her role as a beauty model, we must admit that it does help her obtain more and more work and self-independence and here Jadine is ambivalent once again. But at least, she stops being objectified, not only by Son but by the women from Eloë, as the woman who does not fit the stereotypical gendered role of "Domestic Angel" (Sánchez, 1997). As Mottiff explains (2004: 24), "[i]f *Tar Baby* ends with no clear resolution, that is because Morrison leaves this responsibility to us, the readers: the bird, to paraphrase her Nobel Prize acceptance speech, is in our hands." One thing is for sure, Jadine (like Milkman) adopts this flying away strategy to move away from oppressive gendered stereotypes.

She returns to Paris to find the woman in yellow, and to not marry the white man. She goes there to continue her own process of becoming knowledgeable, by relating with her female referents.

#### 4.3.5. *Beloved*

The novel starts with 124 Bluestone Road, which is the embodiment of "[...] the undecipherable language of the black and angry dead; the voice of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, 'the thoughts of the women of 124, unspeakable thoughts, unspoken.'" (Bhabha, 1994: 142). Sethe and Denver, (mother and daughter) are the only living women in that house, though they are not alone, a ghostly presence haunts the house. This presence becomes the first paradox of the novel since, even though it lacks a physical body, it is the embodiment of the feelings and the collective presence of slavery. In addition, its effects on the house are real as it alters the place of certain objects in the house, as well as its manifestations in a red light. The whole novel has been labeled as the "returned of the repressed" (Grewal, 1998: 105). Nevertheless, it would imply that this "repressed" has never gone somewhere else but in the novel it is present from the very beginning: "124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children." (1). In this analysis, the focus will not only be on *Beloved*, in all its literary forms (ghost, woman, daughter, mother, past, etc), but in the material feelings that articulate the political message of the novel; that is, the remembrance of the silenced slaves who died in the middle passage.

Thus, the novel starts with the relationship between mother and daughter, a gendered relationship expressed through the "living" (Denver) and the "dead" (the ghost, which Sethe and Denver believe is her daughter and sister, respectively). Therefore, the spirit of the house becomes entangled with Sethe's and Denver's realities, in Barad's (2003) words as an "exteriority within" until *Beloved*, the woman, appears. The ghost is entangled with their daily lives, since they learn to live with her, while, the ghost isolates them and encapsulates them outside the black community; it also brings Sethe and Denver together and apart from everyone else. As part of the exteriority within, the ghost incarnates an act of resistance, which in the novel is the resistance of the dead-

daughter/sister to go to the world of the dead-ones, in order to stop Sethe from forgetting what she did; as well as the 350 years of indifference towards those who died in the middle passage (Morrison, 1993).

When Paul D arrives to 124, the ghost incarnates a different form, a red light in the middle of the house. Whether it is to alarm Denver and Sethe of the changes that he represents for their own routine, or is a way to scare him and force him to move away, it definitely represents a change in the novel, as well as the boundaries built between mother and daughter. Therefore, Beloved is, in addition, the key guidance to understanding the plot of the novel, in spite of her paradoxical nature. The relationship between Paul D and Sethe will transform radically the ongoing of the house, which at the same time is read as the disruption that gender can create at all spheres of life. This represents a gendered relationship between a man and a woman, and the strategies that each individual carry out to survive this traumatic passage are altered as well. Paul D refreshes Sethe's memory (thus, the ghost presence is not needed anymore): "As if to punish her further for her terrible memory, sitting on the porch not forty feet away was Paul D, the last of the Sweet Home men." (7). On the other hand, he also represents the healing between men and women, and through men and women, of the brutalization that women suffered in slavery. Paul D will not help heal Sethe's memory and in so doing will aid in materializing of the black community's memory towards slavery by making it *speaking*. He will also demonstrate to Sethe that she is her best thing (273) and will empower her to continue living as much as possible. In Grewal's words (1998: 100):

Beloved makes brutally clear that aside from the 'equality of oppression' that black men and women suffered, black women were also oppressed as women. They were routinely subjected to rape, enforced childbirth, and natal alienation from their children. As Morrison's novel shows, physical abuse is humiliating, but the added emotional pain of a mother is devastating.

This "emotional pain" prevents Sethe from speaking of her past as a slave but also distorts her inner-self as an unworthy human being, being compared to an animal by Paul D and Schoolteacher.

This novel is not about Sethe (Morrison, 1998) even though so far the focus has been Sethe, and in spite of being Sethe also the focus of many other literary analysis of

*Beloved*, such as the one provided by Grewal (1998). This novel is about Beloved and what she incarnates (Morrison, 1998). The first time that the presence of the ghost becomes literally spoken, or voiced, is with Paul D's arrival:

“[Paul D]: What kind of evil you got in here?

[Sethe]: It's not evil, just sad. Come on. Just step through” (10).

Beloved becomes materialized in the form of a feeling: the embodiment of sadness, which is precisely the reality within Sethe's own forgetfulness. Thus, precisely because Sethe is trying to forget the painfulness, it is necessary that Paul D incarnates Beloved while, at the same time, he prompts her disappearance, because he does not need her to remember.

Yes, before, she [Beloved] is just a presence that they [Denver, Sethe, and Baby Suggs] summon; they want her there. [...] They long for the baby that was killed, but Paul D doesn't, and he exorcises it. [...] She takes flesh after Paul D gets rid of her and has to become a person. (Morrison, 1998: 106).

While the women in the house need a material presence to live with in order to remember the past (since Sethe's is consciously forgotten), Paul D does not so that the ghost disappears.

Once again, and following the same lines as with the rest of her novels, Morrison shows how important it is to discard individual feelings to pursue collective politics. Those women were obsessed with their own feelings and their relations; in fact they are isolated from the rest of the community spatial and affectively speaking. Being 'painful' is a feeling that isolates you, and prevents you not only from pursuing social justice, but also from developing your own self worth, as a woman. However, since the novel is about those who could not speak, Beloved's presence does not disappear but takes its real place, a place within reality and not as part of the "exteriority within" mentioned and becomes fleshed. Here, the second part of the strong paradox mentioned at the beginning of the novel starts, that is the living/dead nature of the main character. In James Phelan's words (1997: 226): “[Beloved is an] oppositional character. Spiteful ghost, manipulating lover, selfish sister, all-consuming daughter. But also innocent - and representative - victim." As a phantasmagoric presence, Beloved is “sad” for Sethe

and “lonely and rebuked” for Denver (16). Therefore, at this first stage, Beloved becomes the materialization of the repressed feelings that Sethe and Denver have, which obviously are different. Beloved is the murdered one, the sad and painful episode in Sethe’s life that she refuses to remember. For Denver, Beloved is the materialization of her own isolation, the projection of her inner self and a strategic alliance, in order to repress the fear she feels against her mother. In both cases, Beloved represents the individual strategy that each woman has developed to overcome a traumatic passage in their lives, whether in the past (as in Sethe’s case) or in the present/future (as in Denver’s case).

As a consequence, when Paul D alters the gendered relations in which Denver and Sethe are immersed, the figure of Beloved necessarily changes as well. Paul D takes Sethe and Denver to a carnival, symbolizing two facts at the same time: the disruption of the isolation of Sethe and Denver and the disappearance of the ghost-like presence that hunts Sethe to embrace her past through its repression. This act, which is part of Paul D’s own individual strategy to becoming part of the family created by Sethe and Denver, is prompted by one individual and embodied feeling: “happy”. This feeling should be shared among the three of them, but the original motor is not like that. It is only affecting Paul D, and because of this, excludes him once again for the indivisible bond between Sethe and Denver and the figure of Beloved. Thus, it is through relationship that Morrison opens a possible solution for the repression of the unforgettable past. However, it is not enough. This past is 350 years of indifference and that is why Beloved becomes a corporeal figuration at this point in the novel.

Morrison explains that “[...] particularly, children or young people who die uneasily return in forms of members of your family and come out of the water.[...] Death would not be termination, it is just a change into something else.” (Morrison, 1993: 107). This is part of the African mythology, which reinforces an idea of reincarnation as a possible solution to a bad death. As if reincarnation were produced, a woman appears at the door of 124 Bluestone Road who has come out of the water just when Denver, Sethe and Paul D are coming from the carnival. Having the same characteristics that Sethe’s daughter would have had, name, age, and personal information about Sethe, the women in the house believe it is the dead-daughter and sister, and without knowing this at the

beginning (for Sethe she could even be “someone for the old days”), they defend her against Paul D, who completely distrusts her: “How’d you come? Who brought you? [...] You had new shoes. If you walked so long why don’t your shoes show it?” (77).

At this particular moment, the reader needs to be involved with the novel more than ever (Phelan, 1997) and to develop his or her own strategy to read the novel. Not only the characters in the novel do not agree on her nature, “dead-daughter”, “dead-sister”, “alive-dangerous person” (for Paul D who even has sex with her and gets her pregnant), “alive-past” (for the whole community at the end of the novel), even the literary theory around this novel does not agree. For some, it is the “dead-daughter and sister” (Grewal, 1998), Sethe’s mother (Phelan, 1997), or even Joe’s mother in a later novel, *Jazz* (Cutter, 2000). That is, *Beloved* becomes the embodiment of a multiple, while also fragmented, subjectivity. In addition, herself becoming flesh is one of the most empowering narrative tools used by Morrison. It blurs the dichotomy between giving life and taking it away from someone, as well as the dichotomy between language and matter, since the unspoken becomes corporeal. So, by opening such a concept, it is also the perfect example of the materiality of the text. At the same time, *Beloved* is the entanglement of mind and body, present in African culture and feminist theory. As Morrison (1993: 112) very well explains, “[...] this disassociation of the mind from the body is a very special western notion; the idea that there is the mind/the spirit and then, the body, which will betray you.”

*Beloved* is the material “intra-action” that enacts those boundaries among the three participants in the story while simultaneously forcing the inclusion of the whole community to embrace Sethe and Denver once again. In the following passage, Ella (a member of the community) explains her own feelings towards *Beloved* and how a disruption in that hauntedness is necessary for a future to come to these women. She is encharged to let us know what her definition of “love” is, a “serious distability” that is precisely what is maintaining Sethe in that permanent state of illness. This love becomes corporeal in *Beloved*, as well as the past and present of these women (Sethe and Denver) and the material boundary that was separating Sethe and Denver from the rest of the community:

It was Ella more than anyone who convinced the others that rescue was in order. [...] Nobody loved her [Ella] and she wouldn't have liked it if they had, for she considered love a serious distability. [...] Ella didn't like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present. [...] The future was sunset; the past something to leave behind. And if it didn't stay behind, well you might have to stomp it. (256)

All in all, *Beloved* materializes feelings, in order to conflate past and present and provide a better future for the African American community, in particular, and the United States community, in general. *Beloved* is the materialization of spacetime in literature - the sixty million and more in slavery time - and, at the same time, the virtual plane of a subject needed to become subject for Sethe and Denver. It is a catalyst for feelings, a function and a person. *Beloved* is a corporeal figuration, a metaphorical tool that enables Morrison to express the multiplicity of slavery, and its unspeakable consequences. *Beloved* can be a sexual woman, a ghost, a daughter and a hunk of dead flesh (uncountable), the becoming of the Survivor (which is the slave society in general in United States). All of these personifications are the "products" (Grosz, 1993) of a literary text, which were at the same time part of those texts. Depending on the reading performed in the novel, the "product" is different but always encapsulated in the tension, in the relation. In other words, *Beloved* is a literary intra-action.

#### 4.3.6. *Jazz*

This is the novel in which African-American music takes the central role. The novel presents a melody full of improvisation in which the narrator of the novel "evolves as an open subject-in-process" (Ginsburg and Rimmon-Kenan in Lilienfeld, 2006: 47). The narrator of *Jazz* is the book itself: "[...] the artifact of the book as an active participant [turning the text into both] passive object of the reader's gaze and active subject who gazes on and responds to the reader" (ibid). By presenting a self-dislocated narrator, Morrison presents the blurring of One/Other, Narrator and text, Violet and Violent, etc. Thus, *Jazz* presents the birth of the African American culture, as well as elevating the participatory active nature of Morrison's language to its higher potential. Throughout the melody of the love triangle, Morrison exposes the difficulties that women face in the

disillusion of an accommodated black society that has completely forgotten its origin, despite the efforts produced in *Beloved*.

*Jazz* is an example of literature-in-the-making. Thus, whatever is being developed in the novel is processual. Its narrator

is a complex balance between an omniscient narrator [...], able to dig into the distant pasts of the different characters, and an improvisational voice which shows the novel in the making, in the process of being conceived of and shaped. (Manzanas, 1993: 100).

This narrator-in-process presents itself at the beginning of the novel with a “Sth”. It clearly points out the fact that gossiping will be part of the characteristics that this “new” society holds. Thus, the nature of the community keeps on being marked by a sort of social vigilance of the moral and values of the culture, which tends to be rather patriarchal and detrimental for women because of their double-standards. As an example of this patriarchal culture, Jane Lilinfield (2006: 51) explains that “in Medieval times the term [gossiping] had denoted women’s ability to weave linen and so to be self-supporting.” However, as this novel shows, gossiping represents the social pressure that female subjects, who stood out of those rigid forms, suffer from. Sharing knowledge can result in female alliances and, because of this, becomes a tool for empowerment. However, it depends on how this knowledge is shared, the type of message it conveys and the communicative purpose it holds.

At the very beginning of the novel, Morrison already anticipates what will be the end: Dorcas’ death. However, as in Gabriel García Márquez’s *Chronicle of Death Foretold*, the reader is so occupied with the flow of the novel, that he or she even forgets the end through becoming part of the melody of the book. The reader is presented with a Violet who has tried everything to make her husband love her back again without success, and finally “she decides to love – well, find out about – the eighteen-year-old whose creamy little face she tried to cut open even though nothing would come out but straw.” (2). After Dorcas’ death, Joe feels miserable and isolates himself in the house moving further away from Violet than when he was having an affair with Dorcas. In order to confront this situation, Violet designs a particular strategy, which eventually, by the end of the novel, will prove to be different from the one created here. Her strategy will be

completed and successful through inviting Felicity, Dorcas' friend, to fulfil Violet and her husband's lives.

In order to save herself and her marriage, Violet decides to keep a material presence of the dead child as an individual strategy of healing for her and her husband, which is Dorcas' picture. The picture metaphor is very important. Even though it is the same picture for both of them, it transmits different feelings and therefore becomes something totally different, even in the way it looks. The picture is a bond that reminds one that the other exists. "You are there, it says, because I am looking at you." (12). They even name the picture, which allows its own recognition, and therefore its materiality: "Two or three times during the night, as they take turns to go look at the picture, one of them will say her name. Dorcas?" (ibid). However, this will prove not to be enough, the "City", which is how the narrator calls the Harlem of the twenties, requires more than that.

In *Jazz*, there are two additional factors, space (geographical context) and music (as the melody articulating the novel), that must be taken into account, because of the important influence they have in helping to understand the agency of matter and the political message of the novel. The relevance of the geographical location is outstanding. The personification of the "City" allows the materialization of the agency of space. It gives its citizens future without thinking in the past. This is a problem that no one seems to understand because they are "happy": "[In the] City [...] all the wars are over and there will never be another one. The people down there in the shadow are happy about that. At last, at last, everything's ahead." (7). As Ana María Manzanás (1993: 101) points out, "The City offered those 'running from want and violence' (33) the possibility of starting their lives anew [...]; and the newcomers had the chance to think 'future thoughts'".

The second element, Jazz music, acquired special relevance in the twenties for the black community in New York City that mainly resided in Harlem, where the explosion of African-American culture began. This novel is written as the articulation of a jazz song, as the many improvisations in which all the characters participate. The music takes the place of the argumentative plot attempting to be exposed by the narrator. According to Morrison (1993: 114), "[m]usic is a powerful magical tool [...] it gets you through a

difficult period but it has a greater power than that, which is, like poetry, it allows you to articulate what you are feeling." (Morrison, 1993: 114).

The role of music is important in all the novels, but it becomes the absolute protagonist in this one, as well as feelings. The materiality of feelings becomes visible in the melody of the novel, since they are pointed out in every improvisation with a different meaning. Feelings are temporary and their intensity is only felt at a particular moment, when they occur. Feelings are bounding together as different selves in concrete spaces, but they become different throughout time. If gender and race become discernable through feelings then, they do so also temporarily. Just as we have a pre-conceived idea of what it means to feel fear, each fear in each context is materialized and felt differently, as it happens with race and gender. The following passage shows how Dorcas and Joe started their relationship:

When he called on Sheila to deliver her Cleopatra order, he entered a roomful of laughing and teasing women – and there she was, standing at the door, holding it open for him – the same girl that had distracted him in the drugstore; the girl buying candy and ruining her skin had moved him so his eyes burned. Then, suddenly, there in Alice Manfred's doorway, she stood, toes pointing in, her braided, not even smiling but welcoming him for sure. For sure. Otherwise he would not have had the audacity, the nerve, to whisper to her at the door as he left. (47)

This relationship is developed in this way at this specific moment, and not when they encountered each other in all the other locations. He remembers feeling fear and welcoming. In a room full of women known to her, she has the power to make him feel comfortable, so he can initiate a conversation, though he is the one coming into her house and whispering to her. In addition, his subjectivity is lower in the power hierarchy of the capitalist system, because he is offering himself through his product as a service for women who can decide whether to buy or not. Thus, if music has the ability to articulate feelings, and the music leading the novel is full of improvisations in which each sound is unique and unrepeatable, each feeling articulating gendered relationships will be unique in its temporariness. However, the improvisations of a jazz song also belong to a melody, a whole song.

On the other hand, when Joe tries to remember his relationship with Violet, a very different feeling is prompted. Gratefulness. Thus, the relationships are materially different and because of that their outcomes differ so dramatically: “Regarding his marriage to Violet – he had not chosen that but was grateful, in fact, that he didn’t have to, that Violet did it for him, helping him escape [...]” (30). They have a dependant relationship that Violet does not entirely know. She thinks her husband loved her at some point, so she is trapped in an unknown web. Indeed, they never loved each other, they loved the City: “And like a million others, [Joe and Violet] stared out the windows for first sight of the city that danced with them, proving already how much it loved them. Like a million more they could hardly wait to get there and loving it back.” (32). Once again, love connects itself with negative feelings, since the City is connected with the sense of individualism and makes them forget about their past. The City presents itself as a remedy against the South but only at first sight since, as the characters in the novel presents, this is not a long-term solution.

When those feelings change, gendered relations and their roles also change. Thus, they do not support each other nor do they dance with the city anymore. They have become companions. The problem of Violet's own internal prison is not knowing, a repeated topic in Morrison's female characters. This love relationship undermines Violet's role in this relationship and she is relegated to the background.

Twenty years after Joe and Violet [were] barely speaking to each other, let alone acting like the ground was a dance-hall floor. Convinced that he alone remembers those days, and wants them back, aware of what it looked like but not at all of what it felt like, he coupled himself elsewhere. (36)

Even though women tried to warn her against this, she did not listen to them because she is an isolated woman. This is a product of what Hardack (1995: 460) calls “self-alienation”: “This familiar enough Modernist trope of self-alienation, of seeing oneself through the images of an ill-fitting popular culture, in *Jazz*, is used to achieve a more dynamic critique of the American desire for a stable and self-contained male identity.” (Which is also a frequent move in *Dorcas*). As the City prompts, they are individuals, without a community and without any type of rootedness. Nevertheless, this passage also shows us her own initiative. Not only does she escape from the South but, as her

relationship with Alice at the beginning of the novel indicates, she takes the initiative in her marriage. Alice sees beyond “Violent” (as society/gossiping/the City starts calling her after the irrational act) and warns her that her husband is not a good man. It is important that, albeit all the facts, these two women are able to create an affinity towards one another.

To conclude with the analysis of *Jazz*, a focus on Dorcas’s pursuit of romantic love is needed. Her auntie is her only family because her parents died. Thus her family bounds were lost at a very early age and her view of reality becomes distorted by this idea of love materialized into an illegal relationship with an old man, who could even “be her daddy”, as Violet confessed at the hairdresser’s. She did not enjoy her parents long enough, so she might be looking for a daddy without explicitly saying so. In fact, at the end of the novel, she falls in love with the typical stereotypical man: the most handsome boy in the ballroom. That is why she shares with Violet this “self-alienation”. She follows popular culture at its extreme. Besides, she sees herself as something that must be displayed, in order to pursue that romantic love before mentioned: “[t]here was a night in her sixteenth year when Dorcas stood in her body and offered it to either of the brothers for a dance. Both boys were shorter than she, but both equally attractive.” (64). This makes her to split her own body and herself in order to observe how it looks like, and in that violent act, she loses control of her body and her own life, and she only regains it through her relationship with Joe. At this point, the novel starts yet another loop and the reader is introduced to Dorcas’ view of her relationship with Joe. Dorcas is rejected by the boy in the ballroom, as well as by his brother which makes her decide to start a relationship with Joe. The rejection of the brothers towards Dorcas prompts in her this desire of possession that she could not achieve. At this party Joe speaks to her for the first time. In accepting his desire, she is performing her own individual strategy of overcoming the intense pain suffered at the love rejection: “[t]he flesh, heavenly despised by the brothers, held secret the love soaring inside it.” (ibid). It is in this resistance that Dorcas finds her own behaviour against social laws (regarding seeing a married man), her own gendered roles (regarding the behavior that her aunt wants her to have) and regarding her own self- perception distorted by this desire of love.

The novel is not about those who could not speak, (those who died) but about those who survived and did nothing to act properly, respecting the dead ones, the past, and the black community. The city and the music absorb everyone. There is no trace of politics in the entire novel, except from the female alliance between Alice and Violet and Felicity's own self act of resistance. Felicity is one of Dorcas' friend and appears at the very end of the novel. In Felicity, we can see how gendered oppressions are not only repeated within heterosexual relations but also within family relations. Morrison is warning the reader, than even if the entire community seems to be ignoring the political alerts, there is always space for the individual not to behave individually but meaningfully, by disrupting oppressions. Purposefully, Morrison places Felicity's intervention at the end, as if it were a small step for Harlem's society, while the reader knows that it is the most important one. Only after Dorcas' death is Felicity able to find an individual strategy for her to escape to that circularity that is found in the gendered roles presented in the novel. (And Violet only finds a way out of her marriage and herself after Dorcas' death). In this case, Dorcas' death is the catalyst for the other characters and the reason why the death is presented at the beginning of the novel.

In addition, Felicity's intervention produces yet another twist in the novel unknown to any of the characters and even to the narrator, because all are absorbed by the City and its music. It was not that Dorcas let herself die, as Felicity implies at the beginning; it was that the ambulance took a long time to arrive because she was black hence worthless. But the characters ignore this fact, and live their lives without even noticing that they are being racially oppressed:

I did it. I call the ambulance, I mean; but it didn't come until morning after I had called twice. The ice, they said, but really it was because it was colored people calling. She bled to death all through that woman's bed sheets on into the mattress, and I can tell you that woman didn't like it one bit. That's all she talked about. Her and Dorcas' boyfriend. The blood. What a mess it made. That's all they talked about (209-10).

While the entire community keeps talking about the three-some in the novel, nobody cares about politics or whites and blacks anymore. In general terms, the reader does not know until the end that Dorcas was not taken care of because of the color of her skin. Dancing to the music of the City runs this precise risk: integrating the past as a repeated

record that makes a perpetual noise in the background but without interference in the dance of the dancers: “the past was an abuse record with no choice but to repeat itself and no power on earth could lift the arm that held the needle.” (220). In looking for the meaning of love, as Violet implied at the beginning, the reader is left out only with a disruptive and commodified version of it. Morrison’s critique thus becomes that they will never ever learn how to love each other, not even now that they are free and love is one of their most precious possessions. Their ability to pursue the commodities of a neo-liberal life, among them a romantic ideal of love, has led the community to a political activist passivity and the cancellation of their past.

#### 4.3.7. *Paradise*

*Paradise* is, perhaps, the most political novel in Morrison’s work despite it also being the least analysed one. It starts with the killing of a “white girl” (1) who is never identified in the novel. Thus, throughout the novel, the reader may be confused trying to find the white girl who “may exist only in the imaginations of the men of Ruby, and thus her actual identity is irrelevant.” (Schur, 2004: 294). Morrison explains (in Fraile, 2002: 109-10):

I wanted the readers to wonder about the race of those girls until those readers understood that their race didn’t matter. I want to dissuade people from reading literature in that way ... Race is the least reliable information you can have about someone. It’s real information, but it tells you next to nothing.

Albeit, at the same time, it serves as the conceptual bridge that enables one to understand that oppressive concepts such as racism are created and informed by the oppressor and have meaning only in “their imagination”. As Morrison (1993) explains in the speech given on the celebration of the Nobel, “definitions belong to the definers not to the defined” (also present in the Facebook page). Thus, she is implying from the very beginning, that maintaining such oppressive concepts is useful for the oppressor, but not for the oppressed.

The novel is structured around the daily lives of a black-only community, Ruby and the Convent, situated at the outskirts of the town. Opposed to each other geographically, they present differing societies rigidly based on specific gendered relationship. On the one hand, Ruby's families are building what they consider a nationalistic project that no one can really escape: "He can't fail at what he is doing. None of us can. We are making something." (240). Women in the Convent live without societal rules congruent with conventional patriarchal systems. Ruby and the Convent could be considered what Barad (2003) denominates the "exteriority within". That is to say, while the focus of the growing black nation resides in Ruby, the Convent becomes a space for contestation materially embedded by the affective relations that intra-act among these women. On the other hand, Ruby becomes the oppressive system by repeating the logic of the oppressor; that is the total exclusion of the different one.

Ruby is a community built by eight families. They abandoned Heaven to create what they thought would be Paradise on earth: a town in which only black people could live and be born, so no racism would be present. Having performed a close reading of the novel, three different political strategies can be identified with a common departure point: identities. These are embodied in three different groups: the "old fathers," the young people (led by the reverend) and the teacher, Pat. The position adopted by the men belonging to the "8-families" is one heavily based on patriarchy and racism. As the "fathers" of a new nation, they create their town and materialize their beliefs on an oven where it can be read "Beware the Furrow of His Brow". Thus, by linking their nationalistic objective with religion, they assert themselves as "Chosen People within a Chosen Nation which, as such, had the covenantal obligation to be fair with them." (Fraile, 2002: 98). This situation produces a strong endogamic environment in which, as referred earlier, the female position is fixed, while it is also invisible or materially uncountable: "Who were these women, like her mother, had only one name? Celeste, Olive, [...]. Who were these women with generalized last names? Brown, Smith, [...] Women whose identity rested on the men they married if marriage applied: a Morgan, a Flood [...]." (187) Therefore, in order to have a powerful one, a powerless other without a "name" is needed, and new marginalizations appear to secure the patriarchal order.

Scholars locate the initiation of this isolation in different feelings such as shame, humiliation, vex and anger (Gallego, 2009; Schur, 2004). Therefore, it can be said that this specific type of identitarian politics becomes materially tangible through those feelings, while at the same time intra-acting with the discourse of the Oven:

Oven. More than a rule. A conundrum: ‘Beware the Furrow of His Brow,’ in which the ‘You’ (understood), vocative sense, was not a command to the believers but a threat to those who had disallowed them. [...] So the teenagers Misner organized who wanted to change it to ‘Be the Furrow of His Brow’ were more insightful than they knew. (195)

The isolation reinforced symbolically by the Oven is materially affected by closing their “doors” to newspapers (208), television, “liquor for lunch and dope for dinner” (ibid, 274), etc. As Fraile notes (2002: 103): “The result is an almost complete isolation from the cultural, political and economic events that affect the United States. [...] however. the young people, supported by Reverend Misner, start claiming their connection to the outer world, thereby putting the dream at risk”. Young people are trying to break with the isolation in which all the inhabitants are immersed. This isolation distances them from the outer world, which is a recurrent theme in Morrison’s novels.

Introducing this generational debate, Morrison aims at promoting a more inclusive politics, since she is making her readers aware that time matters and the embodied experiences of the different members of the community are never equal because of their unique self-becoming. This generation is the third generation of those “Fathers” who created Ruby and they are the ones in charge of continuing with their mission. Thus, a reflection about the kind of knowledge that we pass is enforced. In this regard, Fraile (2002: 107) comments the following:

By transforming the phrase from a warning [...] to a self-assertive statement of divine identification *and* disapproval of the present, the young people of Ruby express their desire to make themselves creative agents [...] towards freedom and redemption and become in turn mythic parental figures. (emphasis by the author).

Nevertheless, the effort that young people make does not disrupt the puritan essence in which the community is being built; they want to replace hierarchical orders, become “parental figures”, as their predecessors were. They want to “Be the Furrow of His

Brow” but that only situates them under the obedience of a supernatural force and elevates them as part of that supernatural force. Their bodies become situated as instruments in the serve of an asymmetrical power. They want to create new strategies and methodologies but they keep on being oppressed while (re)creating new oppressions.

This political move is lead by Reverend Misner; who, at the same time, allies himself with the Black movement. Morrison reveals her own reticence regarding the movement (as she does also in *Song of Solomon* and *Love*) in a heated discussion between Reverend Misner and Pat (Ruby’s school teacher). There, Pat is doubting whether the reverend is teaching religion or war to the young people:

“ [Misner] I just remembered that the young people in Bible class say ‘they’ too when talking about their parents’.

‘[Pat] Bible class? More like a war class. Kind of military, from what I hear.’

‘Militant, maybe. Not military.’

[...]

‘Well, let me tell you. Unlike most of the folks here, we read newspapers and different kinds of books. We keep up. And yes, we discuss strategies of defense. Not aggression. Defense.’

‘They know the difference?’” (207).

Pat doubts whether using strategies of defense is not the same as being aggressive. On the other hand, Reverend Misner accuses her of being “sad” for not believing in the idea of Africa that he has, as the perfect paradise on earth, to what she answers back:

“‘I’m really not interested, Richard. You want some foreign Negroes to identify with, why not South America? Or Germany, for that matter. They have some brown babies over there you could have a good time connecting with. Or is it just some kind of past with no slavery in it you’re looking for?’

‘[Misner] ‘Why not? There was a whole lot of life before slavery.’” (ibid.)

The African dream was one of the pillars of the Black Panthers but, just as women did not count there, in Morrison’s novels women seem not to be interested in this African dream. In turn, neither is the African dream interested in them. Soane, for instance, “had the same level of interests in Africans as they had in her: none.” (104).

Even though Pat directs us towards a different kind of politics, her step is not enough (as happened with the young people). The genealogical book that Pat is writing allows the reader to acknowledge the past that this community has and to understand better the present and their “mission”. This is how we learn that Pat’s mother was not completely black and she was rejected by this community. However, she is creating this genealogical tree on the basis of a strong detachment through separating her own self (as a researcher) from her object of research: “Pat had wanted proof in documents where possible to match the stories, and where proof was not available she interpreted – freely but, she thought, insightfully because she alone had the required emotional distance.” (188). Pat’s drawing of the genealogical tree is an individual strategy in order to overcome her position as an outsider inside that community. Nevertheless, trying to distinguish between your own feelings (part of your personal embodiment) and your object of research is an “objective” practice that Haraway (1988) warned us against. Indeed, this individual pursuit ends up with a distance from her own daughter, prevents her from creating an alliance in her own personal space: “She [Pat] who loved children and protected them not only from each other but from too stern parents lunged after her own daughter [...] Billie Delia left the next day [...]” (203). Through love, Pat is reproducing the exact same patterns that left her out. As Fraile (2002: 114) explains, “[t]o invert the poles of such Manichean thinking, as the men of Ruby do with their counter-discursive national narrative, does not change the result.” Racism converts love into hate (Schur, 2004: 297). It provokes the running of her daughter away to the Convent, which is the act of resistance presented by Morrison in this novel.

The Convent, as a geographical space situated within and outside Ruby, is the material space towards the women in Ruby escape from time to time. The women in the Convent are the perfect example of how a collective strategy based on affinities works and creates acts of resistance. Methodologically speaking, Morrison is presenting a space of resistance out of the dominant patriarchal logics that divide the whole population into the oppressors and the oppressed. The women in this Convent are the outsiders of Ruby’s community because they do not follow the same nationalistic mission as Ruby has. Therefore, they are considered a threat that must be eliminated, as announced at the beginning of the novel. At the end of the novel, these women start to prepare themselves for the killing, without even knowing. One day, Consolata, the oldest one in the

Convent, prepares the girls, in order to fulfill their own self-becoming through a process of decolonization: “[it] begins by redefining the body and the mental constructs that give the body meaning.” (Schur, 2004: 292). Their collective strategy consists on externalizing pain and materially confronting it; instead of trying to ignore it (Reverend Misner), being aggressive (the Old Fathers), turning love into hate (Pat) or trying to transform it into something else through discourse (the young people). At this moment, Consolata even gives them the freedom to leave the place, to go somewhere else, a rare act for the black community for whom “freedom” was impossible. However, and even though they were frightened, none of them left the only place “they were free to leave” (262). Since freedom is a new feeling, something unknown for this community, they were frightened, but that feeling is not enough to stop their personal strategy.

The Convent is the materialization of a politics based on affinities work, that is why it is the exteriority within Ruby while mutually depending on it:

In flattering light under Consolata’s soft vision, they did as they were told. How should we lie? However you feel. They tried arms at the sides, outstretched above the head, crossed over breasts or stomach. Seneca lay on her stomach at first, then changed to her back, hands clasping her shoulders. Pallas lay on her side, knees drawn up. Gigi flung her legs and arms apart, while Mavis struck a floater’s pose, arms angled, knees pointing in. When each found the position she could tolerate on the cold, uncompromising floor, Consolata walked around her and painted the body’s silhouette. Once the outlines were complete, each was instructed to remain there. Unspeaking. Naked in candlelight. (ibid).

All of them have a common goal, or a common understanding, which is lying on the floor. However, each one of them should be able to do so in the most comfortable position they can find, the floor being the intra-action relating all of them and reinforced by the material inscription of language: the silhouette of their bodies. As Schur explains (2004: 292): “Rather than internalize the pain or punish themselves with various forms of self-mutilation, the women can examine that pain and mark it on an image instead of on themselves.” While these images are always part of themselves, they are also always part of this exteriority within. Therefore, their own bodies become a political threshold but they are not imprisoned in their own painful burdens.

This is the first step. The second step is reconciling themselves within a gendered relation. Consolata continues:

My child body, hurt and soil, leaps into the arms of a woman who teach me my body is nothing my spirit everything. I agreed her until I met another. My flesh is so hungry for itself it ate him. [...] Not spirit. Bones. No different from the man. My bones on his the only true thing. So I wondering where is the spirit lost in this? It is true, like bones. [...] Never breal them in two. Never put one over the other. Eve is Mary's mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve. (263).

Contrary to what the rest of the community does, Consolata enjoys her own personal experience with the rest of the women. Even though this passage may seem a separation between the body and the "divine" or the "spirit", it is precisely showing that nothing is as clear-cut as it seems. Through her "Never break them in two", she is showing that ontological differences between men and women cannot be other than relations and that these relations are performatively different, as the act of walking to the Convent, but they should "never put one over the other." On the other hand, a strong emphasis should be put on the relationships between women ("Eve is Mary's mother") since, as we have seen in the novel, in a nationalistic and identitarian community, women are left aside as dangerous, unknowing and receptacles. This only happens when we separate the body from the "spirit", when the body becomes a walking uterus. Here, Morrison is providing her readers with a definition of gender as an affected relation, which should be the basis of a politics of affinities.

On the other hand, the Convent is not entirely "free" of Ruby (as an exteriority within), because a certain degree of dependence is created around these two communities. The path that connects both Ruby and the Convent is materially engaging these two communities, albeit by different gendering processes. The women in Ruby need the Convent to free themselves, from time to time, whereas, the men need it in order to feel what a relationship with a woman is like when not based on their political mission. Similarly, the women in the Convent need Ruby at the end of the novel, in order to produce the ultimate liberation: freedom from their own pain, by confronting their past at the very moment when their conditions of life are blurred. The murdering of the women in the Convent remains a mystery, since no one saw any of the women the

following day; no one is sure if they are dead or if they have escaped. Nothing is left in the Convent the day after they were supposedly murdered. It is not the first time that Morrison blurs the dichotomy between being alive and being dead. The last chapter shows how the women in the Convent confront their painful past, by talking with the people involved in this past. By explaining this “after-life”, Morrison is again blurring the conditions of life. Just as she is not interested in explaining to the reader who the “white girl” is, now she is not interested in explaining to the reader whether they are alive or dead, because subjects do have agency; but this is not only what can create a disruption in hierarchical orders.

As observed, what really matters is the process carried out in the Convent. These women are entangled in a space of possibilities. They were part of an act of resistance, and they lived their lives according to their own rules. Thus, what is important is that the reader gets to know how they made peace with their own past in order to avoid ignoring it. Contrary to what Ruby was trying to do, these women confronted their fears. These fears put them together, in the first place, and entangled their past, present and future in order to try to infer a change in the repetitions that Ruby, as a community, was (re)creating. The women in the Convent disrupt Ruby’s order; they disrupt the norm of the Same. Besides, these women supposedly die and do not go to “Paradise”, which is neither on earth (Ruby) nor in Heaven. They stay confronting those painful situations that marked their lives thanks to the corporeal dis-location suffered during the murder.

#### 4.3.8. *Love*

According to Morrison (Wardi, 2005: 214), *Love* is considered to be one of her two perfect novels, together with *Jazz*: “*Love* emphasizes even in its title the bankruptcy of the term.” The novel was intended to be titled L, as its narrator (ibid). Therefore, since the term itself only appears on eight occasions (a very limited number), if we compare it with the rest of the novels, L seems to be the embodiment of that feeling. Nevertheless, I would point out another two important topics in this novel: women’s relationships (mostly rivalry) (Gallego, 2009), and rape (as the relationship between men and women

dominant in this novel) (Roynon, 2007). Thus, it can be said that *Love* puts into practice a gendered relational pattern in which love is present because of its absence and interacting with hatred.

The novel is articulated around Heed and Christine and their relationship with a dead man in the novel, Bill Cosey. He is the owner of a former hotel, as well as Heed's husband and Christine's grandfather. The two girls (same age) are friends until Bill Cosey decide to marry Heed when she is only eleven years old. It is important to move forward in the novel, and backwards in Christine and Heed's relationship to understand them two better. Almost at the end of the novel, we learn that they start to be enemies because of a secret that both need to maintain in order to hide their personal shame. While they were playing on the beach, they remembered that they left some toys for their play at the hotel and Heed goes to look for them. In the meanwhile, Cosey sees her and he touches her nipple and the minute after he is masturbating himself in his granddaughter's room:

She does not know that Christine has left the gazebo to meet her friend at the service entrance. No one is there. Christine looks up toward the window of her own bedroom, where Heed would be looking for the jacks. The window is open; pale curtains lift through it. She opens her mouth to call out, 'Heed! Come on!' But she doesn't because her grandfather is standing there, in her bedroom window, his trousers open, his wrist moving with the same speed L used to beat egg white into unbelievable creaminess. He doesn't see Christine because his eyes are closed. Christine covers her laughing mouth, but yanks her hand away when her breakfast flows into her palm. She rushes to the rain barrel to rinse the sick from her yellow top, her hands, and her bare feet. (192).

When Heed comes back, she thinks that her friend is sick because Christine has seen the encounter that she has had with Christine's grandfather, which she internalizes as her fault because she was running and dancing to pick up the "jacks". But both are ashamed of themselves because of their dirtiness, which comes out from an "outside devil", and no one tells the other what has just happened. At that very moment, they stop exchanging knowledge which, as we are seeing in Morrison's novels, is power, and their bonding starts to break. All of a sudden, Heed thinks that there is something wrong inside her, when, indeed, it is not in her but in that relationship. This fact is preventing her from thinking well of herself and she starts a self-disclosure based on self-defense of

her wrongness, just as Christine does: “When Heed finds her, Christine doesn’t explain the bathing suit, why she is wiping it, or why she can’t look at Heed. She is ashamed of her grandfather and of herself.” (ibid). The “shame” of this man is part of their own interiority, the man being the force, the exteriority within that never comes out, because they kept the secret from each other. They start a new relationship based not on friendship but shamefulness. This will only be overcome when Heed is already dead. Once again, Morrison blurs this distinction by creating a dialogue between the two of them (one dead, the other alive) in which they forgive each other.

The “outsider evil” is introduced at the very beginning of the novel by L: “*Then the only thing that does the trick, that explains the craziness heaping up, holding down, and making women hate one another and ruin their children is an outsider evil.*” (4 [emphasis of the author]). What ruins the women’s relationship and the possibility of their alliance is an outside evil that generally (though not always) in Morrison’s novel is an unhealthy relationship with a man. However, distinguishing these “outside evils” is always difficult, because they are part of the relationship and because of that, part of their own inner self. Christine’s most faithful memories were about moments in which a competition for her grandfather’s love was being enacted between her and Heed, and the feelings that permeated that moment: “What she most remembered was her grandfather spanking Heed, and the flood of pleasure that came when he took his granddaughter’s side against his wife’s, for a change, taking steps to show the kind of behavior he prized.” (132). In taking pleasure with a negative outcome of this relationship, Christine is growing a negative relation with her friend that separates them. However, because pleasure is traditionally conceived as a positive state of the mind, it is almost impossible to detect it as having a negative outcome.

The relationships between men and women are extremely complicated in this novel. The main one is based upon a dubious rape case (Heed and Cosey). Heed sticks to her own version as a personal decision, sustained by the fact that there was no penetration before she had her period. But this is not the only one since there are three more. The first case presented in the novel is based on a true story: Pretty-Fay violation. Morrison wants to depict that “there was this male pride attached to it [to rape in general], in the language” (in Royon, 2007: 37). Indeed, in the novel there is a girl who is being gang-

raped by a group of men. When it is Romen's turn, he decides to liberate the girl, despite his own feelings of shamefulness for doing so: "He thought her name was Faye or Faith and was about to say something when suddenly he couldn't stand the sight of her." (47). However, even if in this case pride and shame intra-act in order to liberate the girl (though not until she has been raped), this is not the case with the other two. In one of them, it is Viviane Junior who frees herself from a sexual abuse that concerned her and the director of her correctional. The other one concerns the rape of a girl in the context of the Black Movement. In both cases a tacit shame is shared, but at the same time invisibilized by the entire community (mostly by the men surrounding the fact). This feeling is artificially produced since they recognize sharing it but only in order to become socially accepted, while Romen becomes socially unaccepted precisely because of visibilizing this shame. Then an intra-action between shame and pride surrounds the contextual frame in which the novel is structured. This intra-action serves another purpose. Rape, and female sexist aggression is not something from the past, from the atrocities of slavery. It keeps on happening in the present, and it does not involve white men raping black women. Morrison is identifying the circles and circles of sorrow in which black women keep on being abusively oppressed. The shame that the black community materializes because they were treated like animals (as *Beloved* showed), intra-acting with the pride that they sustain now that they have become happy citizens with properties (as is the case with Cosey) recreates this circular oppression.

These "smaller" (in the novel plot) cases of rape structure the main one as new cases of slavery (as was already anticipated), by reinforcing institutional marriage, or the institutional relationships between black females and males in this specific context. Women keep on being positioned according to men's necessities, and neither the movement, nor the institution of marriage is a safe place for them. Likewise, the material environment in which love is institutionalized keeps on being a negative intra-action between men and women, since they have not yet learnt to love freely, and with it, create safe spaces for men and women, albeit it perhaps the best option for women, as

we are seeing with Heed<sup>58</sup>. However, without a strong female alliance this strategy remains isolated and may lead to the subject's own isolation.

The outside evil, Cosey, is the embodiment of the intra-action between love, hate and envy that relates Heed and Christine. Thus, as the embodiment of the "exteriority within", Cosey produces different feelings and relates differently with each woman in the novel. Besides, the limits of this affected relation are not the conditions of life, because even after his death, he is structuring the novel (each chapter presents a different characteristic of Cosey) and differing the relationship of these women either through his will, or by the memories of his life:

The argument that followed was a refined version of the ones that had been seething among the women since the beginning each had been displaced by another; each had a unique claim on Cosey's affection; each had either 'saved' him from some disaster or relieved him of an impeding one. (98).

Thus, Morrison is emphasizing here that when creating these affected boundaries between men and women, we should be more cautious about not falling into traditional relationships that (re)create new forms of Afro-american women's (in particular and women's in general) oppressive past. Our affective co-existence matters in order to differentiate us and to avoid relating by oppositional terms. As the following quote shows, we run the risk of existing only if related to a man but not as subjects in our own right, while becoming and intra-acting with multiple elements and not only men:

A woman is an important somebody and sometimes you win the triple crown: good food, good sex, and good talk. Most men settle for any one, happy as a clam if they get two. But listen, let me tell you something. A good man is a good thing, but there is nothing in the world better than a good good woman. She can be your mother, your wife, your girlfriend, your sister, or somebody you work next to. (154).

This quote shows how important relations are. Even though a little reductive because women are encapsulated in three different aspects, it is very important to point out that for the first time, they are not the bearers of new soldiers (that is mothers) and how

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<sup>58</sup> This will be reflected as well in *A Mercy* with Rebekka, who is a white woman

“talk” is an important attribute that has been denied on so many occasions to Morrison’s characters in other novels. Besides, here we find how once again “happy” is the equivalent to resignation and, because of this, another negative feeling. But, what I find even more interesting is how a “good” woman is a valuable thing, and this woman is valuable not because of her uterus but because of some other reasons.

Nonetheless, it keeps on being limited and it is limited because this relation is understood only in terms of heterosexual relationships. The character presented on this occasion as an alternative, as well as an act of resistance, is L. Together with Cosey, L is the intra-action structuring the novel as an omniscient narrator, being also the exteriority within where an act of resistance is produced: killing Bill Cosey. She needed to prevent these women from becoming even more poisoned by each other, because of the will and Cosey’s personal intentions: “I had to stop him. Had to.” (200). Cosey was aiming at leaving his whole will to his lover, Celestial. As Anissa Wardi explains (2005: 212),

L’s murder is part of a larger pattern of oppressive relations endemic in the text, [...] of protection and love, which are nonetheless morally suspect. Again, it is the work of L’s hands that materialize her love for the Cosey women, yet this act encompassed, if not necessitated, murder.

Thus, this conceptualization of love implies dramatic acts that are part of an oppressive system. As happens in other novels (such as *Beloved*), at the end of such an asphyxiating environment requires acts of resistance that blur the limits between what is morally acceptable. In producing this act in the name of love, Morrison encourages her readers to revisit the ethics of love and how we understand it. Killing the ‘evil outside’ is a solution for the moment, but as we see during the entire novel, it is not until the two women are honest to each other that the alliance is created. Before dying, Heed confesses to Christine that what she really wanted was her: “I wanted to be with you” (193). She didn’t really want to be married, she wanted to be with her friend and so did Christine when she wanted to go on their honeymoon.

#### 4.3.9. A Mercy

*A Mercy* was published in 2008, the year a black man became president of the United States: “Morrison’s novel begins and ends with a young female African slave [Florens], writing her story on the walls of an imitation plantation house in the North, a veritable ‘White House’ inhabited only by a Dead White Male.” (Tally, 2011: 63). The novel is situated around the end of the Seventeenth century, that is a “pre-racial period” (ibid) in which African immigrants were coming to the European colonies to work in the fields. Importantly, as Justine Tally (ibid) emphasizes, this is a period when “the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ race began its process of legalization” and this fact has a crucial role for the novel. While the hegemonic race started to materialize discursively the hierarchical distribution of power, women were left apart from this legal process. Thus, racism became institutionally supported, while women remained materially invisible.

The novel starts by presenting the reality of four women: a white one (Rebekka), and three black ones (Sorrow, Lina and Florens) on a farm where no white man was present. Their situation is very precarious, having an uncertain future because of the death of the owner of the house. Indeed, Rebekka is considering marrying another man, in order to secure her position in the house, while at the same time getting sick and frustrating, because of that, even more the future for the rest of the women living on the farm. As Tally (ibid, 104) explains, “[t]he emphasis on female illegality runs across racial lines and promotes the desirability of male protection and guidance as the only recourse for these women, thus legitimizing the patriarchal order and its ‘natural’ foundations.” That is, racism is being legislated right now, while sexism seems to be ‘natural’. In fact, Rebekka is introduced to her husband as “Hardy female Christianized and capable in all matters domestic available for exchange of goods or specie.” (52). That is, the first symbolic encounter between Rebekka and her husband affects a change in Rebekka’s body. She becomes part of the capital to be exchanged in a capitalist system. On the other hand, her husband obtains a wife who can nurture, protect and take care of the farm (which is a figuration to localize the global white empire) and the possibility to have descendents.

The intersectional approach carried out by some authors, such as Constantine González (2012), indicates that in the South of the United States white women were oppressed by means of ‘gender’ and ‘class’, while black women were oppressed by means of race,

since patriarchy did not find its place in the slavery context in terms of propriety. Nevertheless, this would lead to think that the woman is this commodity that can only be exchanged as a symbol of ownership in the capitalistic logic of binary thinking. In addition, the woman is left without any kind of agency to alter this logic of commodity and ownership. As Morrison shows in *A Mercy*, thinking the different women relationally through the affinities that they share, and their relations with men produces a very different type of analysis. In line with Mar Gallego-Durán (2011: 103): “[t]he analysis will reveal the patriarchal limitations to which these women are subjected, while simultaneously throwing light on the survival strategies [...], both individually and collectively.”

Starting with Rebekka, I would like to begin analysis of the main female characters in this novel. In order to understand her situation, it is important to approach the situation of Southern white females historically. Focusing on movement, a key element in Morrison’s work, not only symbolically but literally, we learn that Rebekka has been “transported” as any other capitalist commodity at the time: on a boat from Europe to America. Indeed, her marriage is described in economic terms:

Rebekka’s mother objected to the ‘sale’ – she called it that because the prospective groom had stressed ‘reimbursement’ for clothing, expenses and a few supplies – not for love or need of her daughter, but because the husband-to-be was a heathen living among savages. (74).

Thus, love is not present in the relationship with her mother or with her husband. There is no affection relating her with her family. Thus, she needs to find a different type of bonding, especially since her experience is so different from those surrounding her, as Rebekka explains to Lina: “‘I shat among strangers for six weeks to get to this land.’ She has told this to Lina over and over. Lina being the only one left, whose understanding she trusted and whose judgement she valued.” (72). This type of relationship is stronger among them than with anyone else (in spite of the fact that Lina also has a very close relationship with Florens) and it started with certain feelings, not positive necessarily, when they first encounter each other: “When the Europe wife stepped down from the cart, hostility between them was instant. The health and beauty of a young female already encharged annoyed the new wife; while the assumption of

authority from the awkward Europe girl infuriated Lina.” (52 – 3). For the first time in their lives, they were not invisible. They could recognize each other affectively, and having in common the housework on the farm and the midwiving matters was enough to create the affinities that both needed and to exchange the knowledge that they had:

Together, by trial and error they learned: what kept the foxes away; how and when to handle and spread manure; the difference between lethal and edible and the sweet taste of timothy grass; the features of misted swine; what turned the baby’s stool liquid and what hardened it into pain. (53).

They learned together how to handle difficulties and pain and because of that they created a very strong relationship. In Gallego-Durán’s words (2011: 105) “women need other women’s company to grow, to mature, ultimately to thrive as human beings, as Morrison’s novels repeatedly and relentlessly explore.” However, even though they remain largely invisible, their conditions are, of course, different and not only because of their race but because of their own location: “You [Rebekka] and I [Lina], this land is hour home, she whispered, ‘but unlike you I am exile here.’” (59). That is to say, the location is necessary for one’s individual becoming and for enacting “agential” (Barad, 2007) spaces where acts of resistance can be created. This is why here, Rebekka should have reinforced their alliance, but instead she tries to look for another husband. “Although they had nothing in common with the views of each other, they had everything in common with one thing: the promise and threat of men. [...] Without the status or shoulder of a man, [...] a widow was in practice illegal.” (98). Thus, in order to protect her own self, Rebekka performs an individual strategy that leaves the others in exile. That is why movement becomes their own ally and precisely this is what is emphasized in Florens’ trip.

The rest of the women in the house need to be in permanent movement because they have no land; so, precisely in this act of deterritorialization is where their resistance can be found. In this sense, the fact that Rebekka needs the Blacksmith to heal from her illness becomes a powerful instance in which Florens can self-become. Florens initiates her particular act of resistance by trying to look for the Blacksmith so she can save her mistress. However, the affected motif that leads this search is not an alliance in order to find their land, but rather a personal interest based on love. Therefore, what begins as

the ultimate stage for liberating herself from having being exchanged by her mother ends up being her incarceration.

According to Wardi (2011: 33), “Florens, Sorrow and Lina are denied the protection of the house, yet Sorrow and Florens manipulate domestic space and in so doing contest Jacob and Rebekka’s spatial authority.” Sorrow does not only become “Complete” when she has her own daughter, that presents motherhood not only as the most oppressive love ever (since mothers always have to choose, as Florens points out), but also how mothers can become complete and because of this they own themselves, as the Blacksmith instigates Florens. Besides, it is after becoming a mother that Sorrow understands what the situation of her mistress and her own situation is in the house: “Sorrow understood that servants, however many, would not make a difference. Somehow their care and devotion did not matter to her. So Mistress had no one – no one at all.” (129 – 30). Sorrow has acquired the knowledge and, enough agency, and now is even considering the possibility of escaping with her daughter. Total liberation for Florens is extremely complicated because, by the end of the novel, she keeps on not knowing why she was left alone. This is the real danger with any kind of oppression. If we do not confront it, if we do not stay together it passes from generation to generation. Precisely by writing her story, Florens is preventing those who will inhabit that house from committing the same mistakes as she did. As the end of *Beloved* shows, *it is not a story to pass on.*

To conclude, I would like to stress the importance of sharing knowledge, an aspect often emphasized by Morrison in this novel and in most others. Florens, for instance, does not have anyone to tell, so she starts writing about it. In Justine Tally’s words (2011: 34), “Florens’ act of writing herself onto the structure claims dominion over a landscape of slavery. [...] Florens’ cartography is a refutation of imperial maps, which, in effect, authorized the world to be divided and claimed.” Reading and writing is always already political, thus the process of writing is Florens’ own process of healing, while it also symbolizes the necessity to externalize and communicate trauma in order to stop it. Florens’ writing is an act of resistance insomuch as it is a communicative act (prompted by feelings of “hurt” and “pain”), but it is the impossibility to communicate what establishes the act of resistance itself that is blurring dichotomies once again. As

Tally observes (2011: 76), Morrison specifies in an interview that this book transmits the message at the very end:

In the dust where my heart will remain each night and day until you understand what I know and long to tell you: to be given dominion over another is a hard thing; to wrest dominion over another is a wrong thing; to give dominion of yourself to another is a wicked thing.

Oh Florens. My love. Hear a tua mae. (167).

Florens's mother tries to share this knowledge with her daughter, but she will never learn it because they have been separated from each other from the very beginning forcing Florens to try and find solutions in the Blacksmith (without success) and finding instead a repetition of whatever made her be left alone in the first place. She will never understand this kind of action and will remain in the darkness of the unknown. Maybe Sorrow's daughter will be the one to learn the lesson from her complete mother. This completeness is only achieved during the relation and not before, and prevents the rest to keep on repeating it. However, Florens will not be the one who will understand this, since all she can do is writing about it to, at least, share her embodied experience of how a slave *becomes* one. She can only try to resist within her own situatedness: "Florens. In full. Unforgiven. Unforgiving. No ruth, my love. None. Hear me? Slave. Free. I last." (161).

#### 4.3.10. *Home*

*Home* is Morrison's latest novel (2012). Consequently, the analysis presented here includes reviews from newspapers and Morrison's recent interviews constituting a very interesting and inspiring exercise. I will also use Morrison's previous novels in order to perform a close reading of a novel, which has been considered one of Morrison's weakest works by the general public (Churchell, 2012). Sarah Churchell affirms that Morrison uses female protagonists exhaustively and it is powerfully set up, but with a "boring" end (ibid), which I believe quite distant from reality since the end of this novel precisely blurs the division between hero and villain. A division that is recurrent in Morrison's novels albeit always with a different perspective, and serving a different

political strategy. In this analysis, I focus on the relation between brother and sister since what Morrison finds interesting is precisely that: “the idea of when a man’s relationship with a woman is pure, unsullied, not fraught [...] It could be masculine and protective without the baggage of sexuality.” (Morrison, 2014). This relation becomes paramount in this novel because splitting the characters leaves Cee as a victim in need of rescuing, and Morrison’s approach to female characters is never one of female victimization.

On the other hand, it is equally surprising that Morrison affirms that the relationship between brother and sister is the purest one. *Song of Solomon* also contains Macon and Pilates’ relationship and it is presented as something corrupted by the acquisition of money, not as something pure. In this instance, these two are not presented as hateful to each other, but “Money” significantly appears in several occasions as Frank’s surname. In addition, the novel ends with a very different message away from this purity which is, as I see it, one of the most powerful messages in Morrison’s work: the different forms in which slavery keeps on permeating women’s lives.

The relationship between Cee and her brother (the two protagonists) is strongly influenced by an affective lack at home. As happens in *Love* (L’s impossibility to retire because of the neo-liberal system), their parents were working most of the time: “Their parents were so beat by the time they came from work, any affection they showed was like a razor – sharp, short, and thin.” (53). Working sixteen hours a day does not allow any human being to feel anything else than tiredness and, at any rate, the parents died when the children were very young. Thus, no type of feeling can be transmitted from generation to generation and slavery patterns are produced and reproduced. As has been seen in some other Morrison’s novels, just as slavery prevented black people from loving too much (in *Beloved*) neo-slavery is attaining the same in this post-colonial world. New forms of slavery create new forms of slaves, as will be seen by the end of this analysis.

Due to the fact that their parents died, they are forced to move to a house in a town with a relative who has re-married to a widow, Leonore. Leonore feels no attachment to the kids who are, therefore, forced to create their own affective bonds to each other. They are therefore made to create their own affective bonds. However, this has negative

consequences for Cee, since she starts to be totally dependent on her brother and he starts being over-protective towards her: “When Cee and a few other girls reached fourteen and started talking about boys, she was prevented from any real flirtation because of her big brother, Frank. The boys knew she was off-limits because of him.” (47). Besides, creating boundaries upon a moral burden leaves Cee without anything else apart from orders so she has no free will: “Tie your shoes put down that rag doll and pick up a broom uncross your legs go weed that garden stand up and straight don’t you talk back to me.” (ibid).

Thus, the family environment presents a highly sheltered Cee in an oppressive behavior that binds her to her brother through being sad, full of sorrow and panic when he enlisted in the army: “The only thing he could not do for her was wipe the sorrow, or was it panic, from her eyes when he enlisted. He tried to tell her the army was the only solution. Lotus was suffocating, killing him and his two best friends.” (35). Because he did have his own contextual free will, he allies with his friends and decides to go to war even if she was not going to be fine. Prohibiting a human being from having their own free will automatically leads to her prohibition of having an embodied knowledge because she is not allowed to feel by herself. Thus, even though Frank thinks that she was a victim that needed to be rescued, and Leonore felt that it was her brother’s abandonment, Cee knows better what really happens to her in taking a “wrong” decision: “If she hadn’t been so ignorant living in a no-count, not-even-a-town place with only chores, church-school, and nothing else to do, she would have known better.” (47). It is her lack of knowledge and the oppressive system that surrounds her that contributes to her only decision: to run away with a man that knows better than her, again, and will direct her moves according to his own benefit:

That’s the other side, she thought, of having a smart, tough brother close at hand to take care of and protect you – you are slow to develop your own brain muscle. Besides, prince loved himself so deeply, so completely, it was impossible to doubt his conviction. So if Prince said she was pretty, she believed him. If he said at fourteen she was a woman, she believed that too. And if he said, I want you for myself, it was Lenore who said, ‘Not unless y’all are legal. (48).

Taking into account that a synonym for “happiness” in Morrison’s work is the acquisition of property, here we can see how that discourse is developed in the novel. By reinforcing Cee’s illegal status, Leonore is also trying to move away from the problem of her having this girl in the house. By legally marrying the man, Leonore could get rid of Cee and stopped needing to feed her. She lent them the car and they left the house. Because all the knowledge that she has is constrained by her brother, when he leaves she needs to find a new male figure, in order to “know” through somebody else’s eyes, and this is Prince<sup>59</sup>. In exchange, he obtained a car since he ran away without her taking the car. She knows that it is only herself and her life-choices, and not using her “brain” that leads her to that situation. She was never allowed to be on her own to become more responsible. Thus, when she is left alone she is eager to escape from that environment (as her brother did) and in her own attempt to become her own self, she runs away with the wrong man. Nevertheless, this will not prevent herself from looking for her own autonomy and independence. It is at this moment that her ignorance (again) leads her to be the object of genocide experiments in the house of a white doctor. Because her life is at risk, the woman working with her writes to her brother.

Frank Money is Cee’s brother and he is a former soldier in the Vietnam war. Despite his efforts to live a “normal” life out of war trauma, his recovery is not succeeding. Frank also embodies the conventional acceptance of human abuse. Indeed, it is not until almost the end of the novel that we know that his own project of rescuing his sister is a redemptive move that he needs in order to save his soul for not having being able to save his friend and having raped and killed a little girl in Vietnam. Thus, as he did when leaving the house to go to the army, he is thinking only in his own becoming: *“And not my sister. No way. She was the first person I ever took responsibility for. Down deep inside her lived my secret picture of myself.”* (104 [author’s emphasis]). Frank needs to save his sister in order to save himself. However, this implies reproducing dichotomical patterns that always resulted in the encapsulation of “women” as the powerless other.

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<sup>59</sup> Significantly, the bed used intimacy with this other man is her brother’s and not hers, as if having his approval was necessary even when he was not there. This dismantles Morrison’s statement that this relationship was completely unsexualized. This, and the fact that Frank also commits sexual violence against a girl in Vietnam, permeates the entire plot of the novel. So, even if sexuality is not physically performed between these two siblings, it permeates the whole relationship.

By making his sister a picture of himself, he re-establishes core dualities that reinforce a patriarchal order of asymmetrical power: real and representation, active and passive, one and other, Frank assuming the first characteristics of the dichotomies previously presented and Cee the second.

It is not until Cee starts relating with Ethel that her own process of self-becoming starts. Alliances between women are created here based upon “asymmetrical aggregates” (McWeny, 2014) in which certain lived experiences can be shared. These are defined as “bodily proximities rather than bodily properties; they emerge out of what actually happens between bodies instead of what features those bodies may or may not possess in themselves” (ibid, 281); which, politically speaking means sharing affinities rather than identities in situated contexts: “Although each of her nurses was markedly different from the others in looks, dress, manner of speech, food and medical preferences, their similarities were glaring.” (123). Differences do not need to be erased but shared. Together, they disrupt the medical industry and the discourse of the oppressor.

After this, Cee is able to identify her problem: “Branded early as an unlovable, barely tolerated ‘gutter child’ by Lenore, the only one whose opinion mattered to her parents, exactly like what Miss Ethel said, she had agreed with the label and believed herself worthless.” (129). Therefore, someone has been deciding for her and has put a pre-established category on her, that of victim. This re-creates oppressions and forbids people to become who they truly are, which is why a feminist politics cannot be based upon labels. However, despite the fact that she “was not the girl who trembled at the slightest touch of the real and vicious world” (127), it is true that she stays in the house taking care of her brother and she is not able to have children. Nevertheless, she is part of the community (she has her own property while Lina, Florens and Sorrow do not have it, for instance), and this allows Morrison to leave the reader thinking that neo-slavery is still in the community and there is a need to be cautious and alert. By finishing with this ambiguous ending, Morrison teaches us that another life free from oppressions is *inside each one of us*. Each one must find it even if the same patterns are always being reproduced with new forms of expression. We need to be able to find it because the same patterns are being produced, although reinventing new forms of expression.

#### 4.4. The subject in the event: Toni Morrison's politics

Reading Morrison's remarks that her major point is denouncing black female realities as plural and characterized by multiple oppressions is what makes these subjects oppressed and oppressing, at the same time. However, due to this multiplicity the object/subject of Morrison's politics cannot be *the* woman but rather the differing relations that these subjects present with each other, their context and, most importantly, contemporary society. In this thesis, I have argued that one way to resolve this complexity is through analyzing the different affects interfering in these relations. Thus, and following the entanglement produced between SNS and literature, it is time to analyze the performative nature of the feelings created within this relation. At the beginning of the chapter, I explained how Coole and Frost (2010) described new materialist politics as the study of micro-relations between humans and non-human bodies. That is why it is so important now to focus on the affects pointed out on the Facebook page, because they articulate the micro-relations between the characters in the novel, the relations of these ones with their own environment, the relations between SNS and literature and the relations between past, present, and the future of society. That is, these feelings become intra-actions not only to re-think gender but also politics. Thus, it is necessary to identify how different affects materialize differently in certain bodies, in order to understand the processes by which certain bodies become oppressed and/or oppressing.

Social echoes permeate Morrison's work over the course of her entire career, with *The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved*, or *Love* as example. The *Bluest Eye* was inspired by a little conversation that Morrison had when she was a child, in primary school, as the afterword of the edition chosen for the close reading shows. The author had a friend who stopped believing in God because she prayed during a whole year for blue eyes but her eyes remained brown. *Beloved* was the result of Morrison's reflecting thinking about a newspaper clip in which a mother had to kill her own daughter to prevent her from slavery. *Love* was written in the light of a massive rape, Pretty-Fair's rape,

committed at the time the novel was written. Therefore, linking her work with society follows the premises on which her work is based.

This close reading has been engaged mainly with affects and relations. One of the most frequent literary (and political<sup>60</sup>) techniques used by Morrison is blurring dichotomies. Therefore, understanding one character always entails understanding him or her relationally. Feelings are differing matters to create supporting communities. Morrison makes this clear from the very beginning with her first novel. The community in the novel creates a “false” reality in which they can keep on surviving under this oppressive system, through the isolation of one member: Pecola. Sharing the same blood, race, or gender does not mean anything to Pecola. In Claudia’s words:

All of us – all who knew her- felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so handful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used – to silence our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength. (*Bluest Eye*, 163)

Claudia uses “us” instead of “them”, because she knows that she has also “failed” Pecola. Feelings such as “wholesome”, “guilt”, “pain” or “contempt” are used in order to describe a “fantasy of strength”, that is a fantasy of community. Therefore, when using “fantastic feelings”, in the sense that they are socially conveyed but not materially embedded, we create “fantastic realities” so that people sharing “gender” and “race”, for instance, become bounded by false identities. This results in an oppressive relation instead of a liberating one. This continuum between Pecola’s isolation and the “false strength” of the “us” serve as an example of how politics is developed, in order to perpetuate oppressive systems.

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<sup>60</sup> This tool not only becomes a literary resource but a political one too, showing how literature is already political.

Besides, at an individual level, feelings also produce differences that matter in the way men and women relate. For instance, we can see that female characters like Sula or Pilate feel before they think, while men do the contrary. Pilate is able to express her inner self only through feelings: “Mamas get hurt and nervous when somebody don’t like their children. First real misery I ever had in my life was when I found out somebody [...] didn’t like my little girl. Made me so mad, I didn’t know what to do.” (*Song*, 94). Indeed, she explains to the reader how *it feels* to be a mother, which is very different from being a mother – as Eva in *Sula* – or knowing how to behave as a mother – as Sethe in *Beloved* –. While Pilate, as a mother, feels so much that she does not even know what to do, Milkman, as a son, needs to think first in order to know what to feel: “[Milkman] wouldn’t know what to feel until he knew what to think.” (*ibid.*, 75). Interestingly, here he distinguishes between feelings and reasoning where reasoning comes before feelings. This is part of his own individual strategy to confront the blurred lines that the family bonds have presented to him and have altered his own individuality: “Never had he thought of his mother as a person, a separate individual, with a life apart from allowing or interfering with his own.” (*ibid.*). Apart from being a truly sexist claim, that makes women invisible under the umbrella of motherhood, it is also his own individual strategy in order to start his individual development and the recognition of the individuality of his family members. However, it is not enough since “his individuality [...] emerges in a chaotic way”<sup>61</sup> (Carabí, 1988: 165). Separating feelings and reasoning, he is also producing the division between mind and body and an ontological scission between men and women (ignoring his mother as an individual). Thus, Milkman only appears trapped as a chaotic subject while also embodying patriarchal oppressing structures.

Based upon relations, Morrison’s texts become materially alive in order to be transformative with/to society, which is one of the objectives of feminism, as a whole. They present the attempt to blur the binary opposition between men and women to create a single “One”, holding the disruption of the patriarchal order. The relation becomes the force, instead of female or male subjects and this relation becomes empirically tangible through feelings, albeit they also differ, depending on the sex of the

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<sup>61</sup> “Su individualidad [la de Milkman], desamparada del marco que hasta ahora le había proporcionado estabilidad, emerge de forma caótica.” (Carabí, 1988: 165).

character. Feelings are crucial in understanding Morrison's work because they are the enactment of the characters' self-becoming. Nevertheless, understanding this process is never straightforward because the characters in Morrison's novels are self-sufficient while also incomplete. Morrison's works require a participative reading. Starting with the end, I would like to present *Home*'s case. Here, Morrison presents powerful subjects who not even the narrator fully understands. For example, Frank is telling his story to someone else, who is writing what happened according to Frank's reasoning. The following passage reveals that Frank knows even better than this person, who is an absent narrator in the story: "Not true. I didn't think such a thing. What I thought was that he was proud. Of her, but didn't want to show how proud he was to the other men on the train. I don't think you know much about love." (*Home*, 69). Thus, like Milkman, he is putting his reasoning first, and afterwards he will (re)create conventional patterns of sexist love. Once again, this is a product of the ontological scission between mind (reasoning) and feelings (body); the ontological scission that divides men and women and creates structures of power. Thus, in linking this fact with love, Morrison is already anticipating the effect of love: the ontological division that recreates oppressions, as denounced on the Facebook page and in the novels. Therefore, showing a sexually different performance of feelings among men and women, Morrison is showing differing processes that may help to disrupt hierarchical structures.

The type of feelings embedded in a relational performance of gender is crucial because affects, that is, intra-actions, are the enactment of relating selves. The following passage serves as an example:

Her [Ruth's] son had never been a person to her, a separate real person. He had always been a passion. Because she had been so desperate to lie with her husband and have another baby to lie with her husband and have another baby by him, the son she bore was first off a wished-for bond between herself and Macon, something to hold them together and reinstate their sex lives. (*Song*, 131)

Affects blur the very conditions of life of human beings and alter the relation itself, transforming different selves into something else. Thus, taking into account this definition of affects, the one illustrated in this passage, it is time now to explore encounters between the affects that produced feminist politics based on affinities. The

following table presents the number of times that those feelings appearing on the Facebook page are written in the novels:

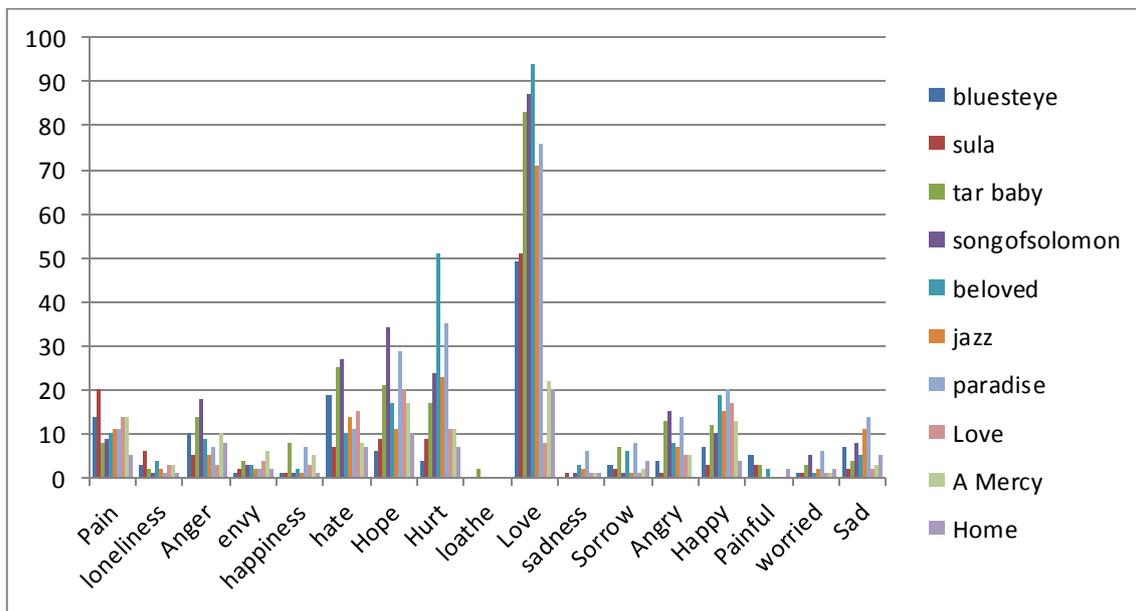


Table 3: Feelings appearing in the FB page and in the novels.

There are two remarkable facts in table 3. First, is the visualization of how many times a certain feeling appears in one novel, giving the reader the ability to discern which one of the feelings is the most frequent in a particular novel. However, it also shows which feeling is predominant in the totality of the novels, by the density of the column itself. Therefore, the table is presented here as a sample of the presence of the Facebook feelings in the novels although not all of them affect equally in the close reading of the novels. My analysis begins with the feeling of love. Almost every character in Morrison’s novel displays love, either by being the beloved one or affecting through it (lover) or even both at the same time. The traditional concept of love is broken in Morrison’s novel, as it was shown in the previous chapter. One of the novels in which the magnitude of the social convention of the “romantic love” is better expressed is *Tar Baby*. This feeling prevents Jadine from becoming an independent woman, while at the same time it also produces possessiveness in a heterosexual relationship. Jadine describes this possession in the following passage: “I should have known. That’s all you could think of to do with your life? Kill a woman? Was she black? [...] Of course she was. What did she do? Cheat on you? [...] Take away your candy [...] My my my.” (*Tar baby*, 77). This passage deals with Jadine’s reaction at the fact that Son killed his

wife after knowing that she was cheating on him. Her answer indicates that she is building affective bonds with black women. Here, if we do as Jadine and take a feminist point of view, the alarms sound quickly. As Mottiff states (2004: 13) “[i]t is difficult to bring the warm, sincere character portrayed in these analyses [those defending Son’s position] into harmony with the character who kills his wife and dangles his girlfriend out a window.” She continues (ibid, 14),

[t]hese inconsistencies may engender some of the most troubling questions about this book: Why would Morrison create a strong, educated, independent black woman character who appears to be ‘in the wrong’ while putting an abusive hypocritical male character on the side of the ‘right’?

One of the reasons is that, following the intertextuality of the book with the tale of the “Breer Rabbit and the Breer Fox” (as Carabí, 1988; Ryan, 1997; Grewal, 1988 do), they both are snare and snarer, at the same time, because of the affective intra-action created through love. Son and Jadine are also a tar baby-like trap for the reader. In Moffitt’s words (2004: 14):

[t]he trap is in judging the characters in terms of overly simplistic, quickly formed definitions based on their apparent roles – a trap into which the characters themselves initially fall, given their limited visions, but that readers may avoid, given that from our vantage point we are able to see multiple visions.

*Tar Baby* settles the basis for re-thinking the conventionality of love. *Beloved* is the re-definition of the ethics of love. Feelings, in general, become intra-actions between subjects and boundary making in new materialist feminist politics, because they affect mutually and multiply and because they transform the very nature of the relation that is matter. Likewise, if a feeling is unidirectional, it produces a hierarchical distribution of power and therefore it is excluded from a conceptualization of a new materialist feminist politics. Through Paul D, we learn how it is paramount to understand that love should not be summarized as universal goodness and happiness because it does not affect everyone in the same way: “For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settle on to love. The best thing he knew, was to love just a little bit [...]” (*Beloved*, 45). Thus, love becomes something to move away, from in order to survive individually, and in order to pursue

collectiveness and remembrance. Sethe's thick love, as Paul D comments (*ibid*), will also prevent Sethe from considering her own self a worthy human being. In the novel, Sethe needs this "thick love" to erase "pain" from her memory and to obtain forgiveness from her own past. On the contrary, erasing pain from her past also implies erasing her past and making her future impossible. Thus, while love is uni-directional, because it implies possession as well as denying her past in a linear way, pain becomes affectively embodied in her past, influencing past, present and future.

On the contrary, as the novels show, love keeps on being a troublesome affect many years later, when slavery was far away from the social imaginary. In *Jazz*, Violet is presented as an irrational person who wanted to *cut open a creammy little face*. Thus, already linking "love" with this unnatural act because she wanted "to solve the mystery of love that way. Good luck and let me know." (*Jazz*, 5) Thus, the purpose of the novel is settled at the beginning: what is the meaning of love? But no one knows the answer, nor does the narrator. That is why reader, narrator and the characters of the novel will move back and forth oppressed by this irrational love that remains incomprehensible. Violet's individual strategy to unravel this mystery is allying with the girl's auntie, Alice. Alice gives her a girl's picture and punishes her with a twofold purpose: first making Joe remember the face everyday of the girl he decided to kill; and second, making Violet remember the fragility of love and how dangerous it might be:

"the aunt broke down and began to look forward to Violet's visits for a chat about youth and misbehavior [...] and eventually let Violet keep for a few weeks [...] a picture of the girl's face. [...] Violet [...] put it on the fireplace mantel in her own parlor and both she and Joe looked at it in bewilderment." (*Jazz*, *ibid*).

Therefore, love has neither matter, nor meaning. It becomes a paralyzing feeling that creates unequal structures of power among subjects.

In her penultimate novel, Morrison explains love from an ontological perspective, gracefully engaging raced and gendered issues. The novel *A Mercy* recounts Florens' becoming a female black slave, which is enhanced not only by the fact that she has an owner but also by the grandiosity of her love for the Blacksmith. During most of the novel, Florens (a materially invisible woman, because the only way she has to prove

that she is a human being is through a note that her mistress has written to her) is moving from the farm where she works to the place in which she can find her lover. However, when she finds him he is living with a kid called Malaik with whom she has a fight and hits him, prompting her enslavement by choice (*A Mercy*, 141). The Blacksmith calls her “slave” because “sir makes [her] that” and because she adores him, but mostly because she has *become* a slave (*A Mercy*, 141). In this encounter, Florens realizes that she is left again, because he “chose the boy. [He] called his name first” (ibid, 140). Florens, as the rest of the women in the novel, remains invisible while at the same time trapped by feelings such as hurt, sorrow and mostly love (ibid, 141). This relation neglects Florens her potential to become a human being. It shows Florens’ incapacity to create alliances in order to overcome her personal pain and trauma (having been abandoned), and reveals how there are different types of slavery in which human beings can be involved and how these may be repeated contemporarily and passed through generations. This incapacity is embodied by the character Beloved (as explained in the previous section), an intra-acting effect with Florens’s incapacity.

Focusing on the end of the novel (*A Mercy*, 167), we can see how her mother is trying to explain to Florens three different types of slavery, which relate to each other but are not the same. The first one “to be given dominion over another” is exactly what it means to be a mother, for her: she chose the best for her daughter, and that is hard (as Sethe also shows); the second one is precisely the fact that someone is dominating someone else who ceases to be an individual on his or her own, “to wrest dominion over another”; the third one is exactly what Florens did with the Blacksmith. That is, Florens is enslaved in the three different dimensions that she could be: the love felt between men and women (the third type), the love between mother and daughter (the first type), and the ambition of mister and mistress who love their own property, their acquisitions (the second type). All three different types of love are supporting and supported by the slavery system, which includes exile (the exclusion of a geographical location), no love (the difficulties for creating human relationships) and the impossibility to love freely.

Women are oppressed by others because of love. Love also makes women oppress others which involves a certain degree of empowerment albeit maybe not a liberating one. Many of Morrison’s female characters, for instance, kill in the name of love (Sethe,

L, Eva, among others). However, it is precisely this fact that problematizes the ethics of love and complicates its affective nature even further. Thus, we should all just love “a bit” as Paul D claims. Otherwise, we risk falling in possessive terms that repeat the same oppressive structural patterns from generation to generation. As shown in *Home*, love is not even the boundary relating families, one of the gendered structural relations, par excellence, but respect. Family is an affective bound created through responsibilities. Love cannot appear on the surface because people do not know how to handle it, they do not understand its meaning. By creating alternative relationships, love becomes unreachable even for future generations. It does not even affect particular relations within families such as mother and son (as shown in *Song of Solomon*), or mother and daughter (as in *Sula*). Milkman, the protagonist of the former, does not correspond to her mother’s love, supporting the idea that this feeling is hierarchical and unidirectional.

So far, love has revealed how certain feelings prompt hierarchical oppressions. This is also the case with happiness: it creates ontological boundaries between men and women. On the Facebook page, it has been observed how happiness is contemporarily, and has always been, the synonym for the acquisition of property, connecting then love and happiness as the basis of the slavery system. In *Song of Solomon*, for instance, we can find how man’s legacy is determined by obtaining property. Milkman’s father tells him: “Own things. And let the things you own own other things. Then, you’ll own yourself and other people too.” (*Song*, 55). This differs substantially from what Pilate tries to pass on to Milkman (which is what her father passed on to her as their legacy): “You just can’t fly on off and leave a body.” (*ibid*, 332). These messages convey the different strategies that individuals have for self-development and how gendered relations interfere in those legacies:

[Milkman] ‘Yeah, but except for skin color, I can’t tell the difference between what the white women want from us and what the colored women want. You say they [whites and black women] all want our [black men] life, our living life. So if a colored woman is raped and killed, why do the Days rape and kill a white woman? Why worry about the colored woman at all?’

Guitar cooked his head and looked sideways at Milkman. His nostrils flared a little. ‘Because she is *mine*. (emphasis in the original, *Song*, 223).

According to Milkman and Guita, the role of the black woman in the black community is nonexistent. They are not different from white women, except from one thing: black women are their possession (their only one since slavery). Because of that, no white men can touch them, mixed marriages are not well-considered and, certainly, it is not useful to treat black women like equals. Otherwise, they would not have any power over anyone. Thus, to black men, property is the only difference between white and black women. This presents the patriarchal roots of black nationalism (which will be reinforced during Morrison's entire work). Thus, as explained on the Facebook page, if happiness keeps on permeating the structure of society, hierarchical structures of power divide society in gendered oppressions. History keeps on being repeated once and again, iteratively, albeit under differing forms.

Closely linked with this sense of property is its embodied form: happy. *Jazz* shows how "being happy" prevents the community from looking for the future which remains one of the main problems in order to be politically active. They only look to the future and believe that the past has already happened, as a static memory not coming back. Living in the City has enabled black people to get accommodated; they live happily waiting for a future without doing anything, without retrieving their past. Dorcas is, perhaps, the character that best expresses the embodiment of happiness. She likes accommodation, orders, and someone telling her how to behave. She is not a dangerous black woman, as Sula was, but she is a complete example of the gendered stereotypical conceptualization of being "happy": "Dorcas is happy. Happier than she has ever been anytime. [He is ] Hawk-eyed, tireless and a little cruel. [...] Other women want him – badly – and he has been selective. [...] Dorcas is lucky. Knows it. And is as happy as she has ever been anytime." (*Jazz*, 188). In fact, afterwards she repeats the gendered patterns that her relationship with Joe had: "After Dorcas picked up with Acton [...], she was different. She was doing for Acton what the old man [Joe] did for her – giving him little presents [...]" (ibid, 203). In this quote, who the lover is and who the loved one is makes a difference. In her relationship with Joe, Joe was the lover and Dorcas the loved one; while in her relationship with Acton, Dorcas was the lover and Acton the loved one. It is the feeling that determines the pattern. However, it becomes so repetitive that Dorcas does not find a way out and she lets herself die. In its connection with love, being happy is as dangerous as in its connection with acquisition. It means that "happy" is as

accommodating in the individual as it is in the collective form. Happiness is certainly as the quote from *The Bluest Eye* on the Facebook page demonstrated, and the future is precisely uncertain, because of the multiple reworkings of present and past and their mutual link. Therefore, happiness prevents social change. Unfortunately, as shown in *Home*, happiness is a state that persists contemporarily albeit presented in this novel within a near past, the fifties.

Nevertheless, if the legacy that we can transmit is not love and happiness, what are we to learn from Morrison's novels? Regarding *Home*, her latest work, the Facebook community agrees on two different aspects, while mutually related: hurt as a contemporary bound and how a hurtful truth is always embedded with reality. The Facebook community agrees that it is real feelings, like hurting, that make Morrison's work global and a-temporal. Real world always hurts, according to them, because accepting the past and how it informs the present is always hurtful. Thus, accepting that women have always being interchangeable objects and that this keeps on being so in the present hurts. That is why Morrison focuses on Cee's process of healing during *Home*. Through her physical pain she needs to face and engage with her hurting reality.

Closely related with love and hurt is pain, which is one of the most oppressive and empowering feelings in Morrison's novels. In the novels, this feeling manifests in a myriad of ways. In *Beloved*, it is a repressive feeling that includes the past as a silenced Other. *Beloved*, the novel, is the presentation of a collective pain (Carabí, 1993), an excellent introduction to the importance of determined feelings for overcoming social injustices. In Carabi's words (1993: 105), "[in *Beloved*, Morrison] brings up a collective pain that had been silenced within the Black community but that was always there." This can be seen in Sethe's character. However, pain is also at the same time the affection black women need to overcome. That is to say, *Beloved* (the main character) shows how, in order to produce social justice in the form of remembrance of a slavery past in the black community, women need to confront their pain first. Part of this pain comes with their impossibility to love in a slavery context, as the novel shows, and also, as the impossibility to be happy precisely because of that. Furthermore, this feeling is not only part of a collective strategy in order to get over the hurtful past, but a differing way to self-become, as *Sula* shows: "As willing to feel pain as to give pain, to feel

pleasure as to give pleasure, hers was an experimental life.” (*Sula*, 119) In becoming an experimental self, embodying an experimental life, she becomes a process by herself, an open-ended subject that not even death can stop. Therefore, Morrison suggests here that we need to be able to embrace pain as much as pleasure. At an individual level, this is how we can liberate ourselves as women.

Even though sadness appears in the table above as not a very common feeling in the novels, textually explicit, it is prominent on the Facebook page. Being the traditional opposite of happiness, it is worth examining if in this context it can be considered an affect that promotes social change or, on the other hand, it is presented as a paralyzing one too, just as happiness is. The first instance when we find the embodiment of sadness is in *Beloved*, where Beloved personifies this feeling, making it corporeal and tangible. First, she appears as a “sad ghost” able to alter the atmosphere and physicality of the house. Later, she becomes a real woman, with the same effects on the house and the relationship between the subjects living there. Thus, even though this feeling is not as present in the novels as it is on the Facebook page, it effectively intra-acts the boundaries between life and death, altering the conditions of life of human subjects. This blurring is also performed through anger in *Paradise* (although I will focus on anger later on). By “killing” the women in the Convent and explaining their “after-life” in the final chapter, Morrison shows that certain relations do blur conditions of life in a liberating way while others reinforce the inequalities already existing.

In *Paradise*, women are “sad” because they do not believe in the African dream that describes a black society in which slavery did not exist in the past and because of that Africa becomes paradise on earth. Simultaneously, this dream is preventing them from facing their past because they look for a past without slavery and, as the incarnation of Beloved shows, that is a dangerous move that creates false communities, insofar as they neglect one part of themselves. Trying to hide this pain under an artificial happiness is creating new regimes of oppression. Pat states: “Slavery is our past” (ibid, 210) and hiding that part from oneself implies denying a future for the community. Thus, if the women in the community are sad, the same as the ghost of *Beloved*, they are confronting their past, present and future, and hope for a better future is installed. They are sad because they embody their past and this is one major difference between most of

Morrison's female characters with regards to male characters. Likewise, 'being sad' can affect female bonding.

On the contrary, sadness is a different experience. Sadness comes back yet again with Cee in *Home* through its contrast with society's happiness. Thus, happiness and sadness become relational feelings in Cee's self-development while, at the same time, mutually influencing society's behavior and Cee's becoming through their relation. About her, Ethel (the woman that helps her healing) says:

I knew you before you could walk. You had those big, pretty eyes. They was full of sadness, though. I seen how you tagged along with your brother. When he left you ran off with that waste of the Lord's air and time. [...] Don't tell me you going to let Lenore decide again who you are? (ibid, 125).

She was fully dependent on her brother and let Lenore define her through sadness, which becomes highly significant if we keep on reading:

Remember that story about the goose and the golden eggs? How the farmer took the eggs and how greed made him stupid enough to kill the goose? I always thought a dead goose could make at least one good meal. But gold? Shoot. That was always the only thing on Lenore's mind. She had it, loved it, and thought it put her above every else. (ibid.)

By using this example here, Morrison is reminding the reader that the acquisition of capital is not something to be pursued, because it makes people even more selfish. This selfishness prompts isolation from the community, while favoring individualistic strategies that respond to neo-liberal practices. Thus, relating Cee's sadness with the happiness of the society, Morrison blurs these two concepts. Besides, this relation produces tension in Cee that forces her to become a diasporic subject looking for jobs (happiness, acquisition), in order to turn into a self-sufficient woman (sadness, individuality). Although, in her, this diasporic movement, together with the affective tension, also promotes the acquisition of knowledge by breaking through these two apparently (which we have seen not in reality) opposite terms. So, she needs start creating new alliances again in order to break the reiterative patterns that have been

passed from generation to generation. Sharing her knowledge is the way to avoid new forms of slavery:

Look to yourself. You free. Nothing and nobody is obliged to save you but you. Seed your own land. You young and a woman and there's serious limitations in both, but you are a person too. Don't let Lenore or some trifling boyfriend and certainly no evil doctor decide who you are. That's slavery. Somewhere inside you is that free person I'm talking about. Locate her and let her do something good in the world. (ibid, 126).

She is showing Cee that she is a free woman, and she can do whatever she wants because of her freedom. Just as Florens, she needs to decide not to become a slave. And, indeed, by the end of the novel, we know that she decides to do so because she decides to think about "what in this world did [she] love" (ibid, 130). Taking into account that love was denied to slaves, by reflecting upon this, Morrison is giving Cee self-determination and authority (indeed she becomes the bread-winner in the house she shares with her brother). Moreover, she has her own land, her own home and, as we see in *Paradise*, home is not a little thing.

It is important to point out that "hope", the second most present feeling, is not referred to directly yet because it is more present in the part of the enactment of politics. Thus, the third most present feeling in Morrison's work is hatred. This feeling is so important and present in Morrison's work because its entanglement with racism is what blurs the conditions of love, creating affinities between these two traditional opposites. Sethe loves her children but she kills her daughter. Hatred is the manifestation of racism and the corporealization of oppressive boundaries. This is key in order to understand racism materialized upon feelings instead of skin color. For instance, when Morrison describes Denver's job search in order to help in the house, Denver goes to the center of the town asking Lady Jones (a white woman) to give her a job. In introducing this example<sup>62</sup>, Morrison is showing how important female alliances are, despite race:

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<sup>62</sup> Morrison repeats this with Amy Denver, the woman who helped Sethe to give birth to Denver; and in many other occasions.

She [Lady Jones] had been listening to ‘all that yellow gone to waste’ and ‘white nigger’ since she was a girl in a houseful of silt-black children, so she dislike everybody a little bit because she believed they hated her hair as much as she did. (*Beloved*, 256)

The alliance between Lady Jones and Denver, "inaugurated her life in the world as a woman." (ibid ). Previously, Denver had already developed her own strategies, in order to survive the house and the fear that her own mother provoked on her. She created her ghost, which kept her company and helped her going through the isolation; then, she started to love her mum just a little bit because she was afraid of whatever made her kill her sister; and later, she decides to not know whatever was wrong with her mom and just stay inside the house, since whatever happened was outside that house. Of course, these are all powerful strategies, and even more so, if we take into account that they are carried out by a little girl. However, none of them challenge the order in the rest of the community, or herself. On the contrary, they all entail an isolation from the community, breaking knowledge sharing, and breaking possible affinities even with her own mother. As a result, she is not able to sort out the situation that she has in her house and because of this realizes that she needs help to get out. Then, she becomes a woman, because she behaves as such and a new life starts for her.

Nevertheless, not only does race turn love into hatred but it also has different implications in a patriarchal system. Within this system, love turns relationships between men and women into sexual oppressions most of the time. In *Love*, Morrison presents a totally different relationship between women, as the focus of the novel: rivalry based on mutual hatred, between two women. They are Christine, who seems to be Heed's servant, despite her only hope being that food "would choke the meanest thing on the coast" (*Love*, 22) and Heed, who seems to be the owner of the house. This is representative of what Gallego (2009: 59) coins as the meaning of love in patriarchy: "warring women who would compete for the same man, thus precluding any possibility for female bonding." Indeed, both love and envy prevent the two from female bonding and prompting Heed's isolation in the community<sup>63</sup>:

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<sup>63</sup> Heed's isolation in the community can be read together with Sula's. Indeed, Heed also becomes a catalyst for whatever is wrong in the hotel.

How could he [Bill] marry her [Heed]? Protection. From what? Other women. I don't think so. [...] She's not bad-looking. Good figure. Way past good; she could be in the Cotton Club. Except for her color. And she'd have to smile some of the time. Needs to do something with her hair. Tell me about it. So, why, why'd he pick her? Beats me. She's hard to be around. Hard how? I don't know; she's sort of physical. (Long laughter.) Meaning? You know, jungle-y. (Choking laughter). (*Love*, 73).

She is considered “jungle-y”, without any apparent reason, because these women are clients from the hotel who do not know her. Thus, she belongs to the unknown, to the savage, and linking this “physical” description to the significant label of the “Cotton club” it leads to a quite recurrent theme in Morrison's novels: Heed seems to be Cosey's slave, though this time purely sexual and regulated by law. Although, it is also true that this marriage was an autonomous decision that Heed took, in order to escape from her family: “Marriage was a chance for me to get out, to learn who to sleep in a real bed, to have somebody ask you what you wanted to eat, then labor over the dish.” (*Love*, 28).

However, an easier way to find the institutionalization of oppression is through the materialization of hate in Ruby's settlement in *Paradise*. While trying to create a safe place for black people, they prompt the isolated place in which oppressions were recreated and enhanced: “They saved the clarity of their hatred for the men who had insulted them in ways too confounding for language.” (*Paradise*, 189). Their horror for whites was convulsive but abstract. Thus, in producing this scission, they do not achieve what they were pursuing, which in Schur's words (2004: 281), was the “goal of cultural transformation”. According to Gallego (2009: 52), shame, humiliation and trauma are the feelings that have created the reversal of the Order, transmitting these feelings “from generation to generation till their present time.” All these feelings are projected onto the women in the Convent, needed by Ruby in order to keep them away from their “safe” community. We are presented once again with a community based on false affinities, because they are not only excluding a part of the community, but also imposing feelings on someone else, instead of becoming mutually dependent with the “Other” created.

“Anger”, as well as its embodied form “angry” is the last feeling that I analyze in this section of the chapter. In the Facebook page, anger is presented as a paralyzing feeling, and differentiated from its embodied form, “angry”. Primarily, this distinction was the

one prompting the differentiation in the analysis, as well between abstract and embodied feelings. The embodiedness of “angry” in a female writer, as the previous analysis showed, is power-knowledge. Being angry is what allows Morrison to write. However, anger is described as something else. This type of feeling relates differently, when it comes to the male characters in Morrison’s work. For instance, Son is automatically paralyzed when he is not able to find his anger: “He stood up, searching for the anger that has shaken him so that first time and again on Christmas Day. But here in this island of crying girls and men on tippy-toe, he could not find it.” (*Tar Baby*, 220). Nevertheless, if anger was prompting before the blurring of dichotomies, now it means a social reaction and its absence as it happened on the Facebook page. In a passage in *Paradise*, we can see how this feeling is part of the motivations to create Ruby:

Steward liked that story [his ancestors fighting with white people because of a black prostitute], but it unnerved him to know it was based on the defense and prayers for a whore. He did not sympathize with the whitemen, but he could see their point, could even feel the adrenaline, imagining the fist was his own. (*Paradise*, 95).

He was not angry at the men because they were kicking a “whore.” To him, the only pleasant thing was in kicking the white men. Thus, the absence of being “angry” reinforces the binary, as well as a determined woman (as in *Tar Baby*) and their commodification. In Fraile’s words (2002: 96): “Morrison criticizes the wholesale adoption of Puritan rhetoric because it results in the inversion – not in the deconstruction – of the binary Manichean terms in which account for racism and dissemination.” Besides, it is this anger that causes the killing of the women, although it also allows Morrison to develop the after-life of the women. This after-life is produced between two different material-discursive expressions: pain and anger; the pain that the women in the Convent confront by facing their past and the anger that leads the men in Ruby to go and kill them. Contrary to the previous definition of pain, in this case, pain is a material inscription of their own bodies, externalized on the floor of the Convent, producing an intra-action between bodies, affects and space that enables this after-life<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> The rest of the feelings appearing on the Facebook page also appear frequently in the novels (except “loathe”, which can be a consequence of being a synonym for hate). Therefore, since this analysis continues in the following section, in order to shed light on the feelings that enable the feminist politics of

#### **4.5. Affecting feminist politics**

To conclude this chapter it is necessary to provide a brief definition of how feminist politics of the process would look like from a new materialist perspective. Even though an entanglement between two different apparatuses has been produced, the result is yet another one that materializes the meaning in how to articulate feminist politics. At the methodological level each novel is an apparatus. On the other hand, the methodological process that this thesis requires prompts the relation between the two realities (novels and SNS) without assuming an ontological separatedness, which is what the previous section has shown. Now, through the analysis of Facebook and the ten novels producing one material meaning, we need to (re)create the iterativeness of the apparatus and consider this relation as yet another minimal unit of analysis.

In order to better visualize these connections, I would like to present the following illustration in figure 10:

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the process, they will be referred to there. It is important to clarify now that the close reading of the novels has been unified according to certain feelings, in order to produce a coherent reading of the ten novels.



Producing a more detailed analysis of the image, it can be observed that the most important feeling is 'hope' which means that is the most significant one to politics, because it entails the conflation between past, present, and future at the individual and collective level. Contrarily to what the analysis of the codes individually showed in the novels and on the Facebook page, love does not appear in the figure. This answers to a basic patron in the visualization, love is not a code that intra-acts with other feelings textually. That is, it appears relating with traditionally negative aspects, such as hate or pain, which may be the only connections. The figure indicates that love is not a transversal feeling, but a categorizing one, that repeats hierarchical structures. Thus, it is not highlighted in the figure. Its invisibility in the figure reinforces precisely its visibility everywhere else. Thus, love automatically becomes part of the exteriority within the entanglement of apparatuses. It is not an affect invoking a feminist politics of the process. Nevertheless, being part of the exteriority within means that, in future re-workings, it will materialize acts of resistance; for instance, *Home* ends with Cee's personal pursuit of what she would love, or why *Jazz* begins with a search for the meaning of love.

Continuing with the analysis that the program has offered, it is now time to observe what kind of relations are attached to the code referred to as "collective politics." It is paired with codes such as "angry," "worry," "pain," "hate," and the bigger one, "hope." Later on, "happiness," and "sadness" do appear, as well, but with a lower relevance. Clearly, we can see which of those feelings are prompting collective politics, through all the different processes already explained so far. Happiness and sadness, on the contrary, present a smaller role in the forces captured by the figure, because these two would prevent the creation of affinities. There is no need to create oppositional logics because what we need is to contextualize our processual politics. Therefore, the hate that the community has suffered from the past, the pain that different individuals have overcome, their angry embodiment, as well as their worries, maintain them together with hope, which is clearly the goal because it is the bigger one. Being "happy" is not a desired goal in the community precisely because of the historization of meaning that it creates. Unavoidably, the community has agreed that happy and happiness are too closely related to neo-liberal practices and, therefore, social justice cannot be entangled with this force, because it recreates asymmetrical powers. On the other hand, hope has

proved itself as self-transforming past, present and future and, as a result, engages with subjects in a permanent movement and always dynamic way, becoming active agents in the process during the relations that did not occur before. That is why Ruby's community fails, because their goal was cultural transformation based upon 'anger', 'sorrow', and many other negative feelings but they do not hold any kind of hope. Then, if materiality is preferred as a representative of one part of the community, if the feelings chosen represent only a part of the community, the scission between object and representation is enhanced and a feminist politics necessarily paralysed.

On the other hand, the relations under the label "individual strategies" are also "hope," "fear," "anger," "sorrow," and "love" (the later one in a much smaller size). Fear, anger, and sorrow are what leads them to try to overcome their personal situation. On the contrary, and as it is explained below, subjects always need to have a motivation, that is the affective force intr-acting between them, that produces the relationality with other subjects. This motivation is their hope again, because it is the only feeling that combines past, present, and future and (as it was explained at the beginning of the chapter) only by trespassing this threshold might we argue for a "justice-to-come" (Barad, 2010).

Using the image above to explain the analysis, differences are presented as major regarding the level at which politics is being performed. That is, different processes can be appreciated depending on the collectiveness or individuality in which certain affects are being materialized. In other words, are subjects' acts of resistance performed at the level of the individual, that is for their own self-becoming? Or are their acts mutually dependant on several relations, creating global practices, at the level of the community? Feminist politics has always argued that the personal is political. Even though it continues to be so, feelings affect differently, depending on the type of relations held, and it is through relations that agency is performed. Therefore, even though subjects are important, they only partake in the act of resistance. The following passage from *The Bluest Eye* can serve as an example of this differentiation found in the analysis:

We [Claudia and her sister] hurried back home to sit under the lilac bushes on the side of the house. We always did our Candy Dance there so Rosemayr could see us and get

jealous. The Candy Dance was a humming, skipping, foot-tapping, eating, smacking combination that overtook us when we had sweets. (*Bluest Eye*, 59).

The two sisters are trying to bother their white neighbor. This is their own particular moment in which they enhance their powerful “movement”: the dancing that produces the particular desired reactions. However, individual practices more often than not remain largely and materially invisible insofar as they do not reach the community and, frequently, have unwanted consequences. In this case, wanting to make the “other” jealous and achieving it, leads the affect relating these particular subjects to a dangerous practice of fulfillment. As Colman (2010) alerts, this is a capitalist practice that moves away from a feminist practice. Thus, the embodiment of jealousy, or trying to prove a cause-effect reaction of that type in someone else is not a desired goal, for feminist politics.

This individual strategy can be compared with the following one, in the novel *Sula*, when Sula is defending Nel from the boys trying to hurt her: “She slashed off only the tip of her finger. The four boys stared open-mouthed at the wound and the scrap of flesh [...]. Sula raised her eyes to them. Her voice was quiet. ‘If I can do that to myself, what you suppose I’ll do to you?’” (*Sula*, 55) Sula here is performing an act of self-determination on behalf of the entire community. This one is helping her gain her own self-respect, and because of this, she is growing and finding her way out of oppression. Furthermore, this also implies that the boys will leave her and her friend alone. Thus, she is aiming to free her friend and herself of harassment. Therefore, by localizing this act, she is making it global to the entire community, because this will infer changes in the way the boys saw the encounter, and how they will transmit their experience. The message is clear: we are also dangerous, so leave us alone. If you are frightened, you will look away, so she is prompting a “frightening feeling” that is not only part of the embodied experience of the boys, but part of the girls’ experiences, in a reciprocal way. Everyone was frightened at that precise moment, which linked experiences together, and subjects developed within a situated context.

Thus, having distinguished these two different political articulations, I provide an affective cartography, that is, a description of the different feelings articulating the performative net in which these two strategical positions are developed. In the context

presented by Toni Morrison in her novels, she defends that knowing what it is to be a woman already implies knowing what it is to be a man (as can be seen on the Facebook page). However, this becomes very problematic because, as the novels show, the ontological referent is oppressive. In *A Mercy* (89), we can find a definition of what is a man by a man (“[Jacob]: What a man leaves behind is what a man is”) and a woman (“[Rebekka]: Jacob, a man is only his reputation). For men, being a man implies having property, it is a neo-liberal practice in which women become commodities, no matter if they are black or white (because, in this case, it is a white couple speaking about it, although we have seen the same examples with black couples). For a woman, it is a social convention, a cultural discourse in which the definition is provided conventionally by others. Therefore, if we take those definitions relationally, we find that, as a result, a woman is a material commodification that is circulated, according to certain social conventions. Women are oppressed, materially and discursively speaking, even though this is not new as the different periods in Morrison’s novels show, creating affective alliances that shed light on the processes. This is why we have explored feelings, in order to break through these two conventions and find what van der Tuin and Dolphijn (2013) referred to in the quote used at the beginning of the present chapter: “the sum of trajectories away from the centre of power.” That is the definition of woman, and the core of a new materialist feminist politics.

I have provided an analysis of how different feelings oppress women and men (and make subjects to become oppressors). At the individual level, one of the things that has been most reinforced in Morrison’s novels is the need to know, in order to empower oneself. In *Paradise*, women are accused continually of not knowing enough, or not understanding; in *Home* Cee suffers from all the atrocities caused by the white doctor, because she did not know where she was working nor for what purpose; in *A Mercy* Florens did not know that she was enslaving herself by loving the Blacksmith; and so forth. Thus, knowing becomes an “apparatus”, insofar as it creates material and meaningful boundaries<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> This argument also serves, at the same time, to support the feminist idea that theory is always political and there is not, nor should there be, a scission between theory and politics. Theorizing is always political because knowing is always political.

According to Morrison, there was a need to reflect upon a very concrete fact: “Somebody was hiding something and by somebody, I mean the narrative of the country, which was so aggressively happy.” (Morrison, 2014). That is to say, happiness is an affective bond that unites happy subjects under an invisible net of conformity, that allowing the invisibilization of the patterns that keep the established Order. As was explained before, love is closely connected with this happiness, thereby turning into two negative aspects that do not connect subjects. They do not create affinities that disrupt politically. In addition, being happy (which more often than not implies lacking knowledge) prevents subjects from feeling “anger”: “Anger wasn’t available to her – she [Cee] had been so stupid, so eager to please.” (*Home*, 128). Therefore, if anger is not available to everyone, it cannot be considered an affinity either. On the Facebook page, anger was not considered a positive feeling because it paralyzed social change instead of promoting it. Florens, in *A Mercy*, becomes aggressive with a kid and enslaved by her loved one out of this same feeling. Thus, anger by itself becomes a paralyzing feeling insomuch as it cannot be the boundary between subjects. Nevertheless, as presented on the page, it can be part of an individual strategy. “Angry” subjects initiate movements and initiate personal acts of resistance, as is the writer’s case.

Following the epistemological and methodological framework, as done in the previous chapter, it is important to conclude with how *new materialist feminist politics becomes an apparatus of knowledge production*. Thus, following Barad’s six main points (2007: 146), we can state the following:

1. They are specific material-discursive practices. Politics has been presented as the processual performance of affects in a hybrid context between SNS and literature.
2. They produce differences that matter. Feelings affect differently, depending on the political strategies used. At an individual level, certain feelings empower women differently from men; the same as certain feelings prompt a collective change, while some others remain largely at an individual level.
3. They produce material configuration/dynamic reconfigurations of the world. New materialist feminist politics has articulated a historical approach in which a linear

conceptualization of time has been discarded. On the contrary, it has been shown how past, present and future combine to avoid denying any component of this cyclical time. Furthermore, it has shifted the onto-epistemological reference, by focusing on processes instead of results.

4. Apparatuses are phenomena. New materialist feminist politics is a phenomenon itself because it anticipates a referential shift. Besides, as shown, it is compounded by the entanglement of two differing apparatuses: SNS and literature. Affects have become the intra-actions within the entanglement between SNS and literature. In addition, the dynamic nature of the concept itself, as well as its context, has implied a shift from results to processes.

5. They are open-ended practices. Albeit multiply related, subjects have been described within a network of connections that included other subjects, affects, literary and digital contexts and contemporary society. The processual nature of this particular concept is rendered to open practices, as love as the exteriority within has demonstrated. However, it is not relative, in the sense that different strategies have been identified.

6. They reconfigure space and time. Digital, analog and literary contexts become mutually dependent, in order to create situatedness for the phenomenon, and the subjects within it, self-becoming. Regarding time, Morrison is denouncing clearly throughout a cyclical expression of time how there is a need for an intervention in the process, in order to avoid repeating the same history once and again. Cyclical time serves as a double metaphor because, discursively speaking, it reinforces the differences that African American culture has with the white culture in the United States. Materially speaking, it also serves to reinforce timeless oppressions and the need to look for the processes that are building them, in order to alter their results.

The material of feelings is the enactment of politics. For instance, pain cannot be silenced under angry or sad ghosts, “thick loves” or social hatred; it represses memories that need to become visible. Women need to create their alliances in order to bring up pain and then, and only then, confront it. Morrison shows what Felicity Colman (2008: 220) would describe as the process by which “[m]emory is a powerful force for the growth and dispersal of communities, [...] However, the important question is “Whose

memory is that cultures draw upon for elements of their material functionality?” (ibid.) By answering this question we find the precise location of the political within the literary context, this being the precise political message that is found not only in *Beloved* but in all of Morrison’s novels.

#### 4.6. Conclusions

This level of analysis showed the relation between novels and SNS by performing the iterativeness of the Baradian apparatus. Echoing Ahmed’s words (1998: 113), in this chapter, I have attempted at detecting “[t]he contextualization of the process in which bodies become intelligible [that] opens out the pragmatic constraints to subjects as constitutive of the social itself.” I have argued that a politics of recognition would entail not so much radical identification but affects and affinities.

Barad defines politics, which in this chapter has been considered a synonym for a spatial empowerment of determined subjects within a temporal context, as those “[e]xclusions [that] constitute an open space of agency; they are the changing conditions of possibility of changing possibilities.” (Barad, 2007: 179). Thus, it is in what is left outside of the analysis that the condition for change is produced, as the close reading of each novel and the analysis presented here has shown. Based upon relations, Morrison’s texts become materially alive in order to be transformative with/to society, which is one of the objectives of feminism, as a whole. The binary opposition between men and women becomes blurred, in order to create a single “One” holding the disruption of the patriarchal order. The relation becomes the force, instead of female or male subjects.

In order to conclude the analysis of the different levels of the proposed phenomenon it is necessary to go to the link between SNS and literature, which is a communicative process. Following the *affective* line of this thesis, communication can only be based upon an affective language that alters the concepts of gender and politics but also the very nature of language itself.

## **Chapter 5. Digitally engaging the literary: a new materialist conception of literature.**

*I propose a multiplicity of materialisms, and the task of new materialism is to address how to think materialisms in a multiplicity in such a methodological way that enables a grounded analysis of contemporary culture.*

Jussi Parikka, 2012

### **5.1. Introduction**

According to Gillian Rose (1998: 224), already in the nineties, issues concerning the accessibility to technology mattered, as much as “the social site in which that technology is deployed and the different aspects of the cultural capital created there.” In addition, this cultural capital is not only technological development but also “social sites and how ideas are shared in them.” (ibid). Thus, technology may indeed infer unequal structures of power, in which social oppressions are created and reinforced. Facebook, as a social site created to hegemonize political and economical practices establishes and re-establishes a different cultural capital as a “social site”, in this particular connection between Literature and technology. This *intra-action* has proven how changes in gender (and race) and feminist politics are provoked. However, remaining questions require attention: how do we know what we know? And, more importantly, how does this knowledge alter simultaneously the way in which the Literary Object is conceived? And finally, how does the relationship between literature and technology reshape SNS? In this chapter, I aim at addressing the main objective of the thesis by arguing that literature and technology undo each other through their relationship, a relationship which, thus, alters not only the literary referents but also the concept of communication itself.

First, I will produce a cartographical approach to the concept of communication touching upon the three different pillars that build this thesis, in order to be able to inform the conceptualization of the analysis. I will then provide an analysis of the

materialization of communication through the entire Facebook page in order to include the readers of the novels in this open space of possibilities created throughout the open endings of the novels and the multiplicity of interpretations by the readers. I will focus especially on the topics that relate affects and communicative practices, whether literary or technological. That is, I will conduct a diffractive reading between the results produced in chapter three and four.

## **5.2. Affecting communication through social networking sites.**

This section of the chapter deals with the relationship between communication and social networking sites, specifically relating to Facebook. Social Networking Sites (SNS) produce relations between different individuals by means of affinities (Sáinz, 2013). Thus, in communicative terms, it could be said that SNS enable the embodiment of communication across differing spaces and times, by offering a dynamic relationship between both. Communication in SNS is transforming the way in which individuals relate as has been specified on many different occasions (section 5.2.1.); yet, it also has altered the way in which the digital is conceived (section 5.2.2.). Taking into account that context always matters as an active part of the process, and exploring the differing possibilities that *affecting communication* offers, an understanding of digital platforms studied in this thesis and the different relationship between individuals remains paramount. Although this concept will be reconfigured during this chapter, affecting communication refers to the possibility of understanding communication affectively. In other words, communication is seen as a capturing force in which different elements relate and become indivisible. It can be considered a dynamic conceptualization, especially a literary one, in which active agents partake in creating spaces for possibilities of social change.

### *5.2.1. Passing through Facebook: neither windows, nor walls.*

Throughout this thesis, I have explored how SNS imply differences in the ways we conceive time, space, agency and relationships (in terms of gendered and raced subjects affectively relating). In this section, a special focus is placed on the materiality of Facebook, in order to understand its active role. SNSs provide a situated context in which communication is produced within a continuum between the physical and the virtual context of literary production. Focusing on this continuum necessarily requires understanding the screen as a door and not a window, from which to look outside or a wall that protects you from others. It is a passing mechanism within what Mieke Bal (2003) considers high culture, namely literature, and low culture, social media, merge to stress horizontal communication between authors and readers. However, let us move on to the specific case of Facebook and the differing conceptualization needed in this thesis so that we can understand the materialization of context and its importance in this concrete *phenomenon*.

Here, I argue that Facebook can be considered a theoretical laboratory for Morrison, where she can communicate with her readers in order to develop new creations of her work. This presents a link between theory and empirical data that must be explained through this complementary relationship. As Barad (2007: 30) claims,

if the goal is to think the social and the natural together, to take account of *how* both factors matter (not simply to recognize that they both do matter), then we need a method for theorizing the relationship between ‘the natural’ and ‘the social’ together without defining one against the other or holding either nature or culture as the fixed referent for understanding the other.

I dispute that Facebook is such a place where nature and culture join together without presupposing differences between them. When participating in this kind of communication – shared in SNS -, the participants transform their bodies, in order to intra-act with computers and to create relating selves intra-acting with each other. At the same time, technology and the different practices needed to create SNS are embedded in the material of the technological apparatuses that also require certain cultural bonds between the different participants of the Facebook community.

Taking into account that one of the requirements for understanding Morrison’s work is the active participation of the reader (Morrison, 1992), Facebook provides this *agential*

(Barad, 2001, 2003, 2007) context in which readers intra-act simultaneously, in order to participate with the author to infer a change in unequal structures of power in contemporary society. At the same time, Facebook's own physicality and structure provide a space for possibilities that determines the literary meanings conveyed in a certain way, since we cannot avoid the limits that this site has (the physical distribution of the news, the requirements to "friend" people, the language with which this Facebook page is constructed). These limits are also an active part mattering in the research and creating boundaries that enact literary and political meaning.

Another specific characteristic of the materiality of the Facebook page is its language, which moves beyond the dichotomy between the spoken and the written word. The posts in Facebook are careful quotes coming from an extract of a book, but some of the responding comments do not have such a careful spelling and construction – albeit some others do preserve careful writing and do not come from the author. In addition, they present characteristics from the spoken language and more often than not present an affective nature by which certain feelings structure the discourses. The use of "three dots", different emoticons, certain words in between asterisks to express a facial feeling (mostly), which try to create a "face-to-face interaction proper of the spoken language" (Dijk, 1998: 4). Another resource very frequent in this page is directing the comment to someone else with the symbol of @, which in English means "at". The following quote is an example of these elements, as well as the use of \*sighs\*, which aims at expressing not only a feeling but also a body gesture, a relief.

[Abigail Leith Luxford](#) My god, those words pierce my heart straight through.....extraordinary writing in that book, heartbreaking, depthless, haunting.....

[June 30, 2011 at 3:15pm](#) · [Like](#) · [2](#)

[Kern Alleyne](#) \*sighs\* so genuine and hearted mmm [August 4, 2011 at 10:28pm](#)

[Zig Zag Claybourne](#) @Yolanda, some things are better kept from Hollywood. [June 30, 2011 at 3:25pm](#) · [Like](#) · [8](#)<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> These quotes belong to one of the entries provoked by one sentence from Morrison's book *Song of Solomon*: "Gimme hate, Lord," he whimpered. "I'll take hate any day. But don't give me love. I can't take no more love, Lord. I can't carry it...It's too heavy. Jesus, you know, You know all about it. Ain't it heavy? Jesus? Ain't love heavy?"

Conversational dialogues are also enhanced, such as the one produced between Morrison and other public figures (like the interview with Angela Davis, or public speeches motivating the audience, like the one in Rutgers present in debates titled “happiness” and “social justice”, from chapter three). Thus, this community has its own language structure in between spoken and written language that, at the same time, reinforces the page own life and the dynamicity of the language created there. They speak *writingly*. It has the properties of the “everyday talk”, that is to say “pauses, errors, repairs, false starts, repetitions, overlaps, etc.” (Dijk, 1998: 4) All in all, this Facebook page allows the study of discourse as action (Dijk 1998). That is to say, Facebook allows the study of discourse as always material, social and alive. With this, communication turns into a material constraint that permeates the life conditions of the participating individuals, and a differing language is enhanced as an intra-action for these conditions. By conditions of life I am referring to the affective affinities that bound these individuals together, this particular language being a material engagement of these *differing affinities* bounding individuals.

### 5.2.2. Digitalizing new materialism.

This section adds another dimension as to why it is important to consider new materialism in this thesis, as well as the importance of considering the “non-human” dimension, always regarded as *the* property that explains the essence of human nature. Connecting technology, or in this case, the mediascape with new materialism is not something new. Crucial for this relationship is the work of Jussi Parikka (2012: 95-6): “New materialism is already present in the way technical media transmits and processes ‘culture’, and engages in its own version of the continuum of *natureculture* (to use Donna Haraway’s term) on in this case, *medianatures*” (his emphasis).

However, this revival of the materiality of “medianatures” has not always been present in all the different academic circles, except from the art field, in which virtuality implied within technology rendered a conceptualization of matter as “mere inert receptacle” (Alsina, 2012). This responds clearly to a conceptualization of language as always active, insofar as it was the mediator between “reality” and “representation.” (Barad,

2007). This said, the previous section showed how language was obviously part of the communicative process, as well as a differing component, since it blurs the lines between the spoken and written language, but it is not all that partakes the object of study here. Information has always implied a strong reliance on language as the medium. This would automatically lead a technology of information and communication such as SNS to be constructed purely throughout linguistic discourses. However, this would again deny material aspects of technology that are not always framed by linguistic discourses, but they are *entangling* with them. Jamie Allan (2012: 69) warns that “[o]ur digital, networked age hides from us (in plain sight) the concrete, historical and affective correspondences between matter and information, object and thought, that which is present and that which re-presents.”

The theory of new materialism has also meant an engagement of these precise material-discursive practices in technologies of information and communication, not only in art studies (Alsina, 2012; Allan, 2012) but also in media studies in general (Parikka, 2012). Furthermore, this theory has also turned to a revival of feelings as a possible way to open up the possibilities that bring a conceptualization of communication beyond the symbolic (Gumtau, 2012). However, despite the effort to introduce feelings as part of individual experiences creating material bonds between physicality and virtuality that do not dismiss the “real” (or what I would refer to as the primacy of the virtual above the physical) some of these approaches still rely heavily on “emotion”, as a category (*ibid.*).

Throughout the review, yet another theoretical debate has been avoided for reasons of space – namely, emotions vs. affects. On the contrary, few words are necessary here, in order to build the boundaries between matter and language created through affects and not emotions. An emotion, as a category *of* the individual (Illouz, 2009), pertains to the androcentric terrain *of* the individuals. In this thesis, a resonant concept has permeated its theoretical and analytical stance that is affinities, and because of that, affects. Affects are understood as the analytical intra-actions creating the boundaries between humans and non-humans (SNS are created within this affinities theoretically and materially speaking); matter and discourse (they belong to the material experience of the individual as much as they create social discourses that enable feminist new materialist politics of

affinities); as well they have enabled the possibility of thinking through one another the categories of gender and race without *intersecting* them, but *intraacting* them. Thus, turning back again to a conceptualization of the digital in its relation with the humanities, as Parikka (2012) claims, can be retrieved from past literature. However, he finds politics missing in the theories of the “materialities of technologies” and I argue that new materialism and affective processes enable that missing point in the literary communicative process. Thus, thanks to the intra-action between literature and SNS, a (re)configuration of technology as ‘political’ is enabled and situated in the works of Toni Morrison and her official Facebook page, demonstrating that literature and SNS are constantly undoing and doing each other.

### **5.3. Feminist digital communication: encountering politics**

Although I have reviewed the birth of a cyber-spaced feminist politics in the 1990s (Haraway, 1991) in the theoretical chapter of this thesis, further reflection is needed here. When referring to the political: do we mean representational politics and ethical matters, including one’s own ideology, or the theorizing of the concept? Cyberfeminism provided a contesting digital platform in which the three aspects of politics mentioned in the question were part of the agenda. However, things become more complicated when a revival of the agential nature of the non-human is pursued. Ironically, theories regarding technologies tend to *offer* agency to overcome this problem. Nevertheless, giving agency is attempting to give voice to the subaltern (in Spivak’s words), something from which this thesis has tried to distance itself from the beginning, since it recreates paradoxes of One/Other.

As a possible solution, I argue that new materialism allows thinking of the technological as already political and therefore, conceiving politics as the embodiment of material changes that only agentic humans and non-humans can enable, when relating together as *relata* and *not relations* (in Barad’s terms). Parikka (2012: 96) explains that one possible way to approach a new materialist analysis that contemplates the material (in

contrast to a mediatic nature) of technologies is through “relations of sensations” and “cultural practices”. I argue that focusing on communication through relating feelings and cultural practices, such as literature is precisely this. As stated at the beginning, communication is not the medium by which individuals relate. Nor are SNS merely digital containers in which they isolate themselves or look peacefully to the exterior. Facebook turns itself into a material space in which a differing literary communication is produced, affecting the way gender and feminist politics are conceived. In the next section, it is important to understand the relationship between new materialist communication and feminism. Again, the effects of literary communication that I explore in this thesis are detected at the very moment in which the Literary Object is not defined by the academic expert but by the intra-action in which readers partake in equal terms.

In the first chapter, I explained how feminism has made use of the digital context in many different forms, in order to disseminate (Fotopoulou, 2012; 2013) and produce feminist politics (Plant, 1997; Haraway, 1991). However, a different approach is also recently being configured in order to understand the relationship between feminism and the digital via new materialism itself. Recently, Jorgen Skageby (2013) has started to conceptualize a differing notion of the digital platform that moved away from a traditional notion of such sites as “mediators”. Similarly to this thesis, she draws upon Barad’s conceptualizations of intra-action, apparatuses and phenomena in order to see

digital media as apparatuses that perform agential cuts [and] help us to model how certain interfaces produce the (illusion of the) informed, sovereign and empowered subject as well as an exploited, mapped and programmed aggregate of individuals. (Skageby, 2013: 8).

Drawing upon the conceptualization of the “giff”, she provides the basis for understanding SNSs as political platforms in a new materialist way. Even though she does not specify which kind of digital sites she is referring to, it is important to notice how both material meanings – that is, the empowering and the neo-liberal one – are present in her conceptualization of the digital. Besides, through her Baradian analysis, she elaborates how a representationalist practice based on mediation does not work, in order to account for the potentialities that a union of feminism and digital practices

entail in this research, in particular. As she states, “[t]he processual power of (computational) media is not restricted – rather it leaks across boundaries.” (ibid.). In her article, she establishes three important concepts, in order to create what she calls “a Socio-material Performativity”: “actualization,” “agency” and “resignification.” However, as she later specifies, “it needs to be put to empirical testing to prove its analytical strengths” (ibid, 14).

Barad’s approximation is extremely important in order to understand the type of object of research being created in this thesis, since digitality is not a mediator. However, it has not yet been proven, empirically speaking, and the concepts being built here are gender, politics and communication which slightly differ in performative terms. Besides, while here affects are the *intra-actions* permeating the empirical base of the thesis, in her approach we find the “gift” as a possible intra-action. Thus, a different approach is needed that concerns SNSs as empirical sites entangling with a new materialist theory.

Niels van Doorn (2011: 534) defines gender and sexuality as “partly ‘virtual’” in a “participatory web culture” (like Facebook): “they are not concrete, materially existing entities but rather constitute a variety of events, affects, ideals and regulatory norms that are repeatedly *actualized* in material-discursive practices.” I believe that the previous analysis of gender has precisely touched upon these concrete facts and reveals itself the necessity to always situate gender in a particular context, in order to be able to provide definitions and patterns of visibility. In this sense, van Doorn distinguishes his notion of gender in these “hybrid assemblages”, because they “produce digital configurations of embodied gender and sexuality that qualitatively differ from actualizations in physical space, while at the same time retaining an intimate relationship to one another.” (ibid, 535). Thus, implicitly, there is an argument to rethink gender while such a hybrid as social networking sites is implied. Explained in chapter three, now I turn back briefly to it to explore the “qualitative leap” (van der Tuin, 2011a) produced: not only does gender alter the way this communication develops, but also the nature of this communication is develops a difference in the way we conceive gender.

At the same time, following van Doorn’s approach, he carefully specifies that it is not enough to disentangle the “physical” notion of gender from the “virtual one”, in order to

account for subversive politics. (In this sense, the first level of analysis was helping to re-create the physical within the technological material meaning of Facebook). This, at the same time, implies yet another re-working of the approach to politics followed in the second level. He argues for a “reterritorialization” of the digital space, in order to acquire a “distributed agency” (ibid, 536). However, this goes beyond the scope of this thesis, since the interest resides on how these two concepts inform and are re-worked by the literary communicative process but this thesis does not pursue a differing notion of agency *per se*. This precisely contributes to the notion of intra-action that will be further explained in the next chapter, as they are constraining but not deterministic. The intra-action produced here provokes an “exteriority within” (Barad, 2001; 2007) that leaves this precise concept outside of the equation for future re-workings which, of course, does not imply that it is not included in the object of research.

Technological contexts such as SNS or other digital platforms, in which different participants throw around their opinions regarding socio-political problems (such as Twitter, Blogs, etc.), are a good context for political agitation. Feminism, of course, is not excluded from these “virtual” platforms. As Thiele (2014) explains, “feminists contest the categories themselves, and thus gain new space for socio-political negotiations.” In line with many other feminist researchers, also in the field of STS (McNeil & Robert, 2011), this research intends to focus on the possibility of engaging with a traditional oppressed subject of research (in this case, black females), without victimizing them (Benhabib, 1987) or privileging their perspective (Harding, 1986).

#### **5.4. Literary communication: *en-mousing* the pen.**

Focusing on communication in Literature implies the prioritization of one central aspect: the reading process, ie. the way author and reader relate to each other. As specified in the theoretical chapter of this thesis, this relationship has been based on hierarchical positions in which either the author and/or the text or the reader were acknowledged as the origin of communication, hence the focus of the literary object. In chapter two,

“close reading” (Lukic and Sánchez, 2011) was described as the most important literary method in order to inform on these relations. Close reading enables an analysis that can be applied not only when focusing on parts of the communicative process but, most importantly, also on the whole communicative process (as this thesis argues).

The process of reading, as well as its methodological aspect, has always been interesting regarding the literary of literature *per se*. However, sometimes it has been identified as the ontological split between the text and the reader, when it was conceived as the opposite one. In criticizing Robert Scholes, Phelan warns literary academics that producing this very onto-methodological split we are failing the nature of the reading process. Phelan (1997: 277) states that the process of interpretation involved in reading “is to thematize, and to thematize is to divide the text into a series of repetitions and oppositions and to link these repetitions and oppositions to cultural codes.” This is an interpretative process that links the text with its cultural (therefore also material) boundaries, and, at the moment that we consider interpretation as a binary movement between the reader and the author, “a divorce between reading and interpretation” (ibid) is produced. On the contrary, for Phelan the act of reading is a political act itself, in which much more than the text and its readability is involved. He argues that a potential “responsibility” (in the sense of being able to respond as Haraway and Barad claim) is enacted in the reading process through writer and reader. Thus, ethics (Barad, 2010) permeates the reading process. However, his ultimate point of departure is the reader (Phelan, 1997: 228), and precisely by hierarchically distributing the responsibility of the literary object just in the reader, new structures of power that neglect the author, the context of the text, and the text itself are re-built.

The entanglements produced in the area of digital humanities also focus on close reading as a primordial aspect of Literature (Ciccoricco, 2012). However, David Ciccoricco limits the analysis on one aspect of the communicative process that is the text. Thus, enabling close reading as a method, in order to closely read a digital text forms part of his main point of departure. As shown in this thesis, the digital in literature is found within literature as intra-acting. Thus, close readings of digital texts are not produced but they produce digitally guides for traditional texts. As stated in the theoretical part of this thesis, the reader has also been the focus of the so-called digital

humanities in moves such as fun fiction, participatory readings, etc. Nevertheless, on these occasions, it can also be observed that the focus resides entirely on the reader, while omitting the “original” text in order to highlight the new productions of the readers. Thus, a teleological move appears at the forefront. This move stresses, once again, the production in contemporary time of something that (as shown in the third chapter) implies a de-historization of gender, de-politicizing the term and invisibilizing it.

A new materialist account of communication that breaks through the scissions automatically implied in the relations between readers, context, texts and authors needs to be cartographically drawn. That is to say, if feminist literature aims at producing visible changes while focusing on processes, it is necessary to overview past and present moves that challenge the very conditions of the literary object *per se*. Thus, relying on new materialism and a diffractive methodology, a literary review of the stake of the debates in literature can be produced, in order to configure a *differing* object that does not assume ontological divisions. Communication in literature becomes a matter of close readings in the digital (Ciccoroco, 2012), albeit relating with the “traditional” literature (by exploring Toni Morrison and Facebook). It implies a focus on a collective reading of the novel (McHenry, 2002), albeit produced in a very heterogeneous community affectively related. It also must focus on the media as within everyday practices that alter our conceptions of gender and politics (Parikka, 2012; van Doorn, 2011), albeit literary related. In other words, it implies a revision of literature’s aim as a new materialist process in which readers, authors, context (*spacetime*), and texts are *materially engaging through diffracting discourses*, entangled discourses and, at the same time, produce *differences that matter* on two key aspects of feminist theory: gender and politics.

As was observed in chapter four, a relation between literature and SNSs would be beneficial for literature, insofar as it helps to disambiguate certain aspects that remain blurred in the literary products, novels, because of their internal dis-location of space and time. In this sense, SNS offer a creative alternative in order to produce collective readings of specific novels dis-locating times and spaces. As an empirical unit, these *intra-relations* are produced, once again, via affects. In fact, as described in the analysis,

affects are *relata* that produce indivisible bonds in all these participants of the communicative process of literature. Pursuing literary communicative processes is a plea for the materiality of language. It is a “material-discursive” practice (Haraway, 1988; Barad, 2007).

### **5.5. Communication matters: processing language**

The last step of the analysis implies a (re)working concepts from the first and second level of analysis. That is, diffractively speaking, I have been engaging with aspects of the communicative process and have used Facebook and Toni Morrison as relating contexts in this thesis. Part of the analysis of these two elements can be observed in the methodological section, “selecting the participants.” My reasons for having chosen Facebook and Morrison’s works belong to the material constraints of the communicative process. However, a final step is needed to help us move beyond an androcentric notion of language within communication. In this section, I engage in this process with the materiality of language, which methodologically speaking, entails the pursuit of affective performances of language relating both digital platforms and traditional literature, by coming back to the codes identified previously as pertaining to language. Likewise, communication becomes an affective discursive intra-action differing gender and politics from a feminist new materialist perspective.

Given that this part of the analysis engages with the main objective of the thesis, I will hereby outline the differing properties that have been acquired, after a diffractive reading of both analyses, regarding the conceptualization of language as intra-action. Communication has been explored as an intra-action that cuts SNS and Literature together apart from each other; given that this last aspect is the main objective of this thesis. At this precise moment of the analysis, “gender” and “politics” become the “agencies of observation” for the object in question (literary communication), as they have inferred changes in the way this object has been analyzed. On the other hand, it goes without saying that it is precisely this specific empirical context that has determined the concepts of gender and politics in this thesis. Likewise, communication

has also been altered in a very substantial way via a differing concept of language that has affected and was affected in the two dimensions explored so far. Thus, before analyzing the patterns that differentiate the communicative process between literature and SNS, it is necessary to distinguish different properties of language that have appeared in the other levels, by re-working the apparatuses yet again from a different angle.

I have therefore divided those properties into six different elements in order to clarify the analysis, albeit all of them are mutually dependant. Briefly, they are grammar, the intra-action between reading and writing, otherness, multiplicity, literary and digital truths, the material of language and the political. These properties build the basis for understanding the differing communicative patterns in the next section:

#### 1. Grammar matters: intra-acting form and content.

Talking about language always implies talking about grammar<sup>67</sup>. However, this does not mean that everything can be explained through grammar or that grammar determines unidirectionally the very nature of matter. The first level of analysis showed two examples of this idea: first, the distinction between adjectives and nouns and second, the modality of the sentence (as the conditional one). An example of this is the distinction between anger and angry or the use of the conditional “if” with the description of happiness. While the second one has been explained already in chapter three, the first one needs further revision. The form of the concepts (whether abstract or embodied) is differing matters of language, since they tend to homogenize predetermined oppressive regimes. For instance, adjectives are properties of subjects and, at the same time, become part of an assumed nature of the subject (whether it is human or non-human). Take, for instance, the relationship between lover and loved one; both adjectives relate to love. On this occasion, the subject affected/affecting becomes automatically oppressor and oppressed at the same time. Besides, since it is a mutually dependent feeling (there is no lover without a loved one), they become oppressor by imposition while oppressed by the same system (as we saw with the trap in *Tar Baby*).

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<sup>67</sup> See for example Derrida and his grammatology (Derrida, 1997) or Kirby and her reading of Saussure (Kirby, 1997).

The noun is as oppressing as the adjective: “*People with no imagination feed it with sex – the clown of love. They don’t know the real kinds, the better kinds, where losses are cut and everybody benefits. It takes a certain intelligence to love like that – softly, without props.*” ([emphasis in the original] *Love*, 63). The relationship between lover and beloved is always hierarchical power: “Indeed, the beloved is bereft: ‘shorn’, ‘frozen,’ and ‘neutralized.’ The power, then, rests with the lover, who is active, choosing the expression of love.” (Wardi, 2007: 202). The feeling itself, as a noun, is also a very exclusive one since it tends to universalize its meaning excluding those who do not identify with it. Therefore, it is not an affinity but an identity. It is not an affect but an inter-action.

Nevertheless, by expressing these distinctions between adjectives and nouns, I am not implying that every adjective and every noun is equally oppressing or liberating depending on its grammatical form. As shown in the analysis, it is not a straightforward relationship. Wardi (2007) goes a step further and establishes a difference between nouns and verbs, which is also a very interesting one and refers to love as a verb (a doing) instead of as a noun. Even though I strongly agree with the need to multiply the references to the words appearing in the explored realities, making a stronger point in this distinction will lead to the textual analysis. I distinguish between these two because the differences were outstanding in the Facebook community, and in the novels. Following Wardi (ibid), the main distinction here was, which linguistic expressions referred to doings and which ones referred to physical and emotional states. To me, this is a matter of distinguishing between universalism and embodied experiences.

2. Intra-acting reading and writing, becoming political:

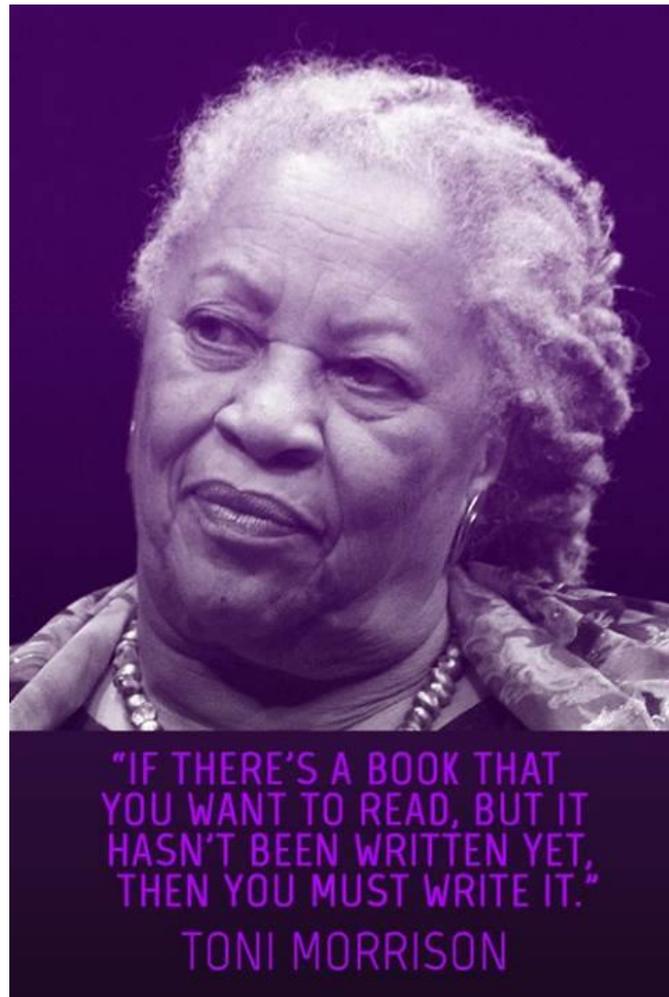


Figure 11: Facebook image

The image in figure 11 has been taken from the Facebook page. It has 3162 likes (which is part of the differing language mentioned in section 5.2.1), it has been shared on people's walls 1160 times and replied by 76 people. Thus, it is a very popular entry entitled "More quotations that will inspire you to write", with a link to the webpage. One of the followers responds with the following: "I've heard many artists of various media express this sentiment, that her work is birthing that which they feel needs to live rather than building something they invented in their imaginations." Even though the reader's response follows an androcentric pattern, in which the artist is the beginning of everything, a closer reading needs to be carried out. Grosz (1995) maintains that the body becomes the socio-political threshold in which matter and discourse merge. Then, moving beyond an androcentric view of the artist, we can anticipate the political view in the relationship between reading and writing. As an example, and in the same entry, the following comment can be observed: "So true, we all have a story to tell." By relating the artist, the Facebook page, the novels and the individual experiences of each

participant on the Facebook page, the birth of a collective strategy for social movement is being produced. The body of the artist becomes this political threshold in which many different intra-actions relate. Thus, it is important to consider the writer's body as a cartography of intra-actions and not as a human body with absolute agency.

Examples of this process are also found in the novels. The end of *Jazz*, for instance, pushes the reader to reflect upon his or her hands. It implies that once he/she has read the book, language, the bird<sup>68</sup>, the power is in their hands, to let them act as they will. It is a material bound that runs literature into politics in a significant way. Florens in *A Mercy* also inquires the following from her reader: "You know. I know you know. One question is who is responsible? Another is can you read?" (*A Mercy*, 3). Florens writes on the walls of the colonial house enslaving her, her story told so others can read it in the future. Therefore, the process of writing was, for her, a merging between the past (what happened to her), the present (how she was facing it at the time of the novel) and her future (someone could read it afterwards). Florens literally occupies the domestic space by writing her story on the walls (what we are reading). In the Nobel lecture speech, Morrison (1993) explains that whatever we do with language is what matters; that is, the intra-action between human beings and language. Therefore, when she is writing her story in the domestic space, she is appropriating this space, in order to liberate what has oppressed her, what has made her a slave, and starts owning herself by owning her story. Thus, even if some authors argue that she holds no future or possibility (Tally, 2011: 76), it is important to realize that, at that precise moment, she is able to externalize her own story by connecting with the space that oppressed her<sup>69</sup>. On the other hand, other characters (such as Frank in *Home*) need someone else to tell their stories, someone writing for them. Women are empowered through the pen, thus feminist literature becomes an empowering tool in which women are the angry writers.

In order for literature to become political, to be read in the future, someone needs to be on the other side of the communicative process. That is, there is not a writer without a reader and vice-versa, and there is not a political nature in literature without the communicative process, the intra-action between readers and writers. The facebook

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<sup>68</sup> Making reference to Morrison's public lecture of the Nobel prize.

<sup>69</sup> We can see this as well in *Paradise* when the women draw their own silhouettes on the floor to externalize their pain.

page dislocates this process and turns it into a multiplicity in which intra-actions are being produced. The process is not linear, but multiplies as it develops.

3. Through literature and SNSs multiple “others” speak in their engagement.

Multiplicity is a consequence of the previous property prompted by the dislocation in times and spaces provided by the digital platform. In chapter 3, figure 12, a recurrent motif appeared in the conversation maintained on the Facebook page. The second theme that appears in the flow of the conversation is an echo to Spivak’s words (1986): can the subaltern speak? The answer is clear in this debate and in many others: “Morrison let[s] THE OTHER speak”, as one of the participants points out. In this specific quote, ‘the other’ refers to a little black girl who is neutralized by her loved ones. This ‘other’ is black and female and Morrison is able to make these bodily experiences comprehensible for whoever wants to listen to injustices. On the other hand, by plainly saying that Morrison “lets someone else” speak, we are automatically giving an authorial voice to just one person, substituting hegemonic powers by marginal ones, without altering the Order at all. However, making a diffractive reading with the novels offers something different:

Talking to Sula had always been a conversation with herself. Was there anyone else before whom she could never be foolish? In whose view inadequacy was mere idiosyncrasy, a character trait rather than a deficiency? Anyone who left behind that aura of fun and complicity? Sula never competed; she simply helped define themselves. (*Sula*, 96).

Here, Morrison is explaining how “one” and “other” are always mutually dependent. That is, talking with *some* others always implies talking to oneself. Therefore, if Toni Morrison is the “angry” writer (and also a black female), this “other” will have some of the properties that relate to the one (Toni Morrison as a writer). Thus, in “letting” someone speak, what we are really doing is producing affinities based on the properties that relate to each other. Thus, an *ethical respond-ability* that implies the ability to take responsibility for something and being able to respond to social justices (Haraway, 2008) is produced between the author, her characters, her readers, etc. in this communicative process. This Facebook page, the authors, the readers, and me try to

mutually reflect upon the relations that put us all together, in order to engage with a very complex reality that is permeating injustices at present. Thus, Morrison's novels do have an analytical activist component (Laazar, 2007). They focus on the processes that are building society as unjust, but not on certain results that improve a future that is not here yet.

4. Literary and digital truths become an objective element necessary in this relation achieved through music.

One of the most frequent interventions produced on the entire Facebook page is the need for reality, for truth, for connecting. The most repeated comment is "so true". This becomes "true" not only for some of the most famous quotes used by Morrison (like "I get angry about things, go on and work") but also for understanding literature, in general. Readers tend to relate their embodied experiences with the characters appearing in the novel. This produces a *truthful effect* in the reader. As explained in *Beloved*, if the reader fails to recognize her or himself in determined characters, they just choose whatever is in their minds, in order to understand the novel that is in their hands. Following Cutler (2000), narratives always move toward an end determined not only by the author but also by the reader. This is an all-encompassing for any novel independent of the multiplicity implied in their readings.

Narratives, it seems, move toward closure. This is an impulse of both the narrative itself (which must finally come to an end at a certain page number) and of the reader (who must eventually close the book, put it down, and begin something else). Even texts that attempt to keep meaning in motion, to present multiple possible endings for their plots, are subject to present multiple possible endings for their plots, are subject to this totalizing pressure (ibid: 61).

Society tends to avoid re-readings and that is why when the end is complex they pick one scenario. However, with the birth of this form of communication multiple entries point out that depending on the writer, at least, this process of re-reading may even be prompted. Therefore, the engagement with the text becomes an iterative re-working and the pressure inflected in the novel is affectively differing, according to the affinities expressed by the readers in the digital platform. As shown in table 2 in chapter three, one of the most repeated instances was "I need to re-read it" or "time for a re-read."

This does not prevent the readers, or the characters, from looking for “provisional truths”. In *Home*, we realize that Frank’s real redemption is telling the truth, even if it hurts. However, this truth is the one that has always oppressed women. Morrison presents the double feeling of a man who is both a hero and a villain, at the same time. Once again, she is blurring these dichotomies, and the very conditions of life. We are left not only without knowing if the girl in the house is the never-born baby or the girl who is going to hunt him forever (as Beloved does in *Beloved*), or even the one that Cee is never going to have. In any case, Cee keeps on not knowing and, without resolving this, is left with the feeling that the hunting is because of her. Her brother does not tell her the truth. The truth is hurtful but everyone should know it, so that knowledge, as well as power, can be shared, in order to disrupt oppressive systems. The reader knows the truth, however Cee remains blind to it.

However, this does not necessarily mean that readers are wrong or whatever they are reading is not true. On the contrary, it means that the relationship between literature and SNS conveys multiple truths that co-exist, in order to provide differing meanings. *Jazz* is particularly interesting for this reason. According to Cutter (2000: 71), the multiplicity of the reading-writing process does not entail a right or wrong choice:

Were we wrong to trust the voice of the book - the voice of language speaking? But who else can we trust? Only ourselves - and perhaps not even ourselves. *Jazz* finally informs us that it will provide no authoritative point of view for us to identify with. We confront the world of the text on our own, writing our ghost chapters, taking our inferential walks in the void, the sphere, the oddly unstable, but oddly liberating, constantly shifting terrain of textuality itself.

Thus, if truth is not found out of a universal truth, nor throughout the identification process, how do we define literature in this context if a definition is necessary at all? To Manzanias (1993: 97),

literature is the artistic expression which absorbs the expressive and healing qualities music used to have for black people. Literature gives 'nourishment' and does 'what the music did for blacks' at a time when black music is not entirely black anymore, and the cultural values and beliefs of African-Americans are being 'devoured' by mainstream American culture. Literature does not substitute music, but incorporates the myths,

beliefs, and the cultural code which was traditionally recorded in music. (Manzanas, *ibid*).

This contemporary definition of literature conveys a diffractive reading of music and literature, in order to understand how a cultural process of settlement is being produced in the US society. Thus, literature is a reaction to the established order that, of course, maintains intact the division (running since slavery times) between ones/others created in Morrison's novels. Music permeates Morrison's entire works. From *Song of Solomon* (where many myths from the African American culture come together in a song) to *Jazz* (literally the improvisation of the twists provoked in jazz music), music is used in Morrison's novels as a literary technique in which different truths are told. The following passage from *The Bluest Eye* can serve as an example: "It [the song] would involve, I supposed, m'my man', who, before leaving me, would love me. But there weren't any babies in the songs my mother sang. Maybe that's why the women were sad: the men left before they could make a baby. (*Bluest*, 23). Women are sad for Pecola and Claudia. Sadness is a repeated statement in the novels (as the previous chapter showed). However, they do not know why they are sad, but they know that they are in love songs.

5. The material of language is affectively intra-acting and empirically accessible through feelings.

One entry on the Facebook page reads as follows: "Definitions belong to the definers, not the defined" and it is a quote that comes from *Beloved* at the moment in which Sethe was being compared with an animal in order to dehumanize her own self. The quote rejects the defining process because it always implies a hierarchical power in which language helps to support hierarchies of power. Florens and her encounter with the blacksmith is one example of this. She is defined by him as a slave girl but it is not something that she has related herself to.

The post is from the 30th of April 2014, in which one of the participants comments the following:

The paradox of defining something is that as soon as you have defined it – you have destroyed it. You have negated its existence as anything else but the definition you have assigned it as. At the same time by defining it – you have in a sense created its identity.

It is one of the most interesting posts, in the sense that it is pretty much the only one that refers to the quote and not to the geniality of the author, a specific book or any other book. Defining something is understood contemporarily as the destruction of the defined while, at the same time, the creation of an identity. If we attend to the context of *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, it would imply that Sethe and Florens are destroyed by the minute they are defined as anything else than animal or slave (depending on which character to which we are referring). However, at the same time we are creating their identity as nothing else than slaves. This statement results problematic in understanding Morrison's novels because of two main facts: one is the unquestioned powerful nature of language and the other is the denial of affects intervening in this process. On the other hand, the statement can cut across the dichotomical opposites of non-existence and identities.

The materiality of language in Morrison's work is unquestionable but it does not mean that it is the only determining factor. Thus, in order to understand the statement, we need to understand the affective context. The process of defining provokes in Sethe an angry move that leads her to escape from Schoolteacher; while, in Florens' case, it also provokes an angry reaction in order to escape from a definition that did not match her reality. Thus, in both cases love and anger are relating with the very statement and, at the same time, empowering these women to create alternative situations to those oppressing them.

Affecting language means to pursue material-discursive practices and their engagement with each other. There are plenty of examples in Morrison's novels, as well as on the Facebook page since almost every emoticon denotes an affection within language. Besides, the moment that we are thinking about the materiality of language, relations such as definer and defined entail dependency and not oppositionality. The following passage about the definition of love shows precisely how affects and language engage with each other, in order to find the materiality of language:

Let me tell you about love, that silly word you believe is about whether you like somebody or whether somebody likes you or whether you can put up with somebody in order to get something or someplace you want or you believe it has to do with how your body responds to another body [...] Love is none of that. [...] Love is divine only and difficult always. If you think it is easy you are a fool. If you think it is natural you are blind. It is a learned application without reason or motive except that it is God (*Paradise*, 141).

Love is a religious thing, it has nothing to do with human, despite its affective nature. Love is an affect that divides between natural and super natural. Love is the creation of the boundaries, and because it is boundary making that makes it a proof of how interactions work empirically. However, because love is constituted as the boundary between human and divine, it is used as an enhancement of the traditional divisions regarding social oppressions. However, feelings need both matter and discourse; if they lack reason, they cannot perform socially in a creative way. Following what the participant stated about definers and defined, love is the only feeling defined as extensively as it is shown. According to him, by defining love we have denied its existence and created an identity that moves away from a politics of affinities and the concept of gender articulating this thesis.

6. Communication is always gendered and raced; therefore, language is political.

Gossiping to isolate specific characters is one of the most recurrent practices in Morrison's work, especially her female characters by others in the community. The origin of this practice is situated in the Middle Ages. It was a practice mainly used by women to communicate secret information. Nowadays, the meaning has not changed so much but the connotations are negative and they may have negative consequences in society. I present two concrete examples from *Jazz* and *Song of Solomon* in which this practice is carried out in a very stereotypical place: at the hairdresser. In *Jazz*, gossiping is reinforced through Violet's own job as a hairdresser. This ironic gesture allows Morrison to empower this activity that can be related with oral storytelling, albeit with an important communicative distortion. Morrison produces this ironical gesture because the reader acknowledges that, even though Violet's profession creates female alliances through gossiping, they are never settled on the basis of trust and support, rather as part

of a social agent guarding cultural morality. As an example, the following conversation reveals the origin of the irrational move used by the narrator when presenting Violet at the beginning of the novel:

“Women,” answers Violet. “Women wear me down. [...] It’s these little hungry girls acting like women. Not content with the boys their own agen, no, they want somebody old enough to be their father. Switching round with lipstick, see-through stockings, dresses up to their you-know-what...”

[...]

[The woman getting her hair fixed answers]: “Now I reckon you are going to tell me some old hateful story about a young girl messed over you and how *he’s* not to blame because *he* was just walking down the street minding *his* own business, when this little twat jumped on his back and dragged him to bed.” (*Jazz*, 16 [author’s emphasis]).

Violet does not try to build any type of affinity with other women. Her job as a hairdresser, as well as her size (“smaller than her ironer”), indicates that she is embodying traditional gendered stereotypes, which include those pernicious women who do not blame the husband or his wife. They just blame the "other" woman who, in this case, is even dead. Thus, female “hateful” approaches result not only in racial oppressions, as *Beloved* showed, but also in sexist oppressions, the motor of the patriarchal system in which women are the only ones to be blamed. They try to isolate whoever does not fit their cultural morality, as happens with Haggar, in *Song of Solomon*. Again as a hairdresser, women create an image of Haggar and they start the relation with Haggar’s *representation, or copy*, leaving the real character as a passive element on which the cultural code is sustained. Haggar’s existence in the novel is no longer (in fact she dies shortly thereafter), since the community has denied it to her. This type of communication engages negatively with the characters in the novel for it tends to engage with cultural representations of bodies instead of engaging with real subjects.

Therefore, it is not being implied that bodies are texts and a merging of cultural discourses (as Butler has been accused of for *Gender Trouble*); however, it is true that in the intra-relation between gender, sexuality, memories, and bodies, texts permeate the socio-political threshold that configures the body. As explained by van Doorn (2011: 540): “[...] instead of being strictly transient textual artefacts, these ‘bodies of text’ become more durable and are able to function as mediated memories in the process of

(re)assembling the parameters of gender and sexuality within a shared narrative framework.” (van Doorn, 2011: 540). This is perfectly explained by Florens in *A Mercy*:

It was there I learned how I was not a person from my country, nor from my families. I was negrita. Everything. Language, dress, gods, dance, habits, decoration, song – all of it cooked together in the color of my skin. So it was as a black that I was purchased by Senhor, taken out of the cane and shipped north to his tobacco plans. (*A Mercy*, 165).

Here Florens stops being anything else than negrita, a black female. The skin becomes the material surface in which everything intra-acts, either by presence or absence. Language, for instance, is absent and it contributes, together with the other constraints, to the disappearance of her own individuality and recognition.

The process of naming in Morrison’s novel is related to this aspect of recognition and language. In *Tar Baby*, everyone in the novel has his and her given names and family names but they are called something else by the other characters. For example: “She kept calling him that. River rat. Sydney called him swamp nigger. What the hell did he say his name was and even if she could remember it would she say it loud without reaching for the leash?” (*Tar Baby*, 158). According to Ryan (1997: 71), this reinforces “[c]ontesting visions [...] to provide the reader with an insight into how they both inform and reflect social relations.” (Ryan, 1997: 71); which means the relation between vision and naming, in order to reinforce hierarchies of class. In addition, other novels present differing cases, such as Eva naming the Deweys equally (even if they come from different races) in *Sula*, or Sorrow naming herself Complete after being a mother in *A Mercy*, or Pecola’s family name, Breedlove, in *The Bluest Eye*.

Perhaps the following passage is the best example to illustrate the intra-action between language, naming, recognition, presence, individuality and embodiment:

*Anybody who remembers what my real name is dead or gone and nobody inquires now. Even children, who have a world of time to waste, treat me like I’m dead and don’t ask about me anymore. Some thought it was Louise or Lucille because they used to see me take the usher’s pencil and sign my tith envelopes with L. Other, from hearing people*

*mention or call me, said it was El for Eleanor or Elvira. They're all wrong. Anyway, they gave up. (Love, 65 [author's emphasis]).*

L becomes a nobody but at the same time she is the intra-action that relates everyone in the novel and guides the reader by herself. L is the exteriority within. Nobody really remembers her name; she can even be dead for some, but she is affecting the entire novel. Her presence is important because of its absence. This is an attempt to realize that we need women's knowledge, their oral tradition, and their differing affective performance. Their absence is their presence.

All in all, what I wanted to illustrate here is how essential the conceptualization of language is for the communicative aspect since it works together with gender (and race) and politics in this intra-action between literature and SNS. In following with the analysis of this chapter, it is now necessary to shed light on how communicative processes are altering how we understand literature and SNS, as has been anticipated in this section. Communication understands language as an affective intra-action with differing properties to those traditional notions of language, that have been so highly criticized in contemporary feminist theory (see Barad, 2001, for example). The revision that I have performed on the concepts of gender and politics implies a revision on how we understand language and communication.

## **5.6. Affecting language: the literary communicative process.**

According to van Doorn (2011: 541), “[b]y sharing their stories in these spaces, they [participants] create mediated memories that become socialized as digitally material artefacts which are durable as well as mutable, reflexive as well as performative.” As the codification of the first level showed, their literary experience is built upon re-reading the novel over and over in order to understand it or, rather, situate it. Literature becomes then a *mutable, reflexive and performative* instance of reality, since it becomes opened to a re-working once again in these digital archives. Taking into account that the analysis shows that one of the most important aspects in this

communicative process is its ability to re-read a novel as a desire (affect), shared by the collective community, it is important to point out the significant differences that it implies for an understanding of literature. First, it needs to be contextualized and re-worked every time that an encounter between the text and the reader is produced. Furthermore, this encounter needs to be situated once again with the historical moment of the novel, the collective and cultural memory of the reader, and the political meaning that the novel tries to convey, as the other two levels of analysis showed. Thus, it implies that literature itself is also conveying a differing nature on the digital platform, by demonstrating the need to consider this “digital archive” as more than just a contemporary one, merging the past, present and future together.

The Facebook page is alive and this is appreciated in how the new information comes first. However, scrolling the page and observing the speed in which this happens also opens up an oppressive structure of power, since increased desire for new news prompts the replacement of the old. In reading the dynamicity of communication, I believe it is much more productive to consider new posts, together with the old ones, as responding to the re-working of the apparatuses. Indeed, if we focus on this aspect of communication and read it diffractively with Morrison’s and Angela’s photograph and Morrison’s novels, the movement is female empowerment. Besides, we have included the Facebook page and its pattern of communication to aid in the understanding of contemporary cultural practices re-worked by the novels. Therefore, Facebook becomes a dynamic contestation highly built upon literary re-workings and society. Through the different comments and posts, Facebook is creating different twists (as Morrison does in her novels) that shows that rootedness (a metaphor related to nature and women) as a dying concept for black women. By taking this into account, we see that communication necessarily entails movement to stir a reaction, making Facebook this ideal context. In addition, by altering meaning and creating this contemporary link, it also enacts movement in literature. As a consequence, a change in the relationship between SNS and literature occurs, just like with gender and race.

On the other hand, having Toni Morrison as the context of this thesis has altered significantly the results, as well, since she is considered by some scholars as a critical race theorist: “Because her literary and critical efforts have aimed at the cultural effects

of unconscious racialized and gendered thinking, perhaps Morrison should be considered a critical race theorist, despite her status as a literary figure.” (Schur, 2004: 278). Besides, as already stated, Morrison is a very important public person because of the many recognized prizes that she has earned. However, because of her critical stance on politics she has also been banned in high schools, libraries, etc. as her Facebook page posted publicly in several occasions (Revelles-Benavente, 2014b). This is ironic after all the scholarly publications that her work has inspired in African American studies, and keeps on inspiring<sup>70</sup>. Thus, her theory about literature, gender and race (as demonstrated so far) imply a very different standpoint than classical approaches, because of the participative nature of her literature, her relation with feminism and approaches to gender, as well as her criticism to black nationalism.

Before concluding, it is important to go back to Barad’s diffractive theory. In previous chapters, I have identified the six characteristics that combine the Baradian apparatuses and proved them against the concepts that were reported in each chapter. The fourth one implies that “apparatuses are always phenomena” because of the nominal nature of the sentence. It also implies the opposite, that phenomena must always be considered apparatuses of bodily production as well. Thus, the differing nature of this communicative process should also be an apparatus by itself while part of other phenomena; therefore, the fourth principle identified in the other two analyses (chapters three and four) is omitted in this chapter. This type of communication has primarily meant two important things: the multiplicity of the relationship between reader and the writer, and the significant change in the nature of both literature and SNS. Thus, if relations precede their relata, it also means that this object of study is necessarily boundary-making, and likewise, an apparatus:

1. Relations are material-discursive practices. Language has been informed and is mutually dependent on a series of material facts, such as affects and gender (which prompts an intra-active force in which communication is created).

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<sup>70</sup> For example see Davis (2014), Tapley (2013), Montgomery (2011), the special issue on the *European Journal of Women’s Studies* (2011); and in general many different references provided in this thesis which include academic research, newspaper clips and the doctoral thesis.

2. They produce differences that matter. This type of communication has produced ontological shifts in the areas explored so far. The literary object has turned out to be the intra-action between different elements partaking in the relation between readers, writers, socio-political context, digital platforms, novels, etc. SNS have been configured as the materialization of affective dislocations, subverting traditional meanings of neo-liberal practices. That is, they become the communicative performance of politics and gender; while, at the same time, they transform themselves into experimental laboratories where knowledge becomes power.

3. They produce material configuration/dynamic reconfigurations of the world. Through SNS, the literary product becomes re-invented over and over since, as many participants have stated, every time they re-read the novel it is a different one. Besides, the realities explored in SNSs imply a dis-location in permanent movement of geographical spaces, where linear time and territorial spaces merge into multiple entries conforming the page. Besides, this communication has altered the way feelings are conceived, as well as the relation between different subjects.

4. They are open-ended practices. Since the minute that a writer is still alive, and the Facebook page is open, the communicative process continues. The Facebook page is constantly posting news on the author and the participants are responding to them almost everyday. The living nature of this special communicative process impedes its closure, even though it does not mean that because of this, it is a subjective process.

5. They reconfigure space and time. SNSs express the multiplicity in the two terms already mentioned. In a similar vein, literature nourishes itself from invented spaces, future generations, and alternative realities, although this is not the case for Morrison. She has invented certain regions in the United States (as Medallion in *Sula*), but basically her work is inspired upon real events. On the other hand, the many years in which her work has inspired engage actively with contemporary times, as the Facebook page has demonstrated.

SNS (via Facebook) and Literature (via Morrison) have become what Barad (2010: 253) calls the “phenomenon” that is “*the inseparability (differentiated invisibility) of ‘object’ and ‘agencies of observation’*”. At the beginning, the conceptualization of gender was

deprived from its own historicity through the immediateness implied in the SNS. It was here, in this precise exclusion, where the opening of possibilities began and the door to processual feminist politics was opened. Thus, the inseparability between these two concepts becomes necessary if we want to turn SNS into an ally for feminist theory and politics. In van Doorn's words (2011: 541): "[i]n this expanded now, the past, present and future emerge in a condensed and recursive circuit in which the temporality of gender becomes an object of perpetual technical rein(ter)vention."

## **5.7. Conclusions**

I have presented yet another re-working of the apparatus, that is the communicative angle. An iterative production of the phenomena has been reported throughout the entire thesis. Certain results have been overlapping in the three chapters, but this overlapping is undeniable precisely because of the mutual dependancy of the three levels. It has been seen that this literary communicative process runs the risk of invisibilizing gender; as well as reinforcing neo-liberal practices in which hegemonic literature becomes empowered by the use of technologies. However, the "Order" can be subverted and altered if we shift the referential point of departure. Instead of looking for results, we have been looking for processes. Phenomena turn out to be specific reconfigurations of the world situated in contexts which are highly marked by local and global practices. Communication, in this regard, has meant a change in the way we think about contemporary literature and SNS. A global community has created strategies to apply to slight changes in the way we think of the world while being a part of it. Race and gender issues continue to provoke structures of inequality; but, a differing way of communicating can prompt small acts of resistance that enhance a different point of view to start working towards victory.

The last chapter of this thesis deals with an epistemological referential shift in the way we conceived knowledge production. Recent studies point towards what is considered a masculinist approach to science (González Ramos, 2014), that is, science based on the neutrality of the methodological tools used in order to elaborate scientific results, as the next chapter shows. I argued at the beginning of this thesis that a diffractive

methodology breaks with this “neutral” view of science that presupposes classical objectivity, by ontologically separating the researcher from the object of research. Moreover, the scientific outputs offered deal with patterns and processes instead of static results. In order to include methodology in this research, it is necessary to alter the levels and to prove empirically that the process is substantially different. The following chapter offers a diffraction of the research in order to provide intra-actions between methodology, ontology, epistemology and ethics, while introducing the researcher to a research through her methodological choices.

## **Chapter 6. Differing diffractive methodologies: diffracting different objects**

*Matter is a dynamic intra-active becoming that never sits still – an ongoing reconfiguring that exceeds any linear conception of dynamics in which effect follows cause end-on-end, and in which the global is a straightforward emanation outward of the local.*

Karen Barad, “Meeting the Universe Halfway”

### **6.1. Introduction**

The chapters included so far in this thesis aimed at answering the research questions established in the methodological chapter. Nevertheless, a further step is needed. The theoretical and methodological framework that builds this thesis, argue that the aforementioned referential shift is a must for feminist theory and politics. This shift involves the pursuit of processes instead of results and the scrutiny of the methodology as part of the object of research. Therefore, the methodology necessarily entails the possibility to test the process, in order to avoid teleological knowledge productions. Moreover, as argued in the introduction, objective knowledge is acquired only when knowledge is situated. This entails how thorough the research has been carried out. It is important to specify not only the epistemological contributions that this thesis aims at by putting together Feminist Theory and Literary Theory, but also the innovations that the methodology introduces through the union between the Humanities and the Social Sciences. New definitions of the object/subject of Literary Theory, gender and feminist politics were outlined in the aforementioned framework.

Queering the linearity with this rethinking process means that a feminist methodology predicated on a new materialist basis (or a diffractive approach) must entail a move beyond cause and effect patterns. Likewise, the theoretical framework becomes a performative move on and towards the different genealogies present in feminist theory.

Thereby, theoretical explanations of the key concepts have accompanied each level of analysis.

However, there is a need to pursue a final step in this thesis, that of *queering the methodology*, since everything is mutually dependant and intra-connected (*intra-actions*). Consequently, this part of the thesis has to do with the alteration of the order of the levels of analysis, in order to see what type of causality is being produced. This also means that the measurement process has turned itself into its object of study with its own life, its own dynamism, its own differences and its own becoming. The researcher can delineate certain parts of the research process as entangled with the research, but not the whole process (*researcher in the research*). However, this will not imply partiality, but rather situatedness, since the research aims to shed light on processes that make differences that matter, not results. After that, I will carry out an experiment on the levels of analysis, in order to discover differences that matter that consists on altering the levels of analysis. Thus, here I will change the point of departure (from the Facebook page to the novels) that will entail significant differences for the concepts studied so far. Queering causality means queering the methodology, in order to empirically access the reality in movement.

## **6.2. Queering causality: the methodology as the object of study**

Different levels of analysis do not mean ontological separatedness between them. Dividing the research process into these three levels has been useful, because “they constitute complementary moments of reality”, which means that these levels are mutually implicated and “embody different aspects revealed by different ritual actions” (Apffel-Marglin, 2011: 63). Instead of developing different ritual actions, this thesis is revealed by different communicative processes: that of SNS (which pertains to the first sub-objective of research) and that of literary works (which pertains to the second sub-objective of research). Thinking through the methodological process becomes essential in a diffractive methodology. This has been also claimed in feminist theory, in order to understand the matrix in which masculine approaches are hidden behind the “neutrality” of the scientific process (González Ramos, 2014; Griffin, 2011; Fausto-Sterling, 2000).

Diffraction methodology has always been entangled with epistemology, ontology and ethics (Barad, 2012). This implies that theories, processes, objects of study and politics become entangled in one ontologically inseparable reality. Attributing certain results to certain practices would imply that we agree on representing a reality, thanks to certain moves and not others. However, as it was previously stated, this is not the case of the diffractive methodology. In van der Tuin's words (2011c: 15), "Barad [...] do[es] not allow for thinking 'the new' in terms of causal linearity or predictability [but] in a continuous rethinking of (feminist) revolutions in thought." Thus, a reworking of the notion of causality is presented as the possibility to infer political changes.

Barad defines (2007: 148 [her emphasis]), "*discursive practices as causal intra-actions* – they enact causal structures through which some components (the 'effects') of the phenomenon are marked by other components (the 'causes') in their differential articulation." Rethinking causality implies rethinking relationality she has defined as the entangled relations, by which not only subject formation is developed but also the material re(con)figuring of the world. Besides, this re(con)figuration of the world implies thinking through the different apparatuses and building the phenomenon as the phenomena itself. Thus, in practical terms, this entails thinking of the first level of analysis as a phenomenon in and of itself. Then, a causal relation is produced among these two, not of origin and end but of mutual dependency. In the analysis, I will show how a differing pattern guiding the first level would also imply a different result albeit complementary to the one already produced.

Causality is not related with linear time and therefore it cannot be conceived as a pattern in which beginning and end follow a certain path. Causality would be the enactment, the actualization of a present, past and future in a concrete phenomenon. "The past is not present. 'Past' and 'future' are iteratively reconfigured and enfolded through the world's ongoing intra-activity. There is no inherently determinate relationship between past and future." (Barad, 2010: 261). Instead she proposes a "queer linearity" based on "complementarity": "complementarity – that is, the play of indeterminacy/determinacy – is vital to the analysis of measurement interactions." (ibid: 263). This determinacy is highly marked by the differing processes that this thesis points out; while, it remains indeterminate because the very act of experimenting with the methodological process implies an openness in which the reader is invited to experiment by him/herself, with

the same levels of analysis. Thus, an open space for possibilities is created, in which the researcher, the methodological process, the reader and the phenomenon itself create their own paths, in order to formulate “respond-abilities” (Haraway, 2008) to contest social oppressions. For instance, the reader may want to invert the relationship generated in the first level regarding race and gender, in order to focus the analysis on race that definitely would imply a different process. This is part of my *violent* cut, or Cartesian cut (Barad, 2007), but it is also, by entangling with the whole researcher an intra-action, it is constraining but not determining.

### 6.3. Intra-action: *relatings* instead of relations

The entanglement of these parts of the methodology previously considered as separated is possible thanks to the introduction of the concept of “intra-action”. Barad defines it as the “[...] recognition of ontological inseparability, in contrast to the usual ‘interaction’, which relies on a metaphysics of individualism (in particular, the prior existence of separately determined entities)”. (Barad, 2007: 128). Thinking through “relatings”, (relations in an iterative movement) instead of “relations”, has resulted in the following three main consequences that will be developed later and have taken part in the entire thesis;

- 1) the conceptualization of gender as always already raced (chapter three);
- 2) an *intersectional analysis* as a *relational analysis*, and
- 3) *identities* as *affinities* (chapter four) and the ontological inseparability of the literary communicative process between Social Networking Sites and Literature (chapter five).

To achieve these “provisional” separations, it is necessary to distinguish between “cartesian cuts” (human-made) and “agential cuts” (intra-actions). Cartesian cuts were those provided by the researcher that contextualize the research as “local, situated, partial, contextual (i.e., dependent on the specific apparatus chosen by the knower). But within this local framework it is to be understood as a reliable and objective piece of knowledge.” (Lykke, 2011: 146). This is what Nina Lykke has denominated “provisional cuts”, arrangements produced in a specific moment, in order to embark

together with the research project. Nevertheless, these are not the providers of the agency or intelligibility of the research per se. The agentiality, or movement, is within the process itself and not within the researcher. Agentiality belongs to the realm of “agential cuts”, which is what “[...] allows for thinking change [...] openings for change in the enactment of worlds through the incision of certain cuts and not others” (van der Tuin, 2011a: 20). Precisely these “constructed cuts” are the participants of the research, while the concepts that are included in the division of the methodology are the “agential cuts”. Agential cuts are beyond my scope as a researcher because of the limits that I have. It does not mean that this thesis is not creating meaning either, just because certain processes are being outlined. However, it does mean that this material meaning is situated. That is why the agency does not just rely on the researcher but is part of his or her ethical responsibility. Indeed, we are thinking change. An “agential cut” “enacts a resolution *within* the phenomenon of the inherent ontological (and semantic) indeterminacy” (Barad, 2007: 333-4).

The nature of the intra-actions entails careful examination, in order to fully understand the political engagement of this methodology and this theoretical framework. This indeterminacy results are problematically linked to relativist practices. However, I argue that the opposite is true. Barad (2012: 10) defines indeterminacy provoked by the intra-actions as follows: “This indeterminacy is only ever partially resolved in the materialization of specific phenomena: determinacy, as materially enacted in the very constitution of a phenomenon, always entails constitutive exclusions (that must remain indeterminate).” It is important to notice that I make a distinction between agentiality and politics. Politics has been defined as a series of processes by which differences can be enacted before a result is produced. Of course, these possibilities remain as part of the openness that intra-actions (agential cuts) demand. This would imply leaving politics behind the researcher. However, this leads to the assumption that research and object are ontologically divided (in the next section I will show that it is not the case) and that politics and agency are synonyms. Agency here is framed under the agential realism. Agency is the very possibility of the openness of the unfolding of the world, that is the entanglement described previously as the object of research self-transformation. On the other hand, politics (politics of everyday practices) are certain specificities of the world that create alliances, in order to produce acts of resistance in the exteriorities within the apparatus. According to Rosi Braidotti (2006: 199), “Haraway raises a point

[...] namely that the Foucauldian diagrams of power describe what we have already ceased to be; like all cartography, they act a posteriori and therefore fail to account for the situation here and now.” That is why offering the possibility to re-work the methodology is always already political. It is a *differing of politics before they have been materialized*, inferring a shift before it is actualized.

#### **6.4. The researcher in the research: a must**

The distinction between research and researcher is paramount to accomplish “objectivity” in any scientific research in the traditional way (Gonzalez Ramos, 2014). That is to say, traditionally, the researcher needs to be neutral and objective towards the research, in order to obtain accurate results that are not biased by personal opinions. This leads to a growing problem for Literary Studies since most of the analysis performed in this type of research is based on the opinions of the literary critique (Eagleton, 2012; Widdowson, 2002) or interpretation (Phelan, 1997). This distinction has become very problematic in feminist contemporary research, becoming as such with Donna Haraway’s “Situated Knowledges” (1988) and Sandra Harding’s “*The Science Question in Feminism*” (1986). Haraway and Harding constitute one of the basic pillars, in order to understand the crumbling of the concept of “classical objectivity”. While Harding (1986) opts for keeping it and re-thinking it by offering objectivity to marginal groups, Haraway (1991) argues for a functional research that does not favor traditional objectivity or any researcher to be more right than another (McNeil and Roberts, 2011).

Haraway’s approach implies *situating* the object of study and entangling the researcher in this object of study, in order to acquire the global in the local. The inclusion of descriptive concepts (as mentioned in chapters one and two) allows me to resolve ambiguities, in this particular context, for the project in which I am involved (Barad, 1998: 96). On the other hand, thinking of politics as affinities instead of identities also has been a political choice that my own subjectivity as a researcher needed to develop. I do not share the same “identitarian” characteristics as the subjects of my research. Therefore, the “ability to respond” from this precise framework (and not as responding to the other but as being responsible within my research) limited my account. I decided

to pursue a politics of the process based on affinities insofar as determined feelings put into contemporary context: feminist theory allowed me to engage with the phenomena itself through my embodied experience. Besides, affects provided a suitable articulation guideline for the entire thesis: gender and politics were defined conceptually and in a practical way via affects. Moreover, affects allowed a particular interpretation of the reading process and the theoretical formation of SNS.

This approach positions the researcher in the research and not above (“mirroring effect”) and goes from the specific to find out certain movements, or patterns, in knowledge production (certain shifts in the way literature communicates through social networks). Thus, we move towards acquiring situatedness rather than objectivity. Feminist theory has seen how problematic universal objectivity is (as feminist post-colonial theory has proven) or the opposite, the “God Trick” (Haraway, 1991), the relativist approach in which everything is valid. This paradox comes from the assumption that researcher and research are separated from each other, the consequence of what Barad (2007) calls representationalism, which is present in the problems that the Social Sciences are currently facing.

Following Haraway’s conceptualization of objectivity, Barad (2007) claims that this methodology is characterized by the multiplicity that infers on the subject and object of study, by which neither of them is defined beforehand. Thus, providing such a division in the methodology is contradictory. However, I have consciously provided this distinction because it has been produced simultaneously with the research, but the academic format requires certain constraints<sup>71</sup>. Academic research (part of the technologies of subjectivation) requires a certain set of characteristics and knowing the research question involves knowing a certain object for the research. Even though we will see how this object varies through the different levels, and how altering those levels also provokes differences that matter, in a thesis it is required to, at least, have a guiding question. Additionally, I believe that any kind of research project requires this guiding question, this paradox, or problematic situation that someone wants to explore. I understand this requirement of a diffractive methodology as the idea of becoming

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<sup>71</sup> Following the conclusions, I include a section called “postscript”, which is a detailed account of how I have been dealing with this research and shows how alive it has been and how everything has always been interrelated with everything else.

entangled with the research project in its duration, its development, and without previous preconceptions. In this sense, the research totally follows the premises, since I develop those differences in their making. The separation of analysis and “objects” or research questions are just “provisional cuts” (Lykke, 2010) required for any type of research.

### **6.5. Starting with the novels: intra-acting queer causality.**

In order to carry out the methodological test, it is necessary to start now with a different level. I have chosen to begin with the second one, albeit there are at least nine different ways of altering the order of the methodology (but this would make the thesis too exhaustive). By altering the order of the levels just once, we reach one hidden objective at the onto-epistemological level. That is, the methodology itself is its own object of study so that the referentiality becomes processes rather than static results. For those matters, the reader can find the analysis of each of the novels in chapter four. In this chapter we will see that taking each novel as an apparatus in itself necessarily entails reading the totality of the novels through their own relations, that is the different feelings appearing in them. Later, we will go one step beyond to select which of those feelings appear on the Facebook page, although these have already been presented. What we really need to find out is if altering the levels of analysis alters the results of the analysis as well, that is the patterns that define a different conceptualization of gender, politics and communication.

Even though this analysis will be significantly shorter than the others, it is necessary to provide at least one other alternative to the levels proposed in this thesis. By doing so I merely intend to demonstrate that the multiplicity and fanning out of possibilities referred to in this thesis is indeed possible. As mentioned earlier, possibilities are infinite but it is not everything. Thus, leaving this door open, the reader can perform different intra-actions as well as follow a different order in the levels of analysis. One of the main intra-actions produced throughout this thesis was the consideration of affects, themselves, as intra-actions producing different cuts at the different levels for performed

differences that mattered. A less noticeable intra-action, which has been less quantified in this analysis, is, however, the “processual” one. This is one of the exclusions in this thesis where agency plays a crucial role as well. By limiting my alteration of the levels to just one choice, I am also re-working the “agential cuts” produced throughout the thesis yet once again I am doing so with one violent “Cartesian cut”. According to Barad, “[k]nowing entails differential responsiveness and accountability as part of a network of performances. Knowing is not a bounded or closed practice but an ongoing performance of the world.” (Barad, 2007: 149). Following the thesis structure, I divide this section into two different headings that correspond with the first and the second types of analysis. The third one is included in section 6.6 which aims at following the apparatus, event and phenomenon structure described so far.

#### 6.5.1. Approaching the novels: materializing meaning through boundary making

This section deals with the analysis of the novels as apparatuses of bodily production. Therefore, instead of looking at the feelings that appear on the Facebook page, I will focus on those feelings that appear more frequently in the text of the novel, in order to highlight different patterns of visibility (either by presence or absence) of gendered performance in Morrison’s characters.

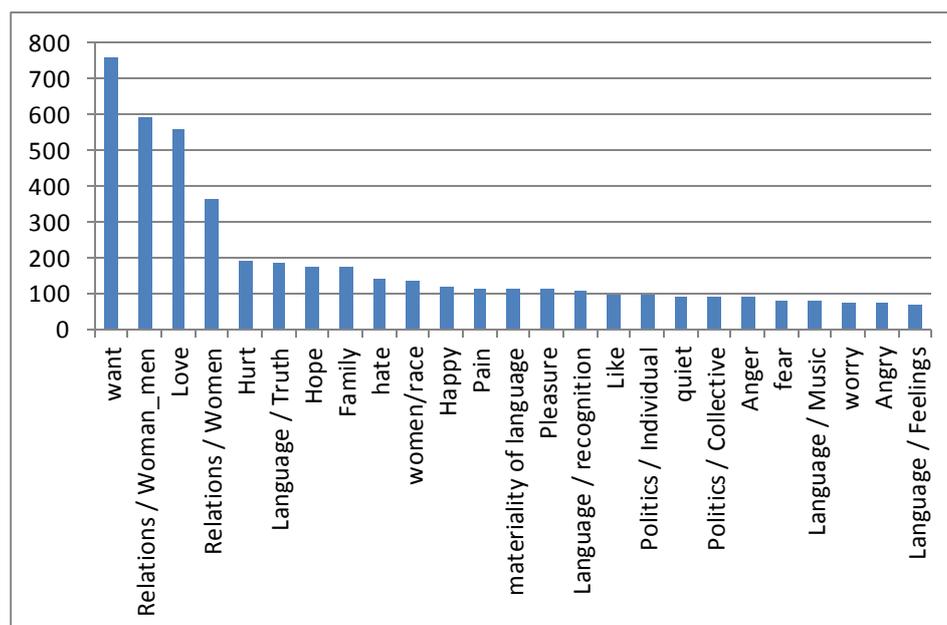


Table 4: Most frequent interventions in Morrison’s novels

This table is based on a qualitative intervention to the novels by using atlas.ti, since there are codes that are not based on the appearance of the word itself but on the meaning conveyed in the sentence. It presents the 25 most repeated codes in the novels. The verb “want” appears as the most frequent in the ten novels, while the discursive expression of feelings (“language/feelings”) is the last one. Interestingly, the three feelings at the top of table 4 are “want,” “love,” and “hurt”; while other codes at the top of the table draw upon the relationship between men and women, women, and “truth”. Thus, in producing a unified message around the most frequent topics in the ten novels would imply including all these different themes from the previous table. It can be said that Morrison’s interests reside in the relationship between men and women (most important one); women’s alliances (or not); race and politics. All this is conveyed around certain feelings that enable her to construct her message. After having produced a close reading of Morrison’s complete works, it seems straightforward to say that her main worry is the oppressive relationship between black men and women, based upon the desire to have more properties and ambition (“want”) and the traditional notion of love closely linked to the previous feeling. This leads the configuration of love as a commodity that you can acquire, as in “happiness”, along the same lines as the previous analysis. Besides, she wants to express her truth in the novels through the feelings expressed in the immediate social community, which sometimes may hurt. So far, this analysis is in accordance with the one produced previously, which would mean that there is not a significant change in the novels by the users of the Facebook page.

However, there are elements appearing in this table that are new and develop a different meaning to be explored on its own. These elements are the feelings of “pleasure,” “like,” “quiet,” and “fear.” All of them respond to an abstract division of feelings (except from quiet), which homogenizes certain feelings under universal premises. The general atmosphere in the United States is culturally and politically quiet, and the black communities depicted in her books are also quiet and surrounded by a pleasant atmosphere, in the sense that oppressions were repeated over and over, which is nothing else but fake realities. As commented while analyzing *Home*, Morrison wants to show that this aura of social and political immobility, (or happiness) is a fake structure that was holding the growth of (in)visible hierarchies. These results, moreover, present one outstanding thing in this part of the analysis: fear. It has not been mentioned anywhere

else and it appears as one core concept to understand Morrison's message. According to Schur (2004: 296), "While the fears are real to be addressed, Morrison demonstrates the potentially destructive consequences of mapping those fears onto particular bodies." It is true that we have seen how the women in the Convent were killed because of these fears (*Paradise*), and how Hagar tries to kill Milkman because of the fear she has in losing him (*Song of Solomon*); or how Denver creates a ghost out of the fear she feels because of her mum (*Beloved*). Fear has been coined in post-colonial theory as the one feeling prompting social change (Massumi, 2005). This has not happened as a liberating effect but rather as a controlling artifact that allows the hegemonic power to control the general mass. In a similar vein, Morrison has shown in her novels that fear becomes as oppressive as other feelings such as love or happiness. Hope is the mobilization principle that might be associated with these feelings (transversally as analyzed in chapter four) but not all of those appearing in the novels.

Table 4 mainly expresses the focus on the neo-liberal desire of "wanting" something or someone (by which something and someone become the same, a commodity). This desire is the motor and the affect relating the second idea, gender, as the most recurrent relation between men and women in Morrison's novels. Gender is mainly expressed via four ideas: the relation between men and women; the relation between women; family, and its intra-action with race. The latter permeates the other three relations. Nevertheless, in this instance, I believe that the four of them do belong to different performances and have different political strategies. The following passage can illustrate the material-discursive practices that encompass the concept of gender:

'Why can't you dress like a woman?' He [Macon, her brother] was standing by the stove. 'What's that sailor's cap doing on your head? Don't you have stockings? What are you trying to make me look like in this town?' He trembled with the thought of the white men in the bank – the men who helped him buy and mortgage houses – discovering that this raggedy bootlegger was his sister. That the propertied Negro who handled his business so well and who lived in the big house on Not Doctor Street had a sister who had a daughter but no husband, and that daughter had a daughter but no husband. A collection of lunatics who made wine and sang in the streets 'like common street women! Just like common street women!' (*Song*, 20).

Strong gender stereotypes fall in Pilate's way of dressing and earning life because of the social conventions that oppress women. They should work and dress in a particular way if they do not want to fall in the "other" category that marginalizes them even more: "the street women"<sup>72</sup>. Being a woman entails many different social conventions regarding not only biological sex, but also social status and physical appearance. Therefore, gender here is performing as an intra-action oppressing women and dividing them, since it does not intra-act with characters and other elements of the novels, temporarily speaking.

Besides, the relationship between men and women has also been problematic within the Black Nationalist movement, and this has been iteratively denounced in Morrison's work: "Soane was burdened with the loss of two sons; he was burdened with the loss of all sons. Since his twin had not children the Morgans had arrived at the end of the line." (*Paradise*, 113). This was all that mattered to women, their duty giving descendants to the men in Ruby so that people in Ruby could follow up their project. Indeed, by using this methodological approach to relationships between men and women, Morrison shows that this concept of gender becomes problematic, almost paralyzing to women. In this endogamic structure on which black communities were built, their role became more and more that of obedient birth-givers: "But they were just women, and what they said was easily ignored by good brave men on their way to Paradise" (*ibid*). As previously stated, because of slavery and racist practices, love has become hatred and shared relational meanings instead of opposite ones, because it materializes women as *wanted* in the relationship instead of as *loved*. Sharing the same skin color did not imply that women could be considered separate human beings; they were exchangeable products. Therefore, this conceptual framework as a specific performative nature of gender is counter-productive for feminist politics. Gender cannot be read affirmatively in Morrison's work, since it is used as a tool to oppress women. On the other hand, to detect these gendered oppressions is easier than on the Facebook page because it is a recurrent theme in the novels.

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<sup>72</sup> Previously, we have seen how "street women" are not desirable for the black community in the analysis of *Paradise*.

Besides, the concept of family is not materialized as a safe place in which love is transformed into healthy relationships between members. Family bonds become more dangerous than beneficial, as many examples have shown thus far. *Song of Solomon* presents one of the most traditional families in Morrison's work, in the sense that there is a father, a mother, daughters and a son. Nevertheless, as Carabí (1988: 155) explains it is a "dead home", as the surname explains, because there is no type of emotional boundary between them. Again, family bonds, which have been traditionally built upon love are built upon a variety of feelings that, yet again, relate to this feeling of *wanting*. For instance, in *Tar Baby*, Jadine thinks of her concept of family through the economic help that Valerian (the white patron) has given to her:

After her mother died they were her people [her aunt and uncle] – but she never lived with them except summers at Valerian's house when she was very young. [...] They were family; they had gotten Valerian to pay her tuition while they sent her the rest, having no one else to spend it on. Nanadine and Sydney mattered a lot to her but what they thought did not. (*Tar Baby*, 49).

In *Tar Baby*, not only does the meaning of family get permeated by a new concept of slavery in which Nanadine and Sydney are indebted to Valerian for the rest of their lives, but we also see how an ontological scission between mattering and reasoning is provoked, enacting a strong hierarchical distribution of power in which reason reigns over matter. Family here also reinforces the oppressive structures denounced throughout the novel. *Home* also shows how these family bonds keep on engendering a new concept of slavery because they are based on *wanting*, the nearest substitute of love in a community still finding the meaning of love. The parents need to work 18 hours a day, which of course does not allow any time to spend with the family in order to love each other, in the traditional sense. This relationship is an obligatory one. Parents are also obliged to work in order to sustain their descendants.

Intra-acting with these issues is, then, the type of legacy that unconsciously we are passing on, creating neo-liberal subjects embodied in the characters of Jadine, Macon Dead or Frank Money, albeit following different paths. A sociological and cultural discourse of pleasure and happiness was materializing the historical moment of the fifties, as Morrison says (2014). However, these types of feelings and homogenous

quietness permeate in the novels referring to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as *Jazz*, *Love*, *Song of Solomon* or *Home*. Truths are being entangled with fake realities through pleasure and quietness while, in this context, performing an active feminist politics becomes extremely difficult. This difficulty resides in oppressions ability to become structural, a part of the social fabric that they are rendered (in)visible. Female and male skins are opposed to each other hierarchically distributing power. Gender becomes an oppressive term that relates men and women intra-actively, by means of “wanting”, by neo-liberalism, by new forms of female slavery.

#### 6.5.2. Diffracting novels and the Facebook page: engendering politics.

In this section, I expand the meaning conveyed in the novels with the Facebook page, taking into account that one of the most important recurrent themes is fear. Although “fear” does not appear as one of the core components of the Facebook page, a very similar statement can be found on it nonetheless: “As an artist without form, she became dangerous” (which refers to Sula), from the 9<sup>th</sup> of July this year. About this character, one of the participants says: “Sula was my favorite character !! She was not afraid to get what she wanted.” Indeed, Sula is one of Morrison’s characters in which fear is less developed. She shows again and again how she is not afraid of the gender stereotypes that surround her, like when she slices her own finger in order to protect herself and her friend. This idea, coined by other participants as “dangerously female,” is part of other works by Morrison. Another dangerous character is Pilate, as well as Sethe, or the women in the Convent. The result for all these women is fighting social conventions through performing an individual strategy, based on isolation and their own politics of everyday life. Besides, it is very troublesome to be the woman who is not afraid of getting what she wants. In a sense, this woman is free, which is something neglected to women in this neo-liberal system of slavery, but it is an oppositional logic. The goal for cultural transformation, as pointed out in *Paradise*, is not to repeat hierarchical structures of power.

On the other hand, feared women, dangerous women, perform their own individual strategies of self-determination and, at the same time, they become the exteriority within

the iterativeness of the apparatus where acts of resistance are enacted. About *Sula*, McKee states (1997: 55):

For all the disgust and separation produced in this process of placing Sula, she is not placed outside the group, which in fact comes to depend on her for their own sense of place. Once she is identified as a total evil, she becomes necessary to the Bottom as something like a moral standard, a limit marking off right from wrong.

*Sula* becomes “boundary-making” and thus the catalyst for political resistance in society. Nevertheless, the motor is “wanting” in this individual strategy and, sometimes, they remember the local context and produce ambiguous situations in which, once again, the ethics of love are contested. Therefore, we keep on looking for meaning, as Cee does in *Home*, and the same structures are repeated over again. Besides, this intra-action with the entire society implies that, following another post by Morrison (indeed the previous one), “[f]reeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another.” These dangerous females are never allowed to claim their ownership because (as stated in the previous section) new forms of slavery appear, in order to maintain women in their oppressive positions. They are always attached to their society.

On the other hand, if we think of gender as a relational movement in which different affinities among humans are produced to overcome oppressions durationally, a different performance is outlined. Women in Morrison’s work are not innocent victims despite the difficulties. None of them are relating and affecting affinities with men. The conceptualization of gender becomes highlighted through their alliances with other women. In order to think of gender in a positive way, as a material performance with liberating effects for marginal groups, it is necessary to think of it as an alliance performed only among women in which knowledge, or power, is shared.

Morrison has always been interested in female friendship (Morrison, 1988) as an empowering tool. This can be seen in both the novels and her private life. Several pictures from her friendship with Angela Davis are shown on the Facebook page. Indeed, their relationship is one of the hottest topics on the page and is embraced with supportive comments by the community. But it is not the only one. Several pictures with many other “dangerous women” are shown on the page, such as Maya Angelou; as

well as many other events like the following: “This short documentary traces the behind-the-scenes preparation and inspiration for 'Sheer Good Fortune: Celebrating Toni Morrison.' The event was an epic poetry reading hosted by [Nikki Giovanni](#) and Dr. [Maya Angelou](#) honoring [Toni Morrison](#).” The audience, among others, responds to this entry with, “So remarkable. I remember meeting Niki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez and Toni Morrison years ago and regret that I didn't take pictures with them...Paying tribute to Toni is like paying tribute to our legacy as African Americans and the human spirit. Hats off!!!”

Clearly, building female alliances and creating communities (the Facebook page itself materializes these two aspects) are ways of combating the neo-liberal practices in which new forms of female slavery are being produced. Morrison exemplifies in her novels how the relationship between women strengthen each other and creates safe spaces in which they can become their inner-self freely (like the Convent). Additionally, she permeates her public persona with life-examples of this. At the same time, Facebook is a virtual community in which people get together through affinities, through things in which they share likeness (one of the most frequent feelings in the novels as well). The understanding of the virtual and the real as a continuum (rather than in opposition to each other) makes what we see on the Facebook page the exemplification of this “getting together” through affinities, in order to produce “justice-to-come.” (Barad, 2010). Therefore, conflating past, present and future, the entanglement between literature and SNS activates a politics of becoming that is always in movement, always in the in-between, a politics of affinities in which knowledge is shared and power distributed less hierarchically.

#### **6.5. The iterativeness of the apparatus: the entanglement between methodology and digital-literary communication.**

Through her novels Morrison presents a historiography of the black community that reaches the fifties. This is beautifully combined with contemporary society through

Facebook. Her literary work fiercely critiques how the black community has been built on the desire for acquiring what it never had: home, land, property and freedom. However, in this pursuit the black community have always negated the white norm by marginalizing themselves ontologically. Because of this move, hierarchical structures have been reproduced within their community, thanks to a permanent reinforcement of gender stereotypes based on a rigid format of female and male relationships. Turning the desire, the “wantness”, into their main motor for social change has produced radical changes in feelings like love and hatred, which become relational synonyms.

Literature is politically transgressive. However, its political nature is not always manifested in a straightforward way, or upfront. Morrison’s ability resides on how gracefully she presents a near past totally dislocated for her characters, and for the US society. Although her Facebook community is highly supportive, we can see that this is not what happens outside the Facebook page, as the following post from 26th of September, 2013 shows:

Last week, the novel came under fire in Morrison’s home state of Ohio. At a board meeting on September 10, 2013, Ohio Board of Education President Debe Terhar criticized *The Bluest Eye* as “pornographic” and called for its removal from state teaching guidelines for high school students. Terhar was outraged by the inclusion of the book on the new Federal Common Core Standard’s recommended reading list for eleventh graders. “I don’t want my grandchildren reading it, and I don’t want anyone else’s children reading it,” Terhar said at the board meeting. Board member Mark Smith doubled-down on Terhar’s intolerance, calling the novel part of “an underlying socialist-communist agenda.

Thus, the characters in the novels keep on negating their own past, while Morrison’s contemporary readers deny their common past, just like the characters. By denying this past, the future becomes impossible. Nevertheless, the moment in which Morrison intra-acts in this community, the past becomes present, the present becomes an affective intra-action and the future becomes a “political hope” (Colman, 2008). Thus, the intra-action between literature and SNS enables justice to reach the society in United States and the characters in Morrison’s work. That is, the intra-action is the political motor for social change. The communicative process is itself a platform for social agitation in which literature and contemporary society relate as a continuum and not as a passive

representation of one another. Morrison's work presents some special features engaging materially with the contemporary pleasure and quietness that permeates the society of the United States. Therefore, the platform and the novel materialize certain boundary-making, and depict injustices even when her work becomes marginalized. Thus, they the platform and the novel become mutually dependent on each other, in order to transform past, present and future affectively. Morrison presents the need to (re)configure love, pain, hurt, fear, etc., in order to produce sustainable socio-cultural ideologies that dismantle hierarchies of power relationally and not oppositionally. Denouncing her social pressure as well as her own public strategies, in order to fight racism and sexism, the platform presents itself as a collective strategy in which the performances of the "dangerous females" in the novels can be (re)thought to find the contemporary ethics of love.

In the alteration of the levels, the way gender was depicted in the novels has been made evident: gender worked as an ontological oppression that needed to be contextualized. However, in the intr-action between both the political strategy leads to women's togetherness, which divides gender ontologically into different sexes in order to enhance female alliances. On the other hand, excluding half of the population has never been a good thing. In this scenario, gender is invisibilized through its presence and problematized as a static category. Thus, a differing political strategy is carried out. On this occasion, a differing approach towards the literary communicative process has produced a different view of gender and politics within the apparatus. Differential patterns show the very nature of matter and social oppression and how dynamic these social relations become. According to Barad (2007: 176), "[t]he marks left on the agencies of observation (the effect) are said to constitute a measurement of specific features of the object (the cause). In a scientific context, this process is known as a measurement." Throughout this thesis we have seen how certain marks have been traced in agencies of observation in this specific context, which has also been contemplated as the concept of gender and politics and the intra-action between these two, a feminist politics of the process. These constitute specific causes of the object, which means that they are part and mutually dependent on it, thus, re-working the object itself, the "measurement".

## 6.6. Conclusions

Twisting the order of the levels of analysis has indeed shown that different approaches can be taken in order to explore the shifting patterns produced within the relation between literature and SNS. In order to understand the facts, you need to understand the process. In science, general assumptions are necessary in order to find out data constructed against or with these (González Ramos, 2014). The problem is that one scientist may not understand that he/she is holding onto certain politics. Background assumptions are always there and by altering differing processes we also alter those background assumptions obtaining a different kind of objectivity. This radically changes scientific referentiality and empiricism itself. This thesis claims that the methodological process needs to be part of the object of study because it is the object of study itself. Similarly, by specifying what our methodological stance is, we also reveal our politics, epistemology and ontology that partake in the object of study. Thus, objectivity becomes (re)configured as well. Knowing what we are measuring, and how we are measuring it, is always political.

Changing patterns is what matters. That is why the methodology needs to be re-worked entirely. This is how the matter/object of study is produced and productive. It is the iterative production of varied differences. A scrutinization of the politics of methodology is necessary: “[f]eminists (and others) who study how scientists create empirical knowledge have begun to reconceptualize the very nature of the scientific process.” (Fausto-Sterling, 2000: 20). Thus, this chapter aimed at providing yet another set of differing patterns, in order to “ [...] display shadows in ‘light’ regions and bright spots in ‘dark’ regions – the relationship of the cultural and the natural is a relation of ‘exteriority within.’”(Barad, 2007: 135).

Therefore, this chapter aimed at producing dynamic relationalities in which the very nature of the relation was put into question. All in all, it presents a differing way of doing research and of producing differing “bodies of knowledge production.”

Necessarily, the research itself turns out to be an apparatus of knowledge production entangling new conceptualizations of gender, politics, communication, as well as enhancing dynamic literary objects of research based upon non-hierarchical relationships between authors, readers, novels, socio-cultural contexts, and digital realities. Dancing in between the Social Sciences and the Humanities, this chapter has produced yet another re-working of the phenomenon. This iterative nature is what presents any phenomenon as an apparatus as well. Politically speaking, this means that all research becomes a potential material constraint entangling with the reality explored and, therefore, both part of the exteriority within and of an act of resistance. This differing communicative process between literature and social networking sites reveals itself as a political platform of contestation in which sexist practices, racism, and social conventions are (re)configured and contested by the very nature of the object itself.

## **Processing conclusions**

### **1. Main contributions**

This thesis mainly aimed at contributing to debates regarding the scientificity of the object of Literary Studies and the conceptualization of gender and politics in feminist theory. Nevertheless, it ended up providing some insight into research on SNS. As hybrid research, this thesis has contributed with various elements of a research process in the Humanities and the Social Sciences, from methodology to object of study. A shift

in referentiality has been elaborated to show mechanisms of (in)visibility of gender, feminist political strategies and communicative relations. Therefore, here I present the main processes that have altered the ways in which we think about these matters. In this section, I will reflect upon the main research questions regarding the situatedness of this piece of research in particular. Then I will present the main contributions that my research offers to Literary Studies, Feminist Theory, and the Information Society from a hybrid framework. Regarding the first field mentioned, this thesis has revealed the complexity of its object of research connecting SNS and going beyond textual analysis, while maintaining the novels as part of the communicative process and positioning Facebook as an “agential space” (Barad, 2007) where Morrison’s works are (re)configured. This process is the entanglement between reading and writing and produces an ontological shift insofar as both aspects become mutually dependant. In support of Spivak’s assumption (2003), reading and writing are not “allegories of knowing and doing” but the enactment of a “politics of collectivity.” This object of study is no longer presented as a hierarchical relation between author, reader, context and novel but as an asymmetrical distribution where acts of resistance are produced. Likewise, the object of study of a feminist literature becomes “feminist” only “provisionally” during the relations. That is, author, reader, context and novel do not exist previously to relations affected between readers, authors, novels, contexts, etc. Canons are not elaborated under the premises of the ivory towers of certain authors and hegemonic cultures but as relations-in-the-making produced within digital platforms like Facebook. Literature becomes what it has always been, an act of resistance which can exert changes in the way oppressive mechanisms are re-established currently. Besides, the reader becomes as active as the author in the entire literary process, producing a disruption in the hierarchy of the reading process.

Regarding the field of Feminist Studies, this research suggests that feminist literature is a political gesture, self-transforming through the intra-action between gender and race. In general, this thesis has provided a genealogy of different feminist researchers that has enabled contributions to current debates in the field, such as gender, politics and language. In addition, a vast bibliography composed almost exclusively by feminist authors, has helped me show to what an extent feminist theory has an innovative effect on all the fields building this thesis. This is a “respon(d)able” move necessary to

demonstrate that it is possible to be respectful to feminist theory while also being innovative. This is what new materialism produces by *moving beyond* dichotomies, or certain turns, as the post-modern one. Despite its focus on a particular type of feminism, new materialist feminism, this thesis is a political engagement with many others. This is a requirement of the phenomenon, that is the object of study, in which I am involved.

The relation between Literature and Facebook allows a transformative (in the sense of socially disruptive) literary factor to be part of the essence of Morrison's work, only if understood as a permanent process of communication. A new understanding of literature as politically transformative when intra-acting with the information society (more concretely digital platforms such as Facebook) is one of the contributions of this thesis to the academic arena. With the simultaneity and speed created within the context of SNS, reading would become a process in itself, and an active agent within an active context. Therefore, Morrison's literature presents itself as a self-transforming matter engaged with SNS, as sites in which communication becomes multiple. Reading is a political process in literature, which becomes more complex and multiple within the context of the information society. Therefore, thinking of language as a material part of the communication implies thinking of communication as the object itself rather than as the medium. In this sense, the novels are not representations with a clear ending but always in the making, meaning is only constructed by multiple factors intervention. Thus, this is not to say that Literature is only affected by this digital platform but, rather, that the digital alters the literary matter. Morrison's work is a dynamic agent intervening in what is understood by gender and politics in a new materialist framework.

## **2. Answering the research questions**

**Gender** – An affective relation of a processual ontology.

Toni Morrison herself has never approached the dimensions of gender and race equally. That has led scientific production about her work to be approached from an

intersectional approach and has resulted in the primacy of the category of race above the one of gender. However, the analysis performed here has shed light on differential novels that look at Morrison's work from a different perspective. Far from totalizing Morrison's work and labelling it as New Materialist, what I have aimed at in this thesis has been to detect and analyze social injustices from a new materialist perspective in order to find strategic patterns to visibilize a different concept of gender and politics in the relation between literature and technologies. In this thesis technology has not been considered a determining entity affecting culture (in this case Literature) but a pure intra-action with the many other elements co-existing in the unfolding of the object under study. In this case, Facebook takes an equal part in the entanglement between authors, readers, politics, history, language and the communication in the literary object. Furthermore, Facebook provides an epistemological laboratory in which global and local merge towards a political future. As Morrison does in her novels, the Facebook page tends to incorporate many interruptions in its format, through different posts and comments that serve as an entry point in analyzing contemporary society and Morrison's novels from a collective perspective in which the figure of the literary critic is de-centralized.

Gender becomes a situated structuring difference materialized not so much by the sexes of the bodies but by the affects intra-acting in between different elements. Radically, gender is a human and non-human property, because it engages affectively (and not sexually) with many different forms of life. However, the conditions of its performance materialize differently according to the subject involved. In this thesis, gender has been (re)defined as a political processual ontology, which automatically becomes part of the politics of feminist new materialism, because they are constituted as relating processes. Gender is/was and always will be political. In the merging between past, present and future is where we find ethical responses to social injustices. Universalisms erase differences, and avoiding the present breaks the intra-action between past, present and future needed for an "ethics-to-come" (Barad, 2010).

Gender seems to be more present on the Facebook page than in the novels, but only at first sight. Gender permeates the social fabric and the literary world either by its presence or by its absence. This means that, even though the novels highlight race from

an intersectional point of view, a diffractive approach was used as an extended analysis to study how gendered patterns of oppression were repeated in every novel and in Morrison's Facebook page. Readers were rapidly connecting the posts on the Facebook page to their embodied experiences, by relating with the woman either by proximity (as a black female) or distance (if the reader was male and white). However, as shown in the debates, a particular viewpoint was not defining the gendered relations, either, between the participants and the strategies followed, in order to pursue individual becoming. In this link between Literature and SNS, gender becomes a relational affect engaging with subjects in a digital context. Thus, individual experiences come to the forefront and they are read diffractively, in order to specify each other's experiences, instead of integrating them under universalistic paradigms.

Gender has followed different paths depending on the analytical point of departure, that is a relational affect on the Facebook page and a female relation in the novels, in order to be part of a new materialist feminist politics. Within the relationship between SNS and Literature, gender becomes a key point in the oppressive system, as the alteration of the methodology shows. Gender becomes situated, while in the novel gender is an atemporal universal. Therefore, analyzing just gender in the novels appears as a performative repetition of the oppression of black women. In the relation between Literature and SNS, it is enacted as an affecting processual ontology. Empirically, gender becomes an oppressive relation mainly through the traditional conceptualization of love and happiness. Thus, oppression is not defined ontologically but relationally and affected in a positive way by certain feelings instead of others. By positive way I mean gender as a structuring difference able to liberate individuals from oppression, instead of reinforcing it. Whereas hope was one of those feelings with an empowering effect, love and happiness proved to be negative. Furthermore, gender becomes formulated through the apparatus (the debates on feelings) as the acquisition of certain meaning-making boundaries, intra-acting between participants and author.

**Politics** – Engendering a feminist new materialist politics.

First of all, it is necessary to point out that this thesis has offered a very important distinction between politics and agency. Politics, agency, the political and ethics are concepts closely relating to each other to construct feminist politics. However, in order to theorize what feminist politics would look like I have distinguished all of them in different parts of this thesis. Thus certain conclusions about the differences among these terms can be extracted from what has been analyzed. Politics has been defined as a set of processes that can alter the way hegemonic powers structure society. Agency is defined as a space for resistance with digital platforms, such as Facebook, as catalyzers that enforce the meaning conveyed in the novels. Moving away from static categories I have argued that politics is the set of practices that enable subjects in relation to alter oppressive structures. These practices are always produced in concrete spacetimes (Barad, 2003) that engage with the act of resistance involving past, present and future and reformulating ethics. In this sense, for Toni Morrison gender becomes a “political hope” (Colman, 2010) involving this dislocation of time in situated contexts. The political and ethics share results that appear through the other two concepts. The political has been a transforming element in order to theorize “feminist literature” per se. It is the property that engages with the literary dynamicity proposed in this thesis. Thus, Literature reveals itself as a continuum together with reality, instead of being the representation of it. On the other hand, “ethics” has been the entanglement of past, present and future explained in the intra-action between Literature and SNS.

Departing from the novels has led me to a perception of politics as a pursuit of knowledge, especially regarding the ethics of love. Female and male subjects in Morrison’s novels are following different paths in which this knowledge, materialized mainly in looking for the meaning of love, was being created, reproduced and disseminated. This helped the characters to self-become individually and to share that knowledge in whichever format necessary to transmit it to further generations. The pursuit of the meaning of love has been especially important for the novels. In this never-ending process, love is never a positive motor for the characters, individually or collectively speaking, because it recreates oppressive hierarchies. On the other hand, looking for the meaning of love was very recurrent as a possible ending to those novels and as the ultimate liberating project individually speaking. However, the consequences of irrational love have always been fatal (ending in murders most of the time), since

love is a feeling too rooted on oppressions perpetrated within the black community. Thus, liberating this feeling from the acquisitive sense in which it is engaged with this community in the novels is difficult and not possible just yet.

On the Facebook page, politics was articulated as the embodiment of differing affinities instead of identities. The visibility/invisibility of gender, the multiplicity of the community in terms of origin, location, sexes, and geographical spaces, the boundary making of the meaning of the novels, the de-historization of the oppressions, etc. provoked alliances through affinities. Identities, albeit dynamic, were constructed upon the integration of different elements in a particular subject. Thus, affinities, as a concept, enable one to focus on the relation and not on the different subjects that were getting together as separate. Capturing the forces that articulated a common space in the digital platform implies thinking of agency (creating spaces of resistance collectively) as an entanglement between affects, subjects, virtual and physical spaces, and times and collective agreement upon determined goals. This agreement was temporarily constructed and dynamically changing depending on the context. Therefore, a politics based upon processes and feelings articulated itself as a possible way to configure the politics of feminist new materialism.

### **Communication** – Entanglement of literature and SNS.

The diffractive reading between the results produced in chapter three and four showed that using an intra-sectional approach provoked differences that matter and proved once again the necessity to entangle epistemology, ontology, methodology and ethics so pursued in feminist new materialist thinking. Thus, the phenomenon in question for this research requires thinking of gender and politics differently (as shown above). Furthermore, concepts such as the literary object and the SNS were reformulated through this precise relation between Toni Morrison and Facebook. My embodied experience as a researcher interferes with a conceptual change in the way Morrison's novels were read, since an identity politics based on intersectional approaches were creating relations of exclusions. The methodology becomes itself part of the object of

study, so the researcher can be part of the object of study and produce an ethical (in the sense of responsibility and responsibility) to certain injustices in the world.

The communicative process, as the main objective of this thesis, is defined as the methodology itself. At the beginning of this thesis, I explained that SNS provided an instrument, empirically and methodologically speaking, that reshapes all the novels at present. They are also a platform where past and present merged in order to intra-act with a hopeful future. Thus, having in mind that these sites turned to being ethical agents, the communicative process itself becomes the intra-action between methodology, ontology, ethics and epistemology. It is the apparatus produced boundary-making, that is historicizing meaning (Barad, 2007), it is the analytical tool and a shift in referentiality. This communicative process produces significant changes in the way we think about gender and politics. However, as was shown in chapter six, it does not produce a strict linear cause-effect because the processes are altered depending on the order. The communicative process between Morrison, the participants and the Facebook page turns to being an object of research and a political agent. Empirically, this literary communication implies conceptualizing language as an affective force materializing recognition, music and embodied experiences. At the same time, these properties exert changes that reveal a dynamic language that depends on gender, the context and the subjects involved. Together with gender, politics, authors and readers, language, therefore, becomes part of the entanglement.

Apart from the three objectives already mentioned, there has been another one permeating the entire thesis, which comes as a result of its entirety and which is the focus of chapter six: methodology as its own subject of research. A brief reflection upon what I consider the main contribution of this thesis is necessary. The information society requires dynamic objects of research and dynamic methodologies. Primarily focused on qualitative strategies (although I have also relied on quantitative computational devices), I have shown that a bridge between the Social Sciences and the Humanities is beneficial for the three fields of knowledge (Literature, Feminist Studies and the Information Society) involved in this phenomenon. I have elaborated a diffractive bridge a strategical, analytical tool of new materialism. This diffractive methodology strengthens the Social Sciences, by moving away from representational

practices and the Humanities by structuring a clear methodological plan. Besides, the onto-epistemological referent has also been shifted, because the methodology has proved to be its own object of study. Altering the order of the methodology does not only facilitate the testing of it (and because of that the shift in referentiality) but also the possibility to offer multiple points of departure. Likewise, problems regarding the scientificity of the object of study, or the multiple readings of a novel (for instance) are solved since not only novels (writers) and readers (Facebook) have been mutually dependent but also interchangeable. Once again, this does not mean that everything is valid, since differential patterns are produced. That is, even though it seems that the interpretation is open to every specific reader, what is allowed is the entanglement between the different elements producing certain patterns, as has been shown. This does not mean, either, that every reading is valid, but that certain patterns produce certain material effects (such as the disruption of oppressions) and some other patterns produce other effects (such as the re-establishment of the oppressive order). Thus, for the process to be considered as feminist, a disruptive effect should be pursued after the analysis, which is precisely what engages with the self-transforming nature of Literature. On the other hand, this does mean that neither the author nor the reader are put in a hierarchical structure. Besides, the Facebook page already proved to be the intra-action between author and reader.

### **3. Limitations and future lines of research**

This thesis has also limitations whether due to space (material constraints) or because certain issues appeared as exteriorities to the research while carrying out the research. These will pertain to the future re-workings of the apparatus that concerns my research. For instance, the conceptual apparatus engaging with gender, politics and the communicative process, created by different elements simultaneously, also affects each individual. Even though this is very difficult to examine because of the methodological strategy followed, it is important to bear in mind that this process is twofold. Thus, the implications that this Facebook page has for the reader and how it has intended a change

in the way he or she reads the novel have been left aside. It would have implied a different methodological structure considering in-depth interviews, or even focus groups (as well as maybe my intervention in Morrison's official Facebook page).

During the methodological strategy, I discovered that the use of atlas.ti was not as straightforward as it had appeared at first. This is because, even though it reinforced my close reading empirically (and solved problems concerning the methodological strategies of the Humanities pointed out at the beginning of this thesis), it also debilitated the choices I made. The main reason is that it was very time consuming and entailed a mental effort to scan ten novels and try to codify every single sentence. Besides, I made a choice that may have appeared as a biased result. My choice was prioritizing those feelings appearing on the Facebook page above those appearing just in the novels. Thus, the connections were clearer for the first group, since a sentence that contained both feelings was codified according to the one pertaining to Facebook. However, this selection belonged to the decisions that I needed to make as a researcher, because the focus was the intra-action between both. Thus, I prioritized those who engaged with both realities: novels and Facebook.

Besides, there was an interruption of the Facebook page in May, 2013. The page was temporarily removed from the Internet, which showed the fugitivity of my object of research. One remaining question would have been to explore the capitalist practices behind this type of dissemination of information. The Facebook page was administered by an editorial house and reasons concerning renewal of contracts could have been in place. Producing an interview with the administrator of the Facebook page would have shown how implicated these practices were in the running of the page. Additionally, this temporary disruption could have meant differences in the way that the Facebook readers engaged with the Facebook page, but I did not perform an analysis concerning the moments before and after this closure. The reasons that led me to not do so are that, even if the page would have disappeared, it would have shown on the one hand that the agentiality of the object itself (much above from my position as a researcher) and on the other it would have exposed that this communicative process is always dynamic when engaging with digital platforms, which means that literature communicates differently through these type of platforms.

#### **4. Additional remarks**

To conclude, I would like to include some final remarks concerning this thesis as a whole, by introducing my own interpretation of the methodological process and the three years that accompany this thesis. The interaction between Literature and technology produces a relation based on intra-actions in which both become reconfigured during this entanglement, and not before. Therefore, Morrison's novels become a self-transforming matter in which relations between readers and authors become less hierarchical and multiply opened. Novels stop being a close-ended process in which a certain meaning is provided to be a material engagement, differing at the very moment that a connection between reader, author, context and novel is produced. The performative act of reading becomes gendered and political at this precise moment. On the other hand, technologies become a dynamic context in which ideologies are built and disrupted, as well as the focus of the historization of matter. If matter can produce its own history, not only does it become an agent in describing a historiography of oppression but it also engages with the disruptive future of this oppression. Thus, if a certain oppression (as is the case with gender) becomes decontextualized through time, Facebook provides the situatedness necessary, in order to detect and analyze the problem itself, transforming the very "nature" of gender, its materialization. SNS become acts of resistance through the entanglement and not before, while gender too is able to structure this resistance during the relation and not before.

This literary communication shift has important consequences for two key concepts in contemporary feminist theory and politics: gender and politics. Gendered oppressions tend to be considered as homogeneous and a-temporal, universal hierarchies. However, Morrison's novels and her Facebook page demonstrates that the situatedness of gender is necessary, in order to shed light on those repetitive patterns in which black women kept on being oppressed under new forms of slavery. Through the absence of gendered concerns on the Facebook page, and in the novels, the invisibility appearing by a textual absence becomes visible. The urge to understand gender as something other than a fight

among men and women became crystal clear, as well as my personal need to relate with my object of study from a perspective that would not equate my experience with that of the subjects. Thus, immersed in the Facebook page, where affinities build communities, it appears that looking at how those relations were disrupting or recreating gendered oppressions was key to understanding these patterns. Universal concepts of happiness, love, or fear created and established the patterns of hegemonic powers.

Inevitably, the relationship between Literature and SNS implies a different political strategy, in order to pursue feminist goals of social justice. In this thesis, I have argued that a new materialist conceptualization of politics enables this different political strategy. Thinking transversally of relations, affects and material engagements allows one to engage with the object of study in such a way that detection and analysis of the social injustices comes upfront. Once universal concepts of subjects, feelings, gender, and language are erased, relationality comes to the surface as dynamic and multiple solutions that offer provisional patterns, in order to disrupt hierarchies of ones and others. That is, politics appears as a set of processes in which repetitions are avoided by situating oppressions and engaging particularly with the object in a global network. By using affinities, the different empirical feelings that force certain relations and not others, we avoid overlapping different oppressions and reinforce the multiplicity of each subject instead.

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