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INCORPORATING MULTIPLE HISTORIES:
THE POSSIBILITY OF NARRATIVE RUPTURE
OF THE ARCHIVE IN *V.* AND *BELOVED*

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INCORPORATING MULTIPLE HISTORIES:
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Abstract

Novels of the twentieth century are grappling with the questions of identity in relation to history, but a self-reflexive history, a history that is always suspicious of itself. Alienated from cultural, religious and physical identities, we try to find this identity in the inanimate dust of memory, like architecture or the material debris of lived lives, to discover our own place and ground our identities. Therefore, we live in a time of memory. This work draws upon Vico's notion of the True and the Certain, Derrida's conceptualization of the Archive as a metaphorical construct, and the body as the locus of memory and language and applies these concepts to Thomas Pynchon's *V.* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. These two canonical works provide a case study for the cultural function of memory in the novels of the twentieth century. The elements of memory are corporeally manifested in the body of the title characters whose function is the same, to mirror this process of the archival function within the realms of narrative. They represent the connection between mere thought and physical manifestation, the dead come to life, the word made flesh. Archives in the literal sense and the archive as a metaphor define an emerging and expanding area of inquiry across many disciplines. This work attempts to extend the tendrils of archival theory into American literary criticism by identifying "archival characters."

CHAPTER ONE

The Archive: Truth and/or Certainty

The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale.

✎ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*

Storytellers, whether speaking or writing, engage in the paradoxical activity of non-material construction—they build something from the intangible realm of memory which nevertheless has an objective existence.¹ Drawing upon sources as disparate as stories they were told, individual experience, and/or intellectual research, the storyteller can produce both a subjective individual reality and an assumed objective historical reality. Stories, although intangible, exist and are, therefore, artifacts which can be approached and studied in the sense that one can gain knowledge from analyzing their various attributes whether in written or oral form. The historian can review the who, what, when, where, and how, and draw conclusions about the why regarding the artifact's production and is therefore engaged in interacting with the material. The linguist can judge the historical aspects of the language choices and development, again noting the materiality of language in its

¹ For the purposes of this study, “storytelling” encompasses the oral and the written. Therefore, there are three levels of the “story”: the oral, the written (physical, tangible), and the ephemeral existence of the “idea” of the story one has once it has been experienced. As for the tangible story, William Kuskin makes the important foundational point that “[the book’s] shape magically rationalizes the ephemera of literature into a physical form” (79).

textual form. The literary critic, or the theater critic, or the film critic can point out the stylistic problems and achievements, focusing on the tangible existence of the artistic product. The story, in whatever form it takes, in whatever genre it is placed, is an artifact.

These fairly obvious points lead to the original and guiding question of this study. What is the link between the purely intangible, subjective, ethereal quality of the idea of a story and the political, real-world, corporal power that these loosely defined gatherings in material form of organized language have? There is a manifest union—points of intersection—where the immaterial and the material meet, and these moments or places of meeting create historical consequences which double back on the processes of storytelling. At this intersection, both objects and documents and the imaginary collaborate in the creation of knowledge. This place of union is best understood as an archival space.² Within an archival space, the material artifact may be summoned to enter into the intangible narrative, thus animating the traces of the past.

The characters/entities of Thomas Pynchon's *V.* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* provide case studies for the application of archival theory. These two novels have entered into the canon although their thematic concerns are overtly about different kinds and scales of alterity. Thematically, behind the obvious differences in setting

² Pierre Nora explains that “Our interest in *lieux de mémoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn—but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory” (7).

and tone, the novels are similar: the struggle to deal with turbulent, mysterious and tragic pasts and the obstacles that the memories and stories about those pasts present to forming a stable identity and healthy community. The dispossessed, fringe groups in *V.* and the ex-slaves in *Beloved* are separated by vast differences in their own histories, their eras, and the causes of their psychological and cultural struggles. Yet what is provocative about these two texts and what makes a comparison intriguing is that despite these marked disparities both novels need narrative to ameliorate these struggles as well as the consequential malaise that encompasses those who cannot narrate. Furthermore, *V.* and *Beloved* are both constructed in similar ways, both incorporating multiplicities and providing the guiding metaphor for this study—the archive. By focusing on two very specific texts and two very specific characters, a close reading of the two novels through the prism of archival theory allows both a novel reading and a novel approach to the cultural function of fiction. The archive itself, and *V.* and *Beloved* as the archive in character form, presents us with issues of control/power because of its association with hegemonic powers and their ability to create and sustain master narratives which often eventually lead to destruction of community. Morrison and Pynchon specifically address these issues in the context of colonial labor and financial interests which resulted in slavery and world conflict. How *V.* and *Beloved* create, reframe and reclaim these stories of the past and how they are read define the politics and society/community of the present and future. Personal and community agency is possible only with active access to and narrativization of the archive.

This issue of personal agency and identity is wrapped up in a multitude of different perspectives and theories over a vast history of philosophy and scholarship. Giambattista Vico's philological perspectives on history and knowledge are foundational to the thinking of Nietzsche, Marx and contemporary scholars such as Hayden White. Vico's philosophical position regarding the relationship between the body and language as well as his famous verum-factum principle profoundly impacts my thinking on the body as archive through language. Therefore, Vico both grounds this discussion and exposes the transition from the Enlightenment into modernity and then postmodernity, setting the stage for finally validating what Morrison has called "discredited knowledge" ("An Interview" 428). Vico establishes an historical evidence chain through language (philosophical/linguistic) that a "universal truth" exists, albeit inaccessible, but also that we must consider it might exist along with multiple subjectivities that must be as valid in self-representation (which is a political concern). His theories take into account memory as an act of imagination which, joined to the corporal origin of language, creates valid, personal and certain knowledge, a postmodern concept. To become bogged down in the question of "What is ultimate Truth?" is to miss the point: knowledge is only available through experience, and the only experience we can have is through language, whether it is in documented form or in the fictional form of narrative.

Language shows us most graphically that an original event occurred that humans experience through the sensory perception of the body (the original event: Truth), but the event can never be reproduced and becomes in that spatial/temporal shift only an approximation. *Reproduction* is as good as we can do. We cannot say the

True does not exist because if it did not, the "copy" would not exist. The archive enters this debate because it is physical evidence of the true, another approximation of the events of the past. Thus the archive and language are paralleled. Morrison and Pynchon have picked up on this parallel and made the prosthetic body out of words; thus, the archive meets language. *Beloved* and *V.* are physical evidence that True events occurred.

Archival theory's roots are firmly attached to the pragmatic assessing, organizing and maintaining of the documents of governments, institutions, and companies. Over the course of the twentieth century, its tenets and concerns have intersected with concepts in historiography and have become intertwined with cultural studies as well.³ Therefore, an abundance of scholarly work on the archive has been produced within the last few decades, although only recently have literary scholars begun to apply it directly to fiction. In the last part of the twentieth century, scholars concerned with literary history began to take interest in the pertinent aspects of

³ For a challenge to the importance of archival theory to the practice of archiving, see John W. Roberts' "Archival Theory: Myth or Banality." He argues that archival theory is either incredibly banal or "At its most mythical, [archival theory] is presented as offering such striking and widely-applicable insights that it can dramatically influence other disciplines" (111). According to Roberts, every archive is different and must be approached "ad hoc." Theory cannot fully cover all the variables that actual archives present to the professional archivist. He decries theory as absolutely worthless since once an archivist "knows the records creator, the context in which the records creator operated, and the records themselves, then he or she has all the knowledge necessary to make sound archival decisions" (112). His position, however, seems rather specious. The theory fills in the gaps and draws connections between the very specific archives that do indeed have individual imperatives in their singular functions. If one accepts Roberts' argument that the archivist who is a good historian has no need of theory, then he is correct that the theory might not be important for the singular archive, but his position puts too much faith in the historical abilities of the individual archivist and actually underscores the need for theory since it provides a check for the work of archivists and the position of archives in our political, cultural and social systems.

archival theory related to their work, mostly focusing on the use of archives as plot within fiction or the use of real-world archives by writers and how the use of an archive influenced the fiction.⁴ Archives in the literal sense and archives as a metaphor is an emerging and expanding area of inquiry across many disciplines. William Kuskin's article "The Archival Imagination: Reading John Lydgate Toward a Theory of Literary Reproduction," begins to tie archival theory to literature, doing what he calls an "archival reading" (79). He does not, however, apply it to a literary text, reading its themes and structures through the lens of archival theory. His approach corresponds more directly to genetic criticism, focusing mostly on the physical artifact that is a book. This work attempts to extend those tendrils of archival theory into American literary criticism by identifying "archival characters" and directly tying the tenets of archival theory to the thematic issues of the text. Archival characters, within two canonical works of American literature, elucidate the themes of memory, narrative and the construction of both individual and community identity in the face of History.

"Truth" and "power" are not distinct in the archive because in the archival space, power is given by the mistaken assumption that the archive is "true" based on its architecture as a sacred space.⁵ The characters of *Beloved* and *V.* show that

⁴ See specifically Suzanne Keen's *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction*. Keen identifies a trend in recent British postimperial fiction in which the archives are primary settings in which characters are presented as questers in the archive. Also, see Micheal O'Driscoll's and Edward Bishop's "Archiving 'Archiving'." This article is included in a volume of essays taken from a conference entitled "Archiving Modernism" which brings archival theory into contact with cultural studies as well as literary criticism.

⁵ Taking a more geographical stance on sacred spaces, Thomas Richards, positing the representation of Tibet as an "archive state" by imperialistic Britain, shows that "in a

multiple subjectivities exist in that space and thus show that the archive both allows for these multiple subjectivities and can also be shut down if narrative fails to rupture the stasis within the archive.

The archival space is the holding area for traces of the past in the form of debris, documents, artifacts, residue. The term “debris” is most helpful when thinking about the material archive as what is left over after something is broken, crushed, i.e. violently acted upon. Another term, “residue,” is helpful when considering that the events of the past leave traces sans any necessary violent destruction. Finally, the term “artifact” is helpful to reference the purposeful and artful construction of events or materials. Such traces are manifest within Thomas Pynchon’s *V.* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* through the construction of their respective title characters.

Reading Pynchon and Morrison Together

These things that are supposed to mark authors and affect the texture and character of their storytelling—their gender, ethnicity, social status, the community during their formative years—are markedly different for these case studies. Thomas Pynchon’s and Toni Morrison’s paths are curiously if briefly inter-connected. First, they both attended Cornell University at the same time although in different disciplines, Pynchon beginning his studies in engineering there in 1953. Morrison began her Master’s work in the English department in 1953, finishing in 1955.⁶ Then many years later, instead of Pynchon, the “perennial Nobel bridesmaid” (“Against the

particular domain of empire a myth of knowledge was actually capable of producing what was taken for positive fact, and that the production of certain kinds of knowledge was in fact constitutive of the extension of certain forms of power” (105).

⁶ Pynchon would leave the university for the Navy in 1955 but return in 1957 to finish his BA in English in 1959.

Day”), Morrison won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993, further “vexing” the relationship between African-American writers and the so-called postmodernists according to Kimberly Chabot Davis (243).

In researching and writing about these authors, scholars have an advantage(?) in the case of Morrison because she has given frequent interviews in which she discusses her ideas about the purposes of novel writing and her own writing process; she has written articles and books in which she critiques others’ work and analyzes her own writing process; she has collaborated on collections of her work as well as the works of other authors. These numerous primary sources shed vast amounts of light on her literary concerns and opinions and allow scholars to use her real voice in relation to her fictive one. In the introduction to one of the collections of Morrison interviews, Danille Taylor-Guthrie concurs: “In her interviews Morrison is open about her art, and this helps one to distinguish between the artist and the product, the mind and the artifact—to appreciate the power of her imagination” (viii).

Pynchon, on the other hand, is famous for the relatively miniscule amount of his nonfiction output. That which does exist ranges from the apropos to the peculiar. Scholars are forced to deal with his work mostly from a distance, having very few clues as to his personal politics or artistic inspirations. He has contributed many book blurbs over the years, written introductions to books, including one for the 1983 Penguin reissue of *Been Down So Long It Looks Up to Me* by his close friend, Richard Fariña, and one for a new edition of George Orwell’s *1984* in 2003. He has also written a few journalistic articles, including “A Journey into the Mind of Watts” in 1966, “Is It OK To Be a Luddite?” in 1984, and “Nearer, My Couch, to Thee” in 1993.

Twice he has written liner notes, in 1994 for *Spike! The Music of Spike Jones* and for the band Lotion's second album released in 1996, as well as conducting an interview of that band for *Esquire Magazine*; he vetted scripts for *The John Laroquette Show* and voiced himself in *The Simpsons*. Perhaps the most revealing nonfiction he has produced was the introduction he wrote for his collection of short stories, *Slow Learner*, in which he explains some of his authorial choices and offers apologies for what he considers some of his authorial sins. A 1969 letter he wrote in response to Thomas F. Hirsch, history graduate student, reveals some of his research methods and political concerns.⁷ The latter work has been the primary text for those wishing to understand Pynchon's artistic concerns. The Hirsch letter has not received as much attention as it deserves.

Most recently, however, in 2006, Pynchon wrote an open letter defending another author against charges of plagiarism. The letter serves to confirm at least one point about his conception of himself as an artist. British author Ian McEwan was accused by some of plagiarism or, more generously, of borrowing some passages from the memoir of a WWII nurse, who later became a famous romance novelist, in his book *Atonement*. Several big guns wrote letters of support defending McEwan, most notably Pynchon. His letter, published in the *Daily Telegraph*, offers a rare glimpse of his current attitude toward and conception of his own work.

⁷ This letter is reprinted in the appendix of David Seeds' now out-of-print book *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (1988). From my research, I could find only three articles that mention its existence, and they do so only in passing: Bernard Duyfhuizen, "Taking Stock: 26 Years since 'V.' (Over 26 Books on Pynchon!)" ; Steven Weisenburger, "Thomas Pynchon at Twenty-Two: A Recovered Autobiographical Sketch"; Luc Herman and John M. Krafft, "From the Ground up: The Evolution of the South-West Africa Chapter in Pynchon's V."

Oddly enough, most of us who write historical fiction do feel some obligation to accuracy. It is that Ruskin business about “a capacity responsive to the claims of fact, but unoppressed by them.” Unless we were actually there, we must turn to people who were, or to letters, contemporary reporting, the Internet until, with luck, we can begin to make a few things of our own up. To discover in the course of research some engaging detail we know can be put into a story where it will do some good can hardly be classed as a felonious act—it is simply what we do. (“Words”)

At last, Pynchon is on record defining himself rather specifically. He writes historical fiction. He also shows in mundane terms—“it is simply what we do”—that his work as a storyteller is created from a mixture of the physical residue of the past and his current personal imagination. Historical fiction usually entails elements of realism and strives toward historical accuracy, as Pynchon notes, but in his fiction, Pynchon seems to privilege imagination over historical accuracy. Having defined himself therefore as someone who considers accuracy important, he underscores a commitment to the significance of the historical record to his practice as a writer and to his more political concerns as an artist. The raw materials of history, the facts and words and physical residue of the past, have merit and precede the imagination of the author.

The link between the two novels is this theme of storytelling and how that practice helps one create and retain a sense of identity and agency, thus empowering the individual to move against the tide of history, the past that dictates a future or

becomes an inescapable destiny already written and played out. Peter Brooks describes this process: “We live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meaning of our past actions, anticipating the outcome of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed” (3). Storytelling is a formal exercise that utilizes the alchemy of the archive, combining memory and imagination, one a catalyst for the other.

It is important to note that I do specifically avoid an overly cultural reading of Morrison and Pynchon for the very reason that I would like to position my argument in the milieu of general criticism for the moment. I'm thinking of them as modern storytellers, not after the tradition of anything specifically tied to culture or tradition or religion (like the griot tradition in relation to Morrison, for example) but as examples of the users of the archive who have created characters that embody cultural history and collective and individual memory.⁸

As writers, they have researched and constructed from the archive, not only from their own cultural or personal or gender experiences but from the surprisingly varied and unexpected residue to be found in the literal archive and in the more general metaphorical one as well. Cultural contexts matter, of course, and impact the texts in important and profound ways as they are bound to do, but my prism is storyteller/user of the archive, one who enters and constructs, and the ways the

⁸ Kuskin, for example, asserts that he wishes to reverse the view that the “archive entombs the literary object within the confines of history . . . that is, rather than seeing archival reading as a process of consigning literature to an external structure, I propose we find that structure within the literary object itself” (79-80). Kuskin’s approach, therefore, is closer theoretically to a New Critical perspective. He argues that since the archive is a “removed” place and located outside of time, then contextualization according to external paradigms is not possible.

metaphor of the archive helps form the characters and narrative choices. If I occasionally use culturally specific notions and find links to theories by Vico or Derrida, for example, wildly variant theorists from far-flung times, I hope to strengthen the validity of the textual and theoretical interplay since they therefore cut across these divisions and reach a more fundamental place.⁹

V. and Beloved

The title characters are deliberately constructed to be non-traditional within the novels *Beloved* and *V.*, and their existence introduces a deictic disorientation since they are both manifested in multiple and fragmented ways: titles, characters, imagined entities, fleshed beings, disjointed bodies, etc. To relate to the characters, one must first know where and when they exist; in the multiplicity of their times and places, having absolute knowledge of their times and places is not possible, thus resulting in the disorientation. Even the characters within the novels are in disagreement about the identities of Beloved and V. To Sethe, Beloved is a daughter. To Denver, she is first a sister, but then she becomes something menacing and other. To Paul D, she is a witch. To the community she is an escaped slave. Trudier Harris, in her essay on *Beloved*, simply reduces her to Demon: “The nature of evil—the demonic, the satanic—those are the features of the female body as written by Toni Morrison in

⁹ The archive, being a large scale metaphorical construct, as opposed to actual archives, the physical collection of materials, is seen in this study in the context of the problematic of the use of power over the dispossessed; the particular cultural contexts and the precise ways in which an actual archive is used to exercise a power over a specific population is not the purpose of this study. However, focusing on such specifics has merit and would further highlight the utility of archival theory being applied to texts within cultural contexts.

Beloved (153), a reading that seems to rather blatantly ignore all the other possibilities of interpretation so integral to *Beloved*'s meaning.

Accordingly, to Stencil, V. is legion, both everywhere/all the time and nowhere to be found. To Profane, she is nothing but a story that constantly circles his without ever intersecting it. To various other characters, she is a lover, a priest, even a mythical place. Kenneth Kupsch argues that although other critics have proclaimed the identity of V. unknowable, there "is a knowable, unequivocal, and essentially irrefutable answer to the question" (428), which is that she is Stencil's mother. However, he arrives at this conclusion through a convoluted albeit interesting argument by linking V. to Astarte, Venus, the Virgin Mary, the Catholic Church, and the V-1 and V-2 German guided missiles. His very method seems to accentuate a multiplicity which does not truly jibe with his argument that the identity of V. is simply the maternal figure. His claims are not necessarily backed up by David Seed either, for example, who insists that "the text is complicated so as to make a clear overview well nigh impossible" (116). On the other hand, Shawn Smith refers to V. as "a woman" with "many aliases" (20), taking her more literally than I wish to do in my reading.

For the author who wishes to construct an entity with multiple possible identities, the naming of said entity must support such multiplicity. The first difficulty in analyzing the function of these characters is to call them by their names, primarily because in naming them, one automatically calls forward a metaphor to define a theoretical and abstract notion which serves to solidify said notion in certain ways that need not be solidified. In other words, naming something can restrict its meaning.

This terming process is complicated by this theoretical factor and others, as usual, which this essay will attempt to unravel and analyze, but also by practical factors which themselves reveal some of the underlying thematic issues in the novels.

The first practical problem is that the novels are both titled with the names of characters. This difficulty is somewhat ameliorated by the convention of italics—one can use Beloved and V. for the characters and *Beloved* and *V.* for the books. The reader will simply have to pay attention to the font, literally, to the act of inscribing them. This parallelism is indicative of the theoretical issues called forth in the text. In the very act of naming the novels, the author privileges the position of these specific “characters” to the reader. In so doing, the approach a reader makes to the book and a certain predisposed framework anchored to these specific characters is privileged before the book is opened.

The third practical issue is that both novels play it fast and loose with narrative perspective, slipping between the voice of the characters and the more removed voice of the narrator, the real-life author lurking somewhere beyond, sometimes detectable in word choice, style, and theme. When discussing a character’s actions or words, one can simply choose to mean that the behavior or voice is Beloved’s instead of a narrator’s or Morrison’s, but this transfer of intentionality is problematic when ascribed to the author, especially in novels with political and social concerns. The three chapters in *Beloved* which are voiced directly from the perspectives of Beloved, Sethe, and Denver are intended to be the unfiltered voices of the characters. But in practice these chapters were written by the author and are presented as pure character voices, an irony that emphasizes the authorial presence because the absence of

conventional authorial control underscores the heightened stylistic approach in the writing. In much the same way, Pynchon's narrator's constant voicing of second-hand stories heard by Stencil or Stencil's insistence on referring to himself in the third person or even the instability of character perspectives as in the title character, also illustrate the intended unreliability of perspective. The resulting deictic confusion necessitates a clear construction of the relevant subject positions played out within the text. According to Ilana Mushin, "In order for a hearer to interpret language as a reflection of the speaker's subjective position, they must be able to orient the information with respect to themselves and the speaker. The ability of hearers to understand the orientation of information with respect to some fixed point, typically the actual speech situation, relies on the deictic function of language" (5). How does one enter into an analysis of a section of text which is intended to be unfiltered but is in reality the work of an author? One must undercut the very intent of the author to do so, acknowledging just the filter that the author intended to dispose of. The question of perspective and voice is one of the major issues at stake in archival theory because deictic confusion is almost a defining feature of an archive. Who is speaking in the presented documents? From what perspective is the document to be considered? Who was the intended audience? How does the unintentional audience interact with these documents? In relation to a fictional text, the questions are similar. The overlapping and mirroring of subject positions, perspectives, and voices of the characters with the readers creates a fundamental relationship between the agents in the reading situation wherein certain characters behave and are treated as texts themselves.

To describe V. and Beloved as “archetypal” characters is tempting in answer to these problems, since the allusion to an anchoring historical text would dispel the disorientation. The idea of archetype is easily used since archetypal associations are usually broadly drawn and can take on many forms as long as there is a basic agreement of some foundational aspect. Is the character female? Ah, then there is the crone or angel archetype to explore. Is the character a mother? Let’s look at Medea as a precursor or maybe Demeter, and the perennial favorite, the Virgin. Is there some sort of death and/or resurrection? Aha! Then there must be a Christ figure involved. These associations are helpful in many ways, but they are sometimes knee-jerk reactions and fail at some critical point. In the specific case of Beloved and V., some archetypes do apply in general, but this term does not really capture the functions of these characters since they are not “copies” of any previous entity. Of course, certain aspects of each character can be aligned with the archetype of the witch or the succubus as some critics have shown.¹⁰

In calling V. and Beloved archetypes, however, a clear understanding of their true roles in their respective texts is significantly limited. Instead, I propose that these characters that literally embody the histories of their communities are “archival” characters. They exhibit characteristics of the gathering together of what Carolyn Steedman calls “debris,” what is produced and then left behind by time and events.

The author, or more precisely, the storyteller, since he or she warrants no claim to total authority, interacts with the closed system of the archive. The storyteller

¹⁰ See Pamela E. Barnett’s “Figurations of Rape and the Supernatural in Beloved” in which she assigns the figure of Beloved to the succubus: “The character Beloved is not just the ghost of Sethe’s dead child; she is a succubus, a female demon and nightmare figure that sexually assaults male sleepers and drains them of semen” (418).

gathers together pieces of the historical record, providing the structure and context of the information as well as the path into the record of multiple, disparate, and sometimes contradictory “materials” which are encountered there. Any number of choices are made about the presentation of the various pieces. Although the materials dictate certain parameters, as in all art, the artistic process naturally produces divergence based on the particular aesthetic of the artist; in short, the act of the imagination is central.

Therefore, the storyteller is the activating or resuscitating agent of the debris within the constructed archival space, creating and applying the web of time by means of the fictive structure of narrative, encasing and filling up the interstices of the debris. The archival character represents the archive; therefore, the role of the reader/storyteller falls to other characters within the story who interact with the archive characters. The major controlling link between the archive and the characters herein discussed is that they are both “figured” in similar ways. Carolyn Hamilton, Vern Harris, and Graeme Reid lay out this concept in the introduction to *Refiguring the Archive*: “The word ‘figure’ enfolds multiple meanings—as a verb: to appear, be mentioned, represent, be a symbol of, imagine, pattern, calculate, understand, determine, consider—all remultiplied by the words’ hospitality to prefixes” (7). Furthermore, “figure” is also a noun, thus accommodating the idea of the human figure as a type of archive. As archival characters, *Beloved* and *V.* are built, marked, and encoded to function as repositories of memory. The reader and other characters “refigure” the meaning(s) offered by the collection of materials within the archive and archive character.

Thus, two planes of archival embodiment and interaction exist in relation to the novel. The first encompasses the living writer and his or her construction of the novel. The second encompasses the storyteller characters within the novel and their interaction with archival characters which makes the construction of their own stories possible.

Archival characters do not exist and are not created as singular entities, whole subjects intended to have volition or power to be dynamic in and of themselves. Instead, archival characters are powerful in their ability to exercise a sort of control on those around them through their embodiment of memory and history, just as a fictional or historical text influences the understanding of the reader. The archival character consists of this historical debris, protecting and defending it against complete destruction. Its power lies in the urgent need to find truth, to find resonance with what one experiences as reality, and to acquire knowledge which is considered factual. Contained within the archival character, however, one finds not the original but the references to the original that, if possible to find, would be true by definition—that which is original is the thing itself and therefore whole and true. The truth is desired and is actively searched for, but the nature of the archival space demands that the available records must undergo rearrangement.

The subsequent reordering and interpretation result in possible coherent meaning in the form of narrative, but the original truth can never be reconstructed *as it was*. Therefore, the human urge to find original truth is a constant turnstile of assuagement and frustration resulting in a never-ending quest articulated most conspicuously in the archival characters V. and Beloved, since both represent a past

truth to the other characters within the novel and to the reader of the novel as well. The authors have capitalized on the urge readers feel to know the identity of both characters in order to anchor the narrative in an understandable, meaningful way. The interaction with the archive is always driven by the need to know origins and to use them to figure one's own place within the history that started somewhere—to piece together, to narrativize a past that exists within the present only as unconnected debris.

This debris, however—the contents of a typical archive—is both purposeful and not. This contradiction creates a displacement that necessitates a rearrangement, a reordering. Usually the documents and objects were originally created not to be accessed, researched and used by a generic viewer or reader. In other words, the archival space is artificial to begin with, a space in which memory is referenced by its very absence; it is prosthetic. The debris within an archive is spatially and chronologically displaced at its inception.

In the case of private collections, the debris were never intended to be archived upon their creation and are composed of elements of a to-be-created story. The term “debris” reflects this destruction of original coherence. These elements that are left over from the figurative death of time and place are pieced together in a different way than their original order and placement and are subsequently placed into a different time and space. In this situation, a gap exists between the original space/place or utterance of the elements of the archive and their existence within an archive. As language is always a referent for something else which it can never *be*, so the elements in an archive are also refers to their original manifestations. The gap allows only

interpretation based on the experience of the reader, never the facts inherent in that which is *original*.

The desire to find the original that we identify as truth is a result of a more basic need which is to provide ourselves with a way to anchor the validity of our identity, our place within the universe both temporally and locatively. The archiving of history in its material form and of memory in its immaterial form, which in its underlying silence is manifest in the currents of metaphor, language and storytelling, is indeed dynamic and political and, through art and literature, activates the necessary counterforce to the complete de-centering of the subject. The archive is the material evidence of what once was, allowing us to imagine that we have a stable identity and singular history, even though we do not. This counterforce makes possible living as an individual within a larger community and as a cohesive community within larger nations. One may therefore maintain individual/community memory within the community/national history. If one is completely defined by the national or communal story, then one is strangled by the adherence to the accepted truth even when that truth is not true to the individual. The truth must accommodate a more certain, local, and singular reality and vice versa for subjectivity to be maintained. Without this balance, both the ties of the communal story would be weakened and the individual identity would be destroyed. In other words, both are necessary for any story to have meaning.

This distinction between these two novels clearly illustrates the divergent uses of the archive. Pynchon's writing shows that the subject cannot return to "the center," or the mythic original, to complete the narrative. The very nature of the archive in Pynchon is to entrap and make any rupture impossible, or at the very least just beyond

the scope of the storyteller's power, because the impulse is feverish to find the truth, and the result is interminable malady. Morrison, however, shows that closure is not possible or necessary and that narrative is enough. Morrison's writing finds strength and identity in the process of storytelling itself, not in the written and concluded fact.

The Meaning of Archive

Both "archive" and "archetype" arise in English from the Greek. The oldest form was probably *arkhein-*, from the Proto-Indo European ancestral reconstructed language, which meant "to begin, rule, command." In Greek, it became *arkhon*—"ruler"—and the connotation of "first" was eventually associated with the term according to the idea that a ruler is first among the people, thus "first type" in the word "archetype." "Archive" reaches English with a swerve from "to begin, rule, command" to "government," an interesting corporealization of the term as it references the body politic, but then it eventually becomes a reference to the material residue of that governmental body in the form of "public records." So the meaning of both "first" and "records" as well as the notion of a type of controlling corpus survives in the term "archive," implying an original, ruling entity within which exists a multitude of references regarding its own function and history.

The original and primary function of archives is to preserve the memory of an institution; but because those institutions are the seats of power within society, controversy about what is remembered and what was intentionally forgotten, who has a voice within archives and who has been silenced, and the practical reasons for these omissions and inclusions has always been a central issue surrounding the practice of archiving. "[A]rchives had their institutional origins in the ancient world as agents for

legitimizing such power and for marginalizing those without power. This initial emphasis has continued” (Cook, “What is Past” 18). Regardless of the theoretical and practical concerns that have waxed and waned in the profession of archivists, this larger concern has always haunted their work and been a kind of litmus test for such theories and practice. While archives do differ throughout the world depending upon the records they keep and the purposes for keeping the records, most archivists agree that they are indeed the same in theory: they seek to “preserve the memory of the world” (Cook, “What is Past,” 18).¹¹

Professional archivists and scholars in record keeping, information management and library science regularly place the birth of archival theory in relation to actual physical archives in the Netherlands at the end of the 19th century with the publication of *Handleiding voor het Ordenen en Beschrijven van Archieven* (*Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*), known simply as The Dutch Manual. This manual, written by Samuel Muller, Johan A. Feith, and Robert Fruin, was an attempt at standardizing and consolidating archival practice and established “[m]any of the concepts archivists take for granted” (Ridener 21). The Manual, although written by three Dutch archivists, integrated French and German concepts; thus, it articulated the core principles of the European archival profession up until that time.

¹¹ Cook notes that while archives around the world more or less follow similarly historically established principles of theory and practice, “archivists in developing countries are now seriously questioning whether classic archival concepts that emerged from the written culture of European bureaucracies are appropriate for preserving the memories of oral cultures” (18 “What is Past”).

In *From Polders to Postmodernism: A Concise History of Archival Theory*, John Ridener traces the historical development of archival theory. He contextualizes the need for a codified theory at the end of the 19th century: “The Dutch Manual was written in the context of change around the globe, especially in terms of the power and the influence of nations and national governments” (21). He further states that “As the national government in the Netherlands began to expand its power and create a national identity, it required a more standardized method of keeping records” (22). The “expansion of power” and the creation of a “national identity” underscore two of the elements that shadow the discussion of archives and the archive in whatever venue they are discussed: power and identity.¹²

Since this beginning of formal archival theory, it has evolved throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first as a result of practical shifts in governmental structures, technological advancements, and world conflict as well as shifting ideological paradigms of history, especially in response to growing interest and concern about the impact of archives on historically marginalized peoples and in the discipline of historiography with issues of scientific truth versus truth as social construction.¹³ Archival theory is based on two main concepts: appraisal and

¹² In the context of *V.* and *Beloved*, two novels whose characters are manifestations of the consequences of colonialism, the rise of importance and the pervasiveness of the physical archive and the increased need for codifying archival practice coincided with the administrative, political and social needs of a state which was heavily invested in colonial endeavors.

¹³ “Archival ‘theory’ and archival ‘theorist’ in this approach do not relate, respectively, to some immutable set of fixed principles and their constant defenders across varying realms of practice. That kind of historical perspective is rather too positivist and outdated for a late twentieth century observer to adopt. Rather, archival thinking over the century should be viewed as constantly evolving, ever mutating as it adapts to radical changes in the nature of records, record-creating organizations,

arrangement/description. The theoretical debates have centered around these “twin pillars of the archival profession” (Cook, “What is Past” 20).

Within these two concepts lie two principles. First, the principle of “*respect des fonds*” or “provenance” means that archives must remain “organic” and in their original order.¹⁴ In other words, there can be no “artificial” arrangements of records based on chronology, geography, or subject. The arrangements of records in the archive must be based on the arrangements of records at the source, the creator of the records themselves. This tenet was supposed to facilitate “the all-important archival activity of elucidating the administrative context in which the records are originally created” (Cook, “What is Past” 21).

Second, appraisal refers to the process which determines the value of records.¹⁵

According to the Society of American Archivists, appraisal is defined as

the process of determining whether records and other materials have permanent (archival) value. Appraisal may be done at the collection, creator, series, file, or item level. Appraisal can take place prior to donation and prior to physical transfer, at or after accessioning. The basis of appraisal decisions may include a number of factors, including the records' provenance and content, their authenticity and reliability, their order and completeness, their condition and costs to preserve

record-keeping systems, record uses, and the wider cultural, legal, technological, social, and philosophical trends in society” (Cook, “What is Past” 20).

¹⁴ Ridener discusses Schellenberg’s theory in relation to archives in other countries, noting that although fundamental archival principles such as provenance are similar world-wide, the specific history and governmental structures of different countries will result in differing theories and practices regarding arrangement and appraisal (91-93).

¹⁵ See Gerald F. Ham’s *Selecting and Appraising Archival Manuscripts* for a book-length discussion of appraisal and appraisal theory.

them, and their intrinsic value. Appraisal often takes place within a larger institutional collecting policy and mission statement. (Pearce-Moses)

The question of when and by whom appraisal takes place is the locus of much disagreement among archivists now and throughout the history of archiving. Two of the most influential thinkers in archival theory during the twentieth century, Sir Hilary Jenkinson and Theodore R. Schellenberg, altered the course of archival studies in their respective work regarding appraisal theory.

Jenkinson's contribution was to focus on the organic aspect of records and posit their "innocence" which was not to be disrupted by the archivist's appraisal. He argued that "The Archivist's career is one of service. He exists in order to make other people's work possible . . . his aim to provide, without prejudice or afterthought, for all who wish to know the Means of Knowledge . . . The good Archivist is perhaps the most selfless devotee of Truth the modern world produces" (qtd. in Cook, "What is Past" 23). Jenkinson's "orientation toward progress and correctness is in line with British historian's empiricism and devotion to the writing of scientific history in the early twentieth century" (Ridener 59). From this position, he did not consider appraisal under the purview of the archivist since he was only to be a "keeper" or "guardian" of the archive: appraisal should occur within the creating organization (Cook, "What is Past" 23). Jenkinson firmly believed that record creation and accumulation were natural, organic processes that created nothing "but the truth" (qtd. in Ridener 59) and any appraisal of said records resulted in relaying false history.

Schellenberg's theory arose from the context of American archives in the 1930s. In the US, the archival profession started not with old, finished records in limited amounts, as the Europeans would have had at the beginning of archiving medieval records, but with a backlog of ever-mounting numbers of records in new formats and utilizing new technologies. Therefore, Schellenberg's work needed to address the issue of appraisal head-on, shifting from issues of mere preservation to selection, a course which directly conflicted with Jenkinson's position. Schellenberg did continue Jenkinson's metaphorical stance concerning the organic nature of records, that they have a life span, but his definition of what constitutes a record to begin with radically altered the theoretical framework. Schellenberg's definition of record included the issue of "future use" in appraising a record's value (Ridener 88). Therefore, the inclusion of a record into the archive was not based on its original purpose as the record of an institution only but as a source of information for researchers and historians as well. In other words, records become archives.

These two theories are of special interest because they usher in conflicting views of appraisal and provenance. Appraisal is the point at which choices are made which ultimately decides which voices are permitted to speak and which are not. Provenance is concerned with how to structure the records, which ultimately decides how the users of the archive will encounter the documents which are deemed valuable. The theoretical battles within archival theory concerning the practice of archiving thus very much mirror the debates in other disciplines in terms of collective memory, access to information, and knowledge formation. The issues at stake in archival theory are important conceptually. However, the more significant issue for other

disciplines is the material, practical concerns of archiving since the theory influences the actual practice; and practice fundamentally alters the point of contact between the archive and the user of the archive.

At the end of the twentieth century, the principles of archival theory began to seep out into other disciplines with theorists like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida who saw the archive as a metaphor for the locus of knowledge and how that knowledge can be put to use in creating master narratives as well as counter narratives.¹⁶ One of the most important texts concerning the notion¹⁷ of the archive¹⁸ was a lecture given by Derrida on June 5, 1994 at an international colloquium in London entitled “Memory: The Question of Archives.” The title of his original lecture in French is “Mal d’Archive: une impression freudienne” which was then translated as “The Concept of the Archive: A Freudian Impression.” In the subsequent printing of the lecture by The University of Chicago Press, the title became and remains *Archive*

¹⁶ In “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” Ann Laura Stoler argues specifically that archives should not be seen as sites of knowledge retrieval but, instead, as sites of knowledge production.

¹⁷ Derrida is careful to point out that “Archive” is a shifting and amorphous idea which cannot be defined, and so he is careful about the category in which the term is placed since categorizing it would create a “sin of nominalism.” “We have no concept, only an impression, a series of impressions associated with a word. To the rigor of the concept, I am opposing here the vagueness of the open imprecision, the relative indetermination of such a *notion*. ‘Archive’ is only a *notion*, an impression associated with a word and for which, together with Freud, we do not have a concept. We only have an impression, an insistent impression through the unstable feeling of a shifting figure, of a schema, or of an in-finite or indefinite process” (29).

¹⁸ Terry Cook makes the distinction between “the archive” and “archives.” “The former focuses on issues of power, memory, and identity centred upon the initial inscription of a document (or series of documents). The latter concentrates on the subsequent history of documents over time, including the many interventions by archivists (and others) that transform (and change) that original archive into archives (497). He goes on to state that “The ‘archive’ (singular) usually engaged by such scholars is as a metaphoric symbol, as representation of identity, or as the recorded memory production of some person or group or culture” (498).

Fever: A Freudian Impression. The translation of Derrida's original title from "*Mal d'Archive*" to "Archive Fever" is both unfortunate and revealing in its limits and connotations regarding how the archive functions in the formation of history and stories. First, *mal* cannot be translated directly as "fever" in English. The French *mal* is used in relation to "bad things" like pain, disease, hurt, or evil in all manner of manifestations. For example, *mal de tête* means "headache" as *mal de ventre* is "stomachache." Furthermore, *mal* in *cela fait mal* means "that hurts." It can also imply "wrong" in *le mal est fait*—"wrong has been done." And the sense of evil is expressed in phrases like *la lutte entre le bien et le mal* which is the common expression "the struggle between good and evil." Although a fever may indeed be bad or in correlation to some kind of pain, to conflate the two ideas is not precise. Fever, however, does also imply passion or force. This meaning comes closer to the intention of Derrida. But the connotation of disease still lingers in the use of the English word fever.

More interesting, however, and not discussed directly in any of the relevant texts, is another meaning of *mal* which is "lack" which directs us to the concept of prosthesis. The expressions which mean "lack" instead of "sickness" or "evil" are based on the construction *en mal de* (which is synonymous with the more common *en manque de* which literally translated is "in lack of"). For example, *Je suis en mal d'inspiration*, *Je suis en mal d'alcool*, and *Je suis en mal de sexe* mean I lack inspiration, alcohol and sex, respectively. However, these express *both* the problematic lack of something (which is usually expressed with only *en manque de*) and the added meaning of a strong desire for what is missing. This translation opens

up the meaning in such a way as to accommodate the idea of passion, illness or evil and the ideas of displaced origins and prosthesis as well. When one is *en mal de*, one does not just lack something but one also has an urgent desire and need for the missing thing. One needs the thing which is missing because one believes it will return one to an original state of equilibrium. However, the thing missing often possesses taboo, destructive or forceful connotations.

The thrust of Freudian psychoanalysis which Derrida deals with is to find what is missing, what is lacking from the current state, to return to the original form when all was cohesive and coherent. Therefore “The Lack of the Archive,” not in the sense that archives themselves lack something but that archives themselves signal a kind of lack, would have been a more appropriate title. This “search for what is lacking” ultimately pushes one to the archive in the first place, to get back to origins, to desire the original. And in the novel *V.* that desire is certainly feverish in the figure of Stencil and in *Beloved* in the figure of Sethe. However, the original in the archive is “dead” already, existing in a state that must be resurrected. The prosthetic, therefore, comes into play. The narrative which links the dead debris of the archive acts as a type of prosthesis, mimicking the original but never having the ability to be the original.

Therefore, in this translation, more is at work than the simple matter of vocabulary translation—the meaning of Derrida’s intent in his title is trying to be conveyed through the English. Steedman points out that the elements of the sickness and evil are important to the ideas Derrida wishes to express and further shows the

problems associated with analyzing the work in translation. Referring to the publisher's insertion of a loose-leaf notice in the book, she writes,

Above all, this brief insertion makes it clear that in *Mal d'archive* Derrida will deal not only with a feverish—sick—search for origins, not only with archives of evil, but with 'le mal radical', with evil itself. The two intertwined threads of argument to follow in the main body of the text . . . underpin a history of the twentieth century that is indeed, a history of horror. To say the very least, if you read in English, without the insert and with the restricted, monovalent, archaic—and, because archaic, faintly comic—'fever' of the English translation, rather than with 'mal' (trouble, misfortune, pain, hurt, sickness, wrong, sin, badness, malice, evil . . .) you will read rather differently from a reader of the French version. (8-9)

Although she misses the sense of "lack" in the term *mal*, she explicitly points out the sense of passion and desire for "origins." In the midst of this word play between the French and English arises the problem of the archive most strikingly played out in *V.*, especially in the quest taken on by Herbert Stencil, and in the search for forgiveness, agency and community for the characters of *Beloved*. Both characters are searching desperately for what they lack and finding it in the fragmented bodies of *V.* and *Beloved*, the archives containing and preserving memory for the community and the individual.

The Material and Immaterial Archive

Pynchon's and Morrison's creation of these characters is intentionally figured as both "construction" and "inscription." As J. Hillis Miller reminds us, the word "character" comes from the Greek for "to scratch." Characters therefore are "marks" scratched into a surface of some kind; they have an inherent and physical relationship with the medium upon which they are scratched which transfers/transforms them into a part of that medium just as the carvings or reliefs on any building are not separate but inherent in its structure as soon as the marking is made. The marking that a storyteller does is not simply indicative of the creation of the mark but also of all the elements which are brought together to bear upon the mark—the support, the decoration, the orientation, etc., all words that point to a greater structure.

In this sense, a character is also built—it has an architecture because it is linked inexorably to the surface upon which it has been applied, altering it indefinitely into its intended shape and design. Derrida and Mbembe both point out the role that the physical presence, the architecture, of the archive plays in legitimizing the existence, function and importance of the archive, in establishing its sacred place within the community. Thus, the architectural element, most prominently displayed in the more or less assembled bodies of *Beloved* and *V.*, establish the characters as sites of the *possible* sacred. The response of the community around them to their inherent architecture determines their status to the community. The two strains of construction meld here again, the word out of inscription as well as out of construction.

The architecture of the archive not only establishes it as a sacred space, but it also limits the parameters of included debris. Not all events or facts of a community or period can be included within the archive, so certain debris is available to a reader

and other debris cast aside, excluded, unprotected and unsheltered. Subsequently, readers' interpretations are based on a certain set of debris, not all that in reality actually exists. Michel Foucault published *The Archeology of Knowledge* in 1969 in which he establishes that the archive *is* "the general system of the formation and transformation of statements" (130). Foucault's concept of the archive is predicated upon the idea that a controlling force from inside the archive limits the statements possible. Since the archive encompasses the rules of any society's discursive system itself and all possible statements that could be made are also predicated upon the basis of its contents, its architecture is actually invisible to those within the system.

At the same time, however, Foucault maintains that "it is the border of time that surrounds our presence, which overhangs it, and which indicates it in its otherness; it is that which, outside ourselves, delimits us" (130). He conceptualizes the archive as architectural, with an inside and an outside, any access to which is circumvented but not ultimately precluded by temporal and linguistic removal, being both close and distant, beginning "outside our own language; its locus is the gap between our own discursive practices" (131). The "system" is therefore a closed space, in *V.* figured according to Profane around the architectural concept of the Street, and in *Beloved* around the structure of the house, and includes the debris and those who interact with the debris. Within this system, the archivist forms the statements through his/her choices of what to include and/or cite, and the reader is the one who transforms them through interpretation, with the end result of time being introduced into the archival space and the resulting narrative.

The interacting aspects of time and place within the archive are also apparent in the term itself, according to Derrida. He focuses on the term *arkhe* which hints at a more active quality to the word in that it was both “commencement” and even the more strongly directive “commandment” (Derrida, *Archive Fever* 1). These translations allow for the term to imply a sense of power, creation, and control. Derrida explains in *Archive Fever*: “This name apparently coordinates two principles in one; the principle according to nature or history, *there* where things *commence*—physical, historical, or ontological principle—but also the principle according to the law, *there* where men and gods command, *there* where authority is given, social order are exercised, *in this place* from which *order* is given—nomological principle” (1, italics in original). The archive is a powerful entity that both creates and orders knowledge and, very significantly for his theory, has a temporal element—it lies in stasis ready for commencement—as well as a locative element—it is *there* in a *place*.

The spatial and temporal arrangement of the archive promotes equivalency. All artifacts are given equal importance in their documentation and presentation. No one piece is documented with a more special number or placement within the physical archive than any other piece; so all artifacts within the archive are spatially equal, reaffirming the lack of movement within the space of the archive. Their spatial orientation is a matter of chance and artificial arrangement into the coding and organizational system of the given institution or person who has created the archive.

The spatial equality is matched by an equality of time as well. All of the artifacts are also temporally equal in that they can be accessed in any order regardless of their past chronology. Thus, the debris is stripped of the time related to its origin.

Although the pieces may be arranged by date, the date is an isolated organizational tool, not a way to create networks or connections between the artifacts. As there is no chronology, there is also no hierarchy. The debris lies equalized. If all materials are equalized spatially, they are also simultaneously equalized in time or, more specifically, outside of a time that passes. All the residue from the past is no longer in the past or of the past and becomes only present, and the times represented by the residue become horizontal but not linear, as if spread out on a table. Derrida's notion of the "future anterior" speaks to this interchange between the residue of a past event and its continuous temporal existence. Any physical residue of the past carries with it the event of the past (its origin) as it also makes the material itself and the event present and future. Therefore, the artifact itself is outside of time. Time is essentially reduced to the duration in which the reader encounters the debris, resulting in an odd kind of metanarrative—the story of the encounter with the past and not a narrative about the past itself. This narrative is the experience of the characters in *V.* and *Beloved* who surround *V.* and *Beloved*. Therefore, the narrative act is necessary to chronologize the debris, which results in the reordering of the past and presenting a new hierarchy of events. A re-established hierarchy is both present and future-directed since the narrative reflects the present interaction with the debris and will be encountered by the audience in the future.

Derrida points out another aspect of the term, that it actively archives or is, itself, an archive: "The concept of the archive shelters in itself, of course, this memory of the name *arkhe*. But it also shelters itself from this memory which it shelters; which comes down to saying also that it forgets it" (Derrida, *Archive Fever* 2). The

word “shelters” indicates a protective, or perhaps even defensive, stance toward the *stuff* the term and the actual archive contain. The thrust of the archive is to protect the past in material form and control the boundaries of its enclosure. The contained debris thus facilitates the continuation of the “instituting imaginary,” the immaterial history that the archive allows the researcher/storyteller to create and relate in her rearranging of the debris accordingly.

Therefore, the *material* archive, the place that contains the debris and has an architecture, actively performs two main functions. First, it preserves in its protective function physical artifacts and documents. Artifacts can be anything from photographs to personal effects of any kind. The documents within the archive are much more inclusive, incorporating everything from public and governmental documents like newspapers, birth and death certificates, and census reports to private documents including notebooks, journals, and letters. These artifacts are encountered by the reader and are automatically reformed by the encounter both physically and temporally.

Second, the material archive in its architectural form acts as a kind of totem within the community. In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Emile Durkheim supplies the definition of totem as the material representation of the immaterial. It possesses power and authority because it is common to all members of the specific clan it represents (217). The very nature of the grand structures which house most “important” or state archives imbue their contents with the same grand status and thus make the story told by the contents authorized by the powers within the community that have created it. The story the archive tells is granted authority by the

physical architecture. The concurrent impact on temporality is that the architecture also memorializes the space, also creates a kind of rhythm of return. In other words, the architecture of the space which contains the residue of the past becomes a physical space one can return to repeatedly to re-narrativize the past. Therefore, time for the reader is constantly cycling as he/she re-encounters the past within a specific location.

The *immaterial* archive, the time of history and memory and the narratives which arise from the past, actively performs two main functions. First, in its defensive function, the archive registers a collective identity for the community within which it exists as a totem would. This is defensive in that definitions created from inside the community result in a resistance to definitions from outside the community. This tenet applies most specifically to archives which are accessible by the masses. For example, the archive materials which included slave records during the 300 plus years of slavery would not have been accessible to the vast majority of those documented within these collections of archivable materials. While the material records themselves were inaccessible to those they concerned, there is no power to use them, alter them, rearrange them, or even to destroy them. These records, therefore, replaced the materiality of the bodies they represented in paper and ink form, making their existence and value predicated upon the documentation of their bodies, not the human flesh itself. Only after these types of archival records are available to those defined by them can honest investigation and narrative rupture occur.

In other words, the defensive function of the resistance to the Master Narratives that have instituted the archive in the first place is limited or nonexistent until the archive is accessible by those defined within it. In the flow of time, those

restricted from access to archival records, which fundamentally record the attributes of those restricted, must gain access in one way or another in order to rearrange the archive into a narrative that will accurately represent them. Therefore, the archive can be used both to uphold the Master Narratives and to resist them. The archive's debris may then be used within its own system to undermine the nature of the system. This defensive function is more communal in nature, allowing minorities within the hegemonic culture to define themselves through interaction with the debris of the archive once they gain access. Once the subgroups gain access, they can contribute to the form of the archive and direct the reconstruction of the past, more fully fleshing out the disembodied voices that reside there, activating them through narrative reconstruction.¹⁹

Second, in its more protective function, the archive allows memory and/or plural histories to exist within History and free of its chokehold on the individual, who is usually forgotten in the grand sweep of big events. The protective function works

¹⁹ This practical access to and control of archives by the peoples and communities the archive represents is becoming more and more realized. For a large scale example, see the National Museum of the American Indian's policy of partnering with tribal members concerning their historical artifacts. "NMAI's mission, with its emphasis on partnership with Native people and their contemporary lives, has spurred different collections-development strategies and programmatic efforts as well as consultations with community representatives on appropriate standards of care, modes of exhibition and interpretation, and the museum's overall operations" ("History of the Collections"). For a smaller scale archival collection, see also the Lesbian Herstory Archive located in New York City. Their mission statement reads: "The Lesbian Herstory Archives exists to gather and preserve records of Lesbian lives and activities so that future generations will have ready access to materials relevant to their lives. The process of gathering this material will uncover and collect our herstory denied to us previously by patriarchal historians in the interests of the culture which they serve. We will be able to analyze and reevaluate the Lesbian experience; we also hope the existence of the Archives will encourage Lesbians to record their experiences in order to formulate our living herstory" ("A Brief History").

more individually, allowing the previously unheard voices of the past to be found again and reconstructed into personal narratives. There are stories that the pieces of the archive can tell that are not yet “authorized” or even usually included in History. They are stories that await the readers’ interaction and interpretation and can, even within the auspices of the “institution” which created the archive in the first place, exist within the gaps that History does not and cannot fill. In this way, the archive is able to function both as an institution of History and a protector of the subjective memory of the individual and its power to produce plural histories. This dual role is evident in the characters of *V.* and *Beloved*. They are both assembled from swaths of history, preserving them bodily, but their interaction with others produces individual stories that can be constructed, thus defending the other individual’s identity.

The archive presents material layers of objects, facts, indeed, the debris. It is in the physical interaction with this debris that different types of knowledge are constructed. Burrowing through the layers of this debris is the process that Toni Morrison in *Beloved* and Thomas Pynchon in *V.* invite us to do along with them in search of a complex web of knowledge, subjectivity and origins. Both authors have corporealized memory in order to locate it materially, just as the archive is a physical space in which the past is present. A storyteller cannot make a space, an emptiness, into a character—the interior of a room, for example, cannot “act.” It is within the space of the archive that memory is held in stasis as debris, waiting to be animated. So in order to “animate” memory, both Pynchon and Morrison have embodied it in the characters *V.* and *Beloved*, assembled pieces of the past to make bodies which act and

lend themselves to be read as narratives. Therefore, there is a distinct parallel between the bodies that they have imagined and the instituting imaginary of the archive.

The most apropos metaphor for this intermingling and collaboration is the connection between the mind and the body. Within the body, the material and the immaterial are reciprocally related. The usual paradigm of “mind” and “body” typically assumes that the body is at the disposal of the mind, that the mind controls the body. But this hierarchy does not necessarily exist. In language, specifically, a “reciprocal relationship” is clear, where the language articulates the experiences of the body; and the language itself defines the parameters of that experience. This collaboration between the immaterial aspect of the mind and the materiality of the body points directly to the conception that memory is indeed contained within the body or more precisely that *memory is embodied*. This intersection of the material and the immaterial, which occurs continuously and imperceptibly in the human body on a biological and psychological level, finds parallels and expression in the notion of the archive. Both the body and the archive are physical spaces—material, tangible, and composed of pieces. The memory contained in both is animated through language in the form of narrative. It is meant to piece together, like a quilt, a coherent, meaningful history that is present. However, as Derrida points out, and Plato before him, the written record, whether the atemporal document preserved in the archive or the chronologized narrative in the text of the novel, is also a way to forget. Paradoxically, the archival space also facilitates and even favors willful forgetfulness by its very nature.

The nature of forgetfulness within the archive results from the presence of the debris, not from any absence. Hypomnesia is prosthetic by definition, by nature, and the archive is therefore a type of cultural prosthesis. The concept of prosthesis is fundamentally important in this discussion of the archive because it carries with it the idea of separateness and replacement, void and presence. The prosthetic nature of the archive is related to memory and always to the “question of relation as remove” (Wills 19). In other words, the prosthesis simulates the body and supplements the lack in the actual body. Therefore, a prosthesis both completes the body but also inevitably points to the space or lack that it supplants. The same process is apparent in our use of language in terms of memory.

The Greek word *hypomnema* simply means “note, reminder, or public record.” Derrida explains that when he writes a note (notice the dependence upon written language in the example) that it is expressly a method of forgetting the contents of the note—to have the knowledge that the information is kept “safe” in a “safe” is to be able to forget it because one can always return to it if necessary to remember. “I put it in my pocket or in the safe, it’s just in order to forget it, to know that I can find it again while in the meantime having forgotten it” (“Archive Fever in South Africa” 54). However, Derrida points out that danger is inherent in this process because there is no guarantee that the information is indeed safe. The possibility of annihilation is ever-present. The drive to destruction always threatens the safe place by the very act of placing it in an exterior place. “The risk has to do with what Freud defines as a death drive—that is, a drive to, precisely, destroy the trace without any reminder, without any trace, without any ashes” (40). David Wills concurs: “. . . for it is always death

that one finds lurking behind a case of prosthesis” (143). The death drive is intimately associated with repetition, an automatic response intended to return to the original state.²⁰

Derrida’s ideas echo the concerns of all those interested in archival theory, not to mention history and literature and any number of other disciplines, the search for origins. Where and when did something originate and why? Carolyn Steedman writes that “Derrida had long seen in Freudian psycho-analysis a desire to recover moments of inception, beginnings and origins which—in a deluded way—we think might be some kind of truth, and in ‘Archive Fever’, desire for the archive is presented as part of the desire to find, or locate, or possess that moment of origin, as the beginning of things” (3). The origin can only be immaterial because it is both removed from the material matter with which we can physically interact and from our current timeframe. Therefore, the “desire to find, or locate, or possess” the origin can never be fulfilled. The thing or event that the debris stands for is the materiality of memory and the precursor to obsessive fetishism. So the natural human desire that Derrida conceptualizes is ever-frustrated, thus making the pursuit a “sick” endeavor. Sethe and Stencil are both examples of this drive to go back, to find the original, and both are diminished by it. Sethe becomes physically weak and ill while Stencil becomes more and more paranoid.

²⁰ Benjamin Hutchens discusses the movement from subject to subject-of-history by means of archivization in “Techniques of Forgetting? Hypo-Amnesic History and the An-Archive.” He argues that the consignment of a subject to the archive simultaneously erases it. He posits that only “counter-memory” which he turns into “an-archivic” memory can displace the contrived commensuration of the discourse(s) that interpret the archive” (45).

The fundamental paradox of the archive is that it is contained within the bricks and mortar of architecture. It consists of material objects; yet its function, its purpose, and its power lie not in its materiality but in its ability to invoke what is immaterial. The strange “alchemy” that results in the movement from material to memory (the imaginary that is the re-imaging of the immaterial past) reveals the connection between what is seen and what is unseen, what is fact and what is myth, what are events and what is a story. These very elements are corporeally manifested in the body of characters whose function is the same, to mirror this process of the archival purpose and power within the realms of fiction. They represent the connection between mere thought and physical manifestation, the dead come to life, the word made flesh. Although fictional characters have no material body in the real world, they do have bodies in the narrative itself. The fictional character, thus, is imaginary and corporal at the same time. The fictional character, thus, is created and creative at the same time. In the nexus of these realities lies the parallel with the archive.

The connection between the body and the text is well established in Judeo-Christian societies primarily based on biblical texts, but the Western world is far from proprietary in this concept. For example, we find in Jahn Janheinz’s work, *Muntu: An Outline of Neo-African Culture*, this concept in relation to one tenet of west African philosophy, many tenets of which are manifested in Morrison’s writing: “Even the act of conception which produces a human being, who is not only a physical, but also a spiritual creature—muzima—is a conception not only through the seed, but at the same time through the word” (124). The literal and figurative “conception” of a human is tied together through both the material of the flesh and the immaterial word,

which paradoxically creates the whole person. Again, the very paradox is repeated since the “existence” of these characters is not material but imaginary, yet manifested in document and textual form, very real elements which are themselves archivable. They are parallel to and incorporated with the real world facts of history which are material, and yet their power infiltrates that real world only in the realm of the imaginary. The “in-universe” existence and activities of archival characters expressly demonstrate the same fundamental aspects of the “real world” archive. And conversely, the “real world” archive contains these material texts.

Animating the Archive through Narrative

The archive, therefore, is itself nothing more than material reality in stasis. It is inanimate. It is dead. Within the archive there is no spatial or chronological movement. The archive does not remember. The archive does not forget. But it facilitates memory and forgetfulness, the two opposing forces that maintain the stasis of the archive in place and time. The interruption of this stasis is simple: it is the introduction of time. One must operate within a sense of time to remember or forget. No memory or forgetfulness can exist without acknowledging and accommodating a sense of past and present. In order to facilitate memory and forgetfulness, the debris must be arranged in accordance with time, which is by definition narrative.

The archive is supposed to be “reality” in its material form. The novel is, however, the “imaginary.” Institutions create archives. Authors create novels. These differences, as slight or as considerable as they may be, do not negate the process of creation with which both the archive and the novel collaborate, the latter drawing substance from the former, and the former reincorporating the latter. The “gathering

together” of historical pieces of information, which both the author and the institution do, is presented as a whole, coherent collection of ideas awaiting the subjective eye of the reader(s). In the first level of the collaboration, however, the novelist is the reader. Novels reorder and chronologize the debris with the obvious gloss of aesthetic language and the “structured” plot. The construct of time has been interjected into the archival pieces, or, better yet, a timeframe has encased and filled up the interstices of the debris.

The novel’s principle of being “fiction” allows the reader to place more emphasis on style than substance, and the (hi)story is presented without excuse. Achille Mbembe explains how archives are the scattered pieces that provide the building blocks of the narratives that their respective societies adopt collectively.

No archive can be the depository of the entire history of a society, of all that has happened in that society. Through archived documents, we are presented with pieces of time to be assembled, fragments of life to be placed in order, one after the other, in an attempt to formulate a story that acquires its coherence through the ability to craft links from the beginning to the end. (21)

The archive provides the raw material for the novel, and the novel reintroduces the separate pieces of the archive back into time, thus giving them life again. It is a limited life, however, since the story is then moved back into the space of the archive, itself become merely a text among the debris.

Unlike in fiction, the archivist is expected to lay out all the pieces without filtration, which in practice is not the case. Terry Cook makes this point clearly:

Yet such societal or collective memory has not been formed haphazardly throughout history, nor are the results without controversy. Historians in a postmodernist milieu are now studying very carefully the processes over time that have determined what was worth remembering and, as important, what was forgotten, deliberately or accidentally. Such collective "remembering"--and "forgetting"--occurs through galleries, museums, libraries, historic sites, historic monuments, public commemorations, and archives--perhaps most especially through archives. ("What's Past" 18)

The novel in which history and memory are thematically imperative therefore overlaps with the process of institutionalizing history and memory because it, in turn, becomes archivable. The primary difference is the absence of time in the one and the dependence upon time in the other. The gaps are present in both, and the necessary analysis on the historic record is just as necessary as the analysis on the fictional story. The historic record in its desired ascension toward the "truth" must be subjected to similar analytical and theoretical concerns to which fiction is subjected. Conversely, fiction, which unabashedly proclaims its subjective nature, often mimics the societal position of the historic record and, therefore, should also be subject to the analytical and theoretical concerns of historians.

In their introduction to *Refiguring the Archive*, the editors note that "Historians and other scholars are increasingly concerned to understand how knowledge is produced and, more specifically, how knowledge of the past is produced" (Hamilton, Harris and Reid 9). One "real world" way to remember the past and thus create

knowledge is writing, and then once produced, any writing—journalistic, autobiographical, fictional—is subsequently archivable. The novel participates in the cycle of knowledge production.

The fictional writing that exists within the genre of the novel is not necessarily only a document, but it also serves as a documenting agent.²¹ The novel itself both archives knowledge and is itself archivable. This quality makes the novel a dual actor within the theory of knowledge production and the archive. Furthermore, archival and archivist characters are mirrors of the novel/archive. These characters function within the novel as documenting agents and archives themselves. Other characters function as readers and seekers (those who delve into the residue of the past) of memory to find knowledge.

Michel Foucault writes that “history, in its traditional form, undertook to ‘memorize’ the monuments of the past, transform them into *documents*, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say; in our time, history is that which transforms *documents* into *monuments*” (7). By extension, then, the novelist, (Morrison and Pynchon specifically), takes monuments and turns them into art and takes documents and turns them into characters.

Morrison’s and Pynchon’s works are a direct artistic reaction to the paradigm shift in concepts of history and memory. Foucault outlines the shift from an

²¹ William Kuskin cuts to the chase by calling books themselves “the archives of literary history.” He argues that books have no physical “interiority” which is necessary for an archive, “Yet these pages possess a depth of their own and to read them is to enter the archival interior of the textual surface. Thus, I argue that books are not merely artifacts . . .” (79).

understanding of history as the study of “simple causality, of circular determination, of antagonism, of expression” to an understanding of history as a balancing of disparate elements on scales which “bear a type of history peculiar to each one, and which cannot be reduced to the general model of a consciousness that acquires, progresses, and remembers” (8). This understanding of history is not more static in its approach since it does not try to follow a progression but instead delves into layers and the cross-contamination of events and personalities, thus engendering the possibility of valuing multi-faceted, multi-temporal and multi-meaningful interpretations and subjective experiences. Even this metaphorical explanation of the process, “delving into layers,” automatically conjures the image of the archive, the material repository of history and memory, or in essence, plural histories.

The general impulse to document, record and contain societal memory is present in the creation of the archive, historical narration, and fiction. The distinctions between them are definite but do not necessarily make the natures of the archive, history writing, and the novel mutually exclusive. Instead they act on a continuum, the archive serving as material evidence for the work of the author of both history and fiction; and the work of the historian and the author eventually becomes, itself, a piece of the archive. In an article entitled “Building a Living Memory for the History of Our Present,” Jean-Pierre Wallot succinctly illustrates the encompassing and lofty goal of the archive and its creators: “This is the archivist’s main challenge, to structure a future to the historical experience of our time” (266). Wallot’s notion, however, does not take into account the role of narrative that activates the archival record. The archive does indeed present a structure, but it is a structure outside of time. It is not

until a narrative is constructed out of the pieces of the archive that the “structure of a future” comes into play.

When an author is constrained by “reality” or “the suspension of disbelief,” then parameters of presentation are formulated by the constraints of time, physics, and the internal logic of the narrative. But when an author has the *carte blanche* to gather together disparate characteristics, each of which is significant in various ways and even contradictory or disruptive to the overall smaller form of the story or novel itself, to create a character outside of the traditional modes of characterization or the constraints of narrative logic, then the parameters are of less concern and can be drawn as multiple and overlapping. The seeming randomness or chaotic conglomeration is proof of the storyteller’s process of gathering of any ideal vestige which can play a part in the production of meaning within and for his/her community. The constraint operating upon archival characters is that their nature is to be inclusive of all possibilities of reconstruction given a limited set of materials that the enclosed and controlled architecture of the archive itself makes available. In other words, it is a closed system which will eventually, mathematically, be exhausted of its possible combinations. The archive signifies this closed system, but it is a system which is composed of a community’s material records, what the community holds as physically true based on nothing other than its tangible existence. So the materiality of the archive is considered to be proof of its veracity, the claim to unadulterated, unfiltered truth. It is, however, also a system which contains only traces of the past, traces that signify absence which is the space of narration.

The Certain and the True

Within historical narratives and fictional narratives, an inherent interplay of rearranging the historical “record” arises from the archive. These writings—which are both constructions and inscriptions—are in the business of creating knowledge and are subject to inquiry about how this knowledge is produced and how the knowledge of the past is produced. How do we understand, however, what actually makes up “knowledge” in relation to the past? It is not well-defined, specific, quantifiable or qualifiable. Giambattista Vico, 18th century Italian rhetorician, historian and philosopher, published his *New Science* in 1725, again in 1730, and the final version in 1744. In this work, he considers knowledge and argues that there are two kinds of knowledge, the Certain and the True.²² This seeming dichotomy clearly expresses a theory of access to disputed, disregarded, and/or discredited knowledge²³ while simultaneously circumventing the tired complaint against “relative” truth that often hits postmodernist critique (that if everything is relative, then nothing is valid). The distinction between the two as well as the synthesis they create allows for a cycling

²² Hayden White, who was greatly influenced by Vico’s ideas, might term these concepts as the “imaginary” and the “real” or the “false” and the “true” (*Historical Emplotment* 39). It is a fine point, but I prefer Vico’s terms over White’s because they avoid the pejorative connotations established in such antonymic vocabulary. This debate crosses into all areas of “discredited knowledge” and historically marginalized communities/cultures. For a discussion of this distinction in relation to Native Americans, see Arnold Krupat’s introduction and first chapter of *Red Matters*. “. . . for traditional people, history is a culturally and socially agreed-upon account of the past. It is what the elders and those with authority to speak have recounted as what happened. Their account presents the truth of the matter, a truth that may on occasion contradict what seem to be the facts. Usually, when this is the case, “We call Their history myth; fetishizing fact, we neither accept their historical criteria as consistent with truth, nor do we translatively mediate between their language and our own” (xi).

²³ Toni Morrison’s phrasing is recalled in Barbara Christian’s article “The Race for Theory” in which she specifically mentions that the “creations” are discredited, meaning, for one, communal and individual stories: “. . . black writing has been generally ignored in this country. Since we, as Toni Morrison has put it, are seen as a discredited people, it is no surprise, then, that our creations are also discredited” (55).

between the particular and the universal, the individual and the community, the story and History.²⁴

Roland Barthes' concept of myth illustrate this cycling. He postulates that myth itself is a "second-order semiological system in which "a sign . . . in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second" (114). He explains that language (or *langue* as Saussure termed it) is the first system and that myth "[shifts] the formal system of the first significations sideways" (115). This shifting is theoretically limitless, cycling from meaning to form to meaning eternally.

By "myth," Barthes means the stories the larger culture accepts as defining, thus True, following Vico's use of the term. He represents this theory in the following schema, itself metaphorical:

1. Signifier	2. Signified	
3. Sign		
I. SIGNIFIER	II. SIGNIFIED	
III. SIGN		

The "Language System" is 1, 2, and 3. The "Myth System" is I, II, and III. Barthes further explains that "We now know that the signifier can be looked at, in myth, from two points of view; as the final term of the linguistic system, or as the first term of the mythical system. We therefore need two names" (116-117). These two names are

²⁴ In the chapters in this work regarding Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, I will attempt to show how Roland Barthes' ideas about myth illustrates this cycling between the Certain and the True.

“meaning” for the final term of the first system, and “form” for the first term of the second system. The new terms are inserted:

1. Signifier	2. Signified	
3. Sign <i>or</i> Meaning		
I. SIGNIFIER <i>or</i> Form		II. SIGNIFIED <i>or</i> Concept
III. SIGN <i>or</i> Signification		

The Signifier is ambiguous for Barthes since it is both Meaning and Form, full on one side and empty on the other. As meaning, the signifier already postulates a reading, I grasp it through my eyes, it has a sensory reality (unlike the linguistic signifier, which is purely mental), . . . As a total of linguistic signs, the meaning of the myth has its own value, it belongs to a history . . . in the meaning, a signification is already built, and could very well be self-sufficient if myth did not take hold of it and did not turn it suddenly into an empty parasitical form. The meaning is *already* complete, it postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions. When it becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letter remains. There is here a paradoxical permutation in the reading operations, an abnormal regression from meaning to form, from the linguistic sign to the mythical signifier. (Barthes 117)

This cycling, which Barthes himself refers to as a “turnstile” (123), from Meaning to Form between the two systems and the fact that the Meaning and Form are also parallel constructs creates a model not only for linguistic constructs but also for bodies and in so doing juxtaposes the linguistic constructs with bodies further connecting his thoughts with Vico’s concepts.

Without this basic distinction between Vico’s Certain and True, when narratives compete, “to the victor go the spoils” will always be the result. This distinction allows for validation of individual experience regardless of the master narrative that attempts to subsume it. Furthermore, the symbiotic relationship between these two concepts prevents one from going too far afield from the other into fantasy, holding both the History and the story in check.²⁵

In “Memory, Literacy, And Invention: Reimagining the Canon of Memory for the Writing Classroom,” Kathleen J. Ryan discusses memoirs, a type of narrative that relies completely on individual certainty for its creation. She attempts “To redefine memory as a strategic, contextualized process of interpretation [which] requires a new version of classical rhetoric’s fourth canon, *memoria*. A contemporary canon of memory that I call rememored knowing attends to the relationships among history, literacy, and invention to reconceive memory as a way to make knowledge” (36). In order to do this, she points to problems with classical rhetorical descriptions of memory which involve simple recall based on mental images. She turns then to Vico as a theorist who challenged this conception by showing that memory involves not

²⁵ In “Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth,” White also discusses the problem of which competing narratives, judged upon their presentation as literal instead of figurative and their plot type, could be dismissed from competition.

only recall but imagination and invention, or interpretation while acknowledging that his emphasis on memory was specifically related to “oral” culture. Memory related to an oral way of knowing is important in archival theory simply because it illustrates that the archives privilege documentation over memory, and the Derridean emphasis on archives as places of forgetting where cultural and community memory is always in danger. Therefore, Vico’s emphasis on the preliterate allows for a challenge to the idea that written documents are superior and authorized as Master Narratives. Writing is not memory. Documents are not memory. They are ways of knowing that are filtered through the urge to forget. To hold the memory in the body and transform it through imaginative and inventive narrative, as Vico’s theory suggests, gives equal status to the individual over the authorized memory that is housed in an archive. Therefore, Vico’s theory of the Certain and the True privileges neither the document nor the individual voice but makes room for both, validating both History and stories as credible ways of knowing.

Vico theorizes that men make their realities through language: “language originated through the workings of the imagination—the unique faculty that allowed humans to transform the world of sensory experience into a world of mental reflection” (Danesi 30). Furthermore, he postulates that men’s first utterances were “poetic.” By poetic, he means metaphorical. One of Vico’s most important and, later, influential points found in his *New Science* is that “When people cannot know the truth, they strive to follow what is certain and defined. In this way, even if their intellect cannot be satisfied by abstract knowledge, *scienza*, at least their will may

repose in common knowledge, *conscienza*” [137].²⁶ The stories we tell and the language in which we tell them comprise our knowledge and are thus subjective truth. These things are to us Certain.

However, Vico maintained that universal truths do indeed exist but may not be known definitively or concretely by any individual. These things are what Vico calls True. In other words, the True does exist but is unknowable and unreachable by man. Vico also places the disciplines of philosophy and philology within this construct: “Philosophy contemplates reason, from which we derive our abstract knowledge of what is true. Philology observes the creative authorship and authority of human volition, from which we derive our common knowledge of what is certain” [138]. The True can be only approached through human reason although in abstract form, and the Certain is knowable through human will and “creative authorship”—in other words, imagination. The documents preserved within an archive are presumed to be as close to truth as one can come. When those records are arranged and reconstructed into comprehensible narrative structures, they can be used to formulate our definitions and historical knowledge. Therefore, to use imagination in constructing a narrative is to use and study language in order to find knowledge and the only avenue through which to do so. The logical problem is that the “abstract knowledge” of what is true is approached or derived through human reason, an attribute already construed and constructed through the “creative authorship and authority of human volition.” So there is, in the end, no clear opposition between the True and the Certain since the True is derived or created from observations and the Certain is created through

²⁶ Following the standard practice in Vico studies, all references from *New Science* are to paragraph numbers, not pages.

imagination. Neither are *truly true* in the universal sense of the word but exist only on a sliding scale towards universal truth, which, and it bears repeating, cannot be reached.

Vico ameliorates this logical problem of instantaneous deconstruction of meaning by allowing that language which arose from physical experience and not reason is an avenue to *approach* the True as well and thus makes his strongest and most interesting point in the argument about language and its power to create community and maintain subjectivity through the corporal. He shows the development of language from the physical experience to the reflective one leads to philosophy and thus to whole systems of understanding the world: “This axiom is the first principle of poetic statements, which are formed by feelings of passion and emotion. By contrast, philosophical statements are formed by reflection and reasoning. Philosophical statements approach the truth as they ascend to universality. Poetic statements gain certainty as they descend to particulars” (94). The faulty grounds of human reason and volition are aided and supported by the history of language that sprung from the body, the poetic (metaphorical) utterances that began with the first primal sounds. This link is not negotiable, and this link between the body and language, more generally, is foundational in the problematics of history and memory.

Therefore, works of fiction, although “untrue,” still maintain a correspondence with Vico’s idea of the Certain and are therefore equally significant, just as neither the immaterial nor the material aspects of reality are subjugated to the other. These fictions participate in history making, archiving the past, on as important a level as any historian does as he/she creates “non-fiction.” The novels *Beloved* and *V.* have so

integrated the thematic of writing and history, to the point that characters are constructed to manifest attributes of writing and history themselves, that the meta-narrative *is* narrative and shows how sometimes competing truths, in the Vichian sense of the True and the Certain, are constructed. To write history, to create a piece of the cultural “archive,” if indeed one accepts that is what Morrison and Pynchon have done, is always to interpret the past anyway. Morrison’s and Pynchon’s aesthetics do not in any way dilute history or make it fundamentally untrue but instead re-imagine a corresponding certainty to the historical truth in order to open up the space for normally silenced voices to be present.

This seemingly contradictory positioning of the true record and a fictional one on equal and/or similar grounds is not a new one. Vico’s conception of the Certain and the True does not imply a contradictory aspect; they are *interdependent* concepts of both history and memory; their attributes, according to Vico’s theory, are most readily detectable in language and in stories where multiple and layered realities, sometimes seemingly contradictory, are constructed to acknowledge each other and exist together.

Finally, one of Vico’s most well-known principles is what has come to be called the verum-factum principle which posits that man can only know what he himself has made. In the poetic and frequently quoted excerpt below, he describes the intermingling of the mind and the material world which includes the body, a distinct but interrelated, interdependent, and coterminous dynamic resulting in a process of knowledge production:

Still, in the dense and dark night which envelops remotest antiquity, there shines an eternal and inextinguishable light. It is a truth which cannot be doubted; *The civil world is certainly the creation of humankind*. And consequently, the principles of the civil world can and must be discovered *within the modifications of the human mind*. . . .because it is buried deep within the body, the human mind naturally tends to notice what is corporeal, and must make a great and laborious effort to understand itself, just as the eye sees all external objects, but needs a mirror to see itself. [331, italics in original]

For Vico, the way to gain knowledge of the contemporary world was through the way humans had constructed their societies in the past, and he found language the most reliable path to understanding that past.²⁷

Therefore, the mirror Vico mentions is held up to the body but is not the body itself, only its representation, just as language is not the thing itself but a representation of what is True. Nietzsche concurs on the point of representation specifically but concludes that the referential aspect of language is in fact empty of anything outside of itself, so full of only itself, or of human creativity, not of Truth: “.

²⁷ Nietzsche's stance is a nuanced version of Vico's and makes the function of the archive clearer. Nietzsche writes, “As a genius of construction man raises himself far above the bee in the following way; whereas the bee builds with wax that he gathers from nature, man builds with the far more delicate conceptual material which he first has to manufacture from himself” (“On Truth” 118). He argued that myth, the stories constructed within a particular society to hold up the mirror, is the receptacle of all human imagination and therefore the key to all human invention. These stories combine both the original ideas of a society but also the original traces of the language of that society. These traces are powerfully connected to physical, and thus essential realities, but they remain traces only.

. . we possess nothing but metaphors for things—metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities” (116). The viewer of the body, the mind, must interpret the view seen of the material body just as he interprets his material surroundings. This is the same process one must do when looking into the mirror of language. One must receive the material aspect through the senses, imagine its significance and meaning and then arrive at a production of the imagination. The mind interprets, *must* interpret, because nothing is pure and immediately grasped as “the thing itself.” Therefore, the process of looking at the body is parallel to looking at language. Language and the story are two tiers of the same impulse. Language originated in the melding of the corporal with the intangible, and this alchemy continues the production of language. The word spoken and ultimately recorded in some way transformed the individual experience into some sort of record which transformed its elusive and intangible existence into a mark which could be referenced over and over again, in a type of eternal recurrence which is varied but finite. Stories, then, are simply enlarged language, holding all the same properties of language and can be constructed perpetually from the material archive.

We have forgotten the distinction between the True and the Certain (placing the hard evidence of it in the hypomnesic space of the archive) as well as the qualitative difference between the two, simply as a matter of history and as a matter of the distance in time, although the distinction is of primary importance in understanding the concept of “knowledge” and knowledge is the foundation upon which we define our communities and ourselves. The distinction between the True and the Certain is of the utmost importance when analyzing History as well as plural

history, history connected to memory, because confusing the Certain for the True can be a tool of oppression. This oppression arises from the control of the archive and of memory because if the stories that are sanctioned about the past by the authority of the archive are not at the disposal of the communities in which they exist, then reductive and oppressive definitions can be imposed. The main characters in *Beloved* and *V.* are pitted against such imposed definitions of those who attempt to control memory and, in the hands of the authors, suffer different fates depending upon their abilities to tell the stories themselves in spite of the oppression.

The commonplace understanding of an archive's function in a society is, theoretically, to establish truth through material evidence and produce knowledge of past events and of the society at large within which the referent events occurred. This truth is related to the past, to the events themselves that produced material records. The knowledge, however, is related to the present, to the interaction with the materials and through an interpretive process. So these two elements of the archive are clear: it supposes to present what is true because it is *material evidence*; but as a result of temporal and locative removal, the real production is simply the Certain, not necessarily True because it is related in the form of a story, a kind of certainty about that past that is corroborated by evidence but that can never fully be established given the various powers which influence the creation, structure, maintenance, and access to archives.

Reading the Archive

Therefore, a transubstantiation results when the reader narrativizes the debris. It takes a reader to remember, to create a story or stories that the archivist and the

archive make available. The reader then becomes a storyteller. Remembering is the immaterial relation to the material substance of the archive. Remembering, however, is not a neutral process. Interpretation shapes the memory. Since forgetting is a corollary of remembering within the system created by archiving, then forgetting is also not neutral and requires interpretation as well.

The archive has in recent years become a matter of critical interest and has been theorized in connection with issues of power and read as a part of the controlling institutions in the Foucauldian sense. The overarching critique of the consequences of colonial aggression, occupation, and authority within the novels *V.* and *Beloved* functions within an archival paradigm, and the construction of *V.* and *Beloved* fall within that paradigm. Since these characters are created through the narrative urge of the other characters within the novel, they, and specifically their bodies, are figured as archives. If *V.* and *Beloved* are read as archival characters, created out of language and in narrative form, then one can read them as the locus of the material and the immaterial and of time suspended, the records of the past and memory.

Therefore, its use as a metaphor for the kinds of characters herein discussed calls for a clear outline of how the concept, structure, and creation of archives and the associated theoretical problems both enhance and disrupt the function of what I am calling “archival” characters. For example, one of the main theoretical dilemmas of the archive is that archives are created and controlled by hegemonic forces and can therefore be instrumental in denying real history and favoring what Nietzsche might call monumental history (the “effect in itself” outside of cause and effect, deceptive and authoritative) at the expense of critical history. Nietzsche’s notion of monumental

history involves the privileging of events and moments which seem to articulate in and of themselves the notions that the powers-that-be actively inscribe into them. Little respect or attention is paid to the current of history that flows into and out of these grand events of moments. In other words, the narrative arc that could encapsulate and lend meaning and lessons from these events and moments is lost, replaced only by the un-reflected-upon monument to the past. Monumental history

will always tone down the difference in motives and events, in order to set down the monumental effect, that is, the exemplary effect worthy of imitation, at the cost of the cause. Thus, because monumental history turns away as much as possible from the cause, we can call it a collection of “effects in themselves” with less exaggeration than calling it events which will have an effect on all ages. What is celebrated in folk festivals and in religious or military remembrance days is basically such an “effect in itself.” It is the thing which does not let the ambitious sleep, which for the enterprising lies like an amulet on the heart, but it is not the true historical interconnection between cause and effect, which fully recognized, would only prove that never again could anything completely the same fall out in the dice throw of future contingency. (Nietzsche, *On the Use*)

In this comparison between archives and archival characters, such a concern highlights the role of the author and his or her role as storyteller because his/her objective is to engage and activate critical history by narrativizing it.

By creating narratives from the equalized debris within the archive, storytellers are primarily involved in constructing alternative histories which enable the audience to participate in re-imagining and re-interpreting the larger narratives the powerful forces have instituted. Within *V.* and *Beloved*, certain characters represent different functions of the archive in order to expose the process of archive function and use both to the oppressed and the oppressors. In *Beloved*, for example, Denver acts as a type of archivist for those who are disconnected from the past, whereas Stamp Paid creates a personal archive from the bits and pieces of his direct experiences. Schoolteacher is also involved in archive construction through his systematic documentation of his slaves and their bodies as well as teaching this process to his nephews, the next generation. In *V.*, Stencil is in the process of archiving through a series of journeys into the physical archive, emerging with new concepts of history through his experience with these structures and spaces. His experiences teach him that the stories within these structures and spaces are manifold and told from many different positions of power and powerlessness. Therefore, the storytellers, Pynchon and Morrison, are concerned with the creation of personal narratives and how they impact, stall, or help free the power of the individual who is caught within these archivally justified spaces and times. The engagement with the archive is how these novels illustrate the development of agency, or the lack thereof, of their characters.

If one's personal identity is represented not by oneself but by those who have instituted the archives within the culture at large and understood according to the sacred aspect of the archive, its instituting imaginary, then only through an interaction and re-figuring of that cultural archive can one rewrite, re-understand one's personal

identity. One must disassemble the stories which have been constructed from the debris and reassemble them in order to show that narrative can tell another story constructed from the same debris and thus legitimize the narrative since the raw materials are themselves sacred. Toni Morrison and Thomas Pynchon, artists who are self-conscious of and adept in using not only the play of language but also the process of storytelling and production from this already assembled debris, have written novels which capitalize on the irony of identity creation and personal agency from the archive and within and without the archival space. Søren Kierkegaard writes in *Either/Or* of the problems with establishing one's identity when the assemblage has not been properly constructed: "Or can you think of anything more frightful than that it might end with your nature being resolved into a multiplicity, that you really might become many, become, like those unhappy demoniacs, a legion, and you thus would have lost the inmost and holiest thing of all in a man, the unifying power of personality?" (164). Kierkegaard is concerned with "personality" in the sense of individuation and completeness, of agency. In order for one's identity to be confirmed, it must be assembled from the complex pieces within the archive. The process of becoming a fully realized individual is always in flux for Kierkegaard, an ironic cycle which can never be completed, an obvious problem within an archival space since the assembly and reassembly can theoretically continue *ad infinitum*. "It is the paradox of the nature of the individual—of identity—continually being yet always becoming" (Schleifer 46). The "always becoming" aspect is an especially important activity within the archival space because it clearly demonstrates the lack of vitality of the debris within the archive. The time element is also problematic. Since the archive is

characterized as timeless, how does becoming function? Again, the process takes place only when narrative is activated, again pointing to the importance of who is reassembling the pieces into a chronology.

The problem of “becoming,” since it implies both already being and not being is particularly complicated in the act of artistic creation. The author is presented a particularly ironic situation because he or she must create that which already is, yet he or she truly creates nothing. Characters do really exist within the imagination and do not really exist. This ironic situation opens up a chasm within which collapse many commonly held notions of time, history, subjectivity, and political and social agency. In creating a space where competing subjectivities are not only accepted but equalized by the practical layout of archival materials, major paradigmatic shifts are possible. In novels such as *V.* and *Beloved*, the archival nature of the novel demonstrates this equality of subjectivities as manifested in its characterization, manipulation of time, and use of storytelling.

Although there is an equality of sorts within the archive, there is also an element of control that it wishes to exert by its removal from distinct cause and effect. Against the intended control, a constant reordering of dead documents into living stories occurs. In other words, the equality that is established within the archive is an equality only so far as the documents remain in stasis. The storyteller mines the archive for evidence, for substance, and for reminders in order to form a knowledge of the past which can only come after a narrative treatment. Because the forces which have created the archive, and the archive itself, are on all levels constructed and controlled, the knowledge they can make possible must be interpreted in light of such

construction and control, the artificial equality that has been established which removes the debris from their original location, both locatively and temporally. The archive is highly controlled, just as any novel is “controlled” by the author or any story controlled by the storyteller. So a level of truth exists beyond the certainty of the searcher, but because records have tentacles that connect to truth, a certain space remains where the research is uncontrollable. Just see the plethora of divergent criticism on literature, a highly controlled medium.

Furthermore, the ways in which time is introduced into the archived material form another basis of control. Their existence in the structure of the novel is therefore not as a traditional character that is invested in the events of the story itself and changes or grows or exhibits dynamic characteristics of any kind. They exist in this super-textual level because they are purposefully created by their authors to be entities of reference for the other characters who play the role of searcher or archivist themselves. They exist outside of any essential time structure. This relationship between archival characters and traditional characters is mirrored in the relationship between the story/narrative/novel itself and the reader.

Current scholarship on the archive focuses, therefore, on the power structures that facilitate the construction of the archive and maintain its relevance to the community in which it exists. However, the very idea of the archive within the minds of the general public (those upon which power is targeted and exercised) is another, less analyzed, but important aspect. Individuals within a community, whether consciously or not, psychologically and practically depend on various archiving structures in society. Most assume that records are kept, that objects which

correspond in intimate ways to community events are protected. This expectation is relatively recent and depends quite a bit on the faith one has in a benevolent governing body and civil society. For communities that have historically been denied the ability to count on an archiving structure, the archiving impulse has been present in less obviously material forms and within progressively smaller sub-sets of the community or state. This impulse can be detected in practices and events (considered “other”) which metaphorically correspond with spectral activity because in the union or meeting of the sacred and the profane, a niche for memory has been carved that is highly protected from the accepted and academic authority of any institution. This spectral activity, referring to the disembodied voices of the excluded individuals and communities throughout history, takes place in the gaps of the archive, the connective threads between the debris which are actualized by narrative. These specters inhabited the events of the past, but their presence is lacking within the archive proper. The manifestation of Beloved as a spectral entity is therefore no surprise since it is her role to mimic and give presence to the individual stories of the past. A private relationship with memory still corresponds with the basic functions and structures of the archive.

The Archive in Pynchon and Morrison

The attributes of the archival character at work in the novels *V.* and *Beloved* have heretofore been conveniently placed under titles such as magical realism or, more recently and pejoratively, hysterical realism which the term’s creator, critic James Wood, applies specifically to Pynchon (178). It is important to note that reading these books from the standpoint of participating in the archival construction and use firmly establishes the relationship of the text to one’s own community. The use of archival

characters means to instigate a deictic displacement within the fictional world, a temporal/spatial confusion about the relationship of the characters to each other and to their existence with the text itself, an element which is traditionally read as magical realism. However, reading a text in such a way obscures the true functioning of the technique by moving the reader's experience with the novel outside of a cultural and sacred relationship with the text, and automatically reading it as "other." Toni Morrison herself shies away from being associated with magical realism. She states in "The Site of Memory":

I am not comfortable with these labels. I consider that my single, gravest responsibility (in spite of that magic) is not to lie. When I hear someone say, "Truth is stranger than fiction," I think that old chestnut is truer than we know, because it doesn't say that truth is truer than fiction; just that it's stranger, meaning that it's odd. It may be excessive, it may be more interesting, but the important thing is that it's random—and fiction is not random. (72)

Magical realism relies upon the agreement between the reader and the writer that the elements that appear "magical" or "supernatural" are in fact separate from "real" or "truth" as Morrison terms it. In making the distinction between the magical and the real, three problems appear which disrupt a reading of the novels with archival characters.

First, there is a privileging of the "real" in calling the novels "magical." By calling attention to magical elements as unreal or a lie or as a moment in need of the suspension of disbelief, any political justification for the use of the archival character

is undermined. The “unreal” or the “magical” is therefore subjugated to another space, a space that is disconnected and untenable in relationship to real world concerns and political points of view. This undermining takes place because the revelations of deeper and more satisfying human experience may only be textually possible by rearranging the historical debris in such a way that alters the experience from standard realism.

Second, the creation of a fictional world is in itself imaginary and therefore on the same level as anything else imaginary, containing as much that is “true” as any other imaginative work. Third, what is magical to one person in the fictional world of the novel may in fact be an accepted and absolutely real or “true” part of the character’s world view. For example, Morrison mentions the tendency to discredit the world view of black people and her black characters:

We are very practical people, very down-to-earth, even shrewd people. But within that practicality we also accepted what I suppose could be called superstition and magic, which is another way of knowing things. But to blend those two worlds together at the same time was enhancing, not limiting. And some of those things were “discredited knowledge” that Black people had; discredited only because Black people were discredited therefore what they knew was “discredited.” And also because the press toward upward social mobility would mean to get as far away from that kind of knowledge as possible. That kind of knowledge has a very strong place in my work. (*Rootedness* 342)

Although magical realism as a genre allows for the acceptance of the supernatural or the unreal to exist and be believable within the confines of its specific world, magical realism is not an appropriate measure of novels like *Beloved* or *V.* because, technically speaking, the magical nature of the characters, *Beloved* and *V.*, is a result more of real world knowledge made usable in these fictions as metaphorical, not magical or supernatural.

Applying the term “archival” to these novels and characters allows them to be anchored more appropriately to cultural history and experience instead of being associated with private imaginative constructions. The relationship to the sacred space of the archive, which is a way of tracing a real and meaningful link to historical memory and experience and turning it into meaningful narratives that in turn establish personal agency and identity, avoids relegating any magical or unreal elements of the text to the easily disregarded category of superstition.

In her article “Fixing Methodologies: *Beloved*,” Barbara Christian reiterates the meaning behind Morrison’s choice to construct *Beloved* as an embodied spirit: “I was struck by Morrison's representation of the character *Beloved* as an embodied spirit, a spirit that presents itself as a body. In the Caribbean, spirits are everywhere, are naturally in the world, and are not ghosts in the horror-genre sense of that term” (6). Christian is pointing out the choice to construct a character in such a way that actually undercuts the conventionalized, popular-culture reader response to the notion of a spirit or ghost. This relationship between the author’s choices of construction and the reader’s interaction with that character illustrates the dynamic relationship between

the writer and reader, the construction and animation that occur both within and without the text.

The process of “building” a character is highly determined, obviously deliberate, and functions for the author and the reader on two levels, the interior and the exterior of the story itself. These are the points which must be fixed in order to orient the discussion of the texts: the character functions within the narrative (inter-narrative OR in-universe) and outside the narrative (extra-narrative). Inter-narrative there exists the fictional world of the story where characters interact with each other in dialogue and think and remember as living, breathing entities as they encounter events that move the plot forward and create a suitable story arc. Extra-narrative there exists the relationship between the text itself (which metonymically includes the author, the characters, the language employed, the symbols presented, the appearance of the text and physical book) and the living reader who actively interprets based on his or her own pre-conceived realities.

Most importantly in the extra-narrative, the character exists as a non-material imaginary entity, understood and held by the reader as such while maintaining its existence within the text as well as real. The extra-narrative understanding of the character as imaginary, however, does not subjugate the character as unreal. Because the character behaves “archivally,” its existence is considered a trace which links the interior sacred space of the text to the exterior constructing elements. This dual role of the average character is multiplied in *Beloved*'s and *V.*'s cases since they inhabit even more nuanced ways than the simple in-narrative and extra-narrative. Their

constructed bodies, for example, inform their constructed identities, and the notion of their very *construction* is significant.

No term yet in exists so far as I know which delineates between a character as a traditional character who is not factually real but that makes sense in the logic of the narrative and a character that is not intended to be “real” or even necessarily intended to make sense intra-narratively. And furthermore, how does one conceive of a character when the “real” and the “unreal” meet in the same created personage? For example, Beloved is both fleshed entity and un-fleshed apparition, a character in a novel and a concrete example of scores of real people. V. is both a real entity for Stencil’s father but a phantom or legion for Stencil, a character in a novel and a concrete example of historical events. The answer is to see these characters metaphorically as mimicking the process of archiving, a completely real and politically and socially important process that both preserves and animates history and memory providing traces which firmly establish identity and agency through the narrative act.

Chapters Two and Three deal with the physical spaces which Pynchon utilizes to express the temporal and spatial condition of archives. Benny Profane is aligned with the space of “the street,” and Herbert Stencil is aligned with “the hothouse.” Within these spaces, both the characters and the readers attempt to reconstruct narratives, and the conditions within the spaces affect the way the stories can be told. The ultimate space, however, turns out to be the literal body of V. as well as the narrative creation of V. by Pynchon as author, by the main narrator, and by the various characters from whose perspectives stories are told within the text.

Chapters Four and Five move the discussion to *Beloved*. Chapter Four focuses mainly on the physical space of the domicile, 124. As Derrida stresses, the metaphor of the archive is powerful for the community because it is an architectural entity, a place of memory. The house at 124 functions according to Derrida's notion. Chapter Five coordinates the place of memory that was 124 with what becomes corporealized in the body of Beloved. The other characters' actions are circumscribed by their relation to Beloved's body and the narratives that it inspires.

Chapter Six attempts to draw comparisons concerning the possibility of narrative rupture of the archival space in the two novels. Although the locus of memory in architecture and in the body are similar in both novels, and the main questions concerning the identity of said body are likewise similar, their resolutions (or lack thereof) clearly reveal the importance of the narrative act in the possibility of escaping the archive. Finally, Chapter Seven pulls the focus out slightly to contemplate narrative acts as community and individual production, both healing and dangerous, which are possible out of the archival space.

CHAPTER TWO

The Profane Space of the Street

This was all there was to dream; all there ever was: the Street.

∞ Thomas Pynchon, *V.*

The narrators in Thomas Pynchon's novel *V.* present the reader with the disassembled, dismantled debris of history and memory laid out in physical spaces, alternately the street, the hothouse, and the female body.²⁸ All of the narrators that Pynchon creates deliver a presentation that equalizes the significance and/or seriousness of the stories' components associated and contained within the archival space. Pynchon's style is to lay out all sorts of intriguing and convoluted statements, facts, characters, dates, locations, songs, memories, and histories in even ways, so the reader cannot differentiate amongst them. Thomas Schaub states that Pynchon's writing always "aspires to the condition of simultaneity in which contradictory possibilities coexist" (4), which is the nature and function of the archive. The narrator's voice neither accentuates nor diverts attention from any detail contained within the story. For example, the reader does not know that a character like Debby

²⁸ Pynchon overtly uses bodily terms when describing the street in *The Crying of Lot 49*: "The city was hers, as made up and sleeked so with the customary words and images (cosmopolitan, culture, cable cars) it had not been before: she had safe-passage tonight to its far blood's branchings, be they capillaries too small for more than peering into, or vessels mashed together in shameless municipal hickeys, out on the skin for all but tourists to see" (97). These terms applied to city streets is not novel, but they are juxtaposed with Oedipa herself and her gaining of knowledge by interacting with the words and images she finds within the street.

Sensay or Harvey Fazzo or Stuyvesant Owlglass will appear only one time or only be mentioned in passing, and that this character will not appear again in the novel or even have any bearing on the plot whatsoever. This character is simply one other piece of the debris cast before the reader to choose or not to choose.

The reader is therefore presented with a demonstration of memory in material form more than a story and must read with this problem always in mind—the narrator is not necessarily guiding the reader through a chronology that creates resolution as a typical story arc would but instead reveals the process of assembling blocks of material and creating possible chronological and spatial relationships between them. The layout of the book itself corresponds to this organization or lack thereof: the chapters of *V.* regarding the character *V.* are not chronologically ordered but instead are presented as set pieces, emerging from Stencil's quest, interwoven with the chapters devoted to Profane and the Whole Sick Crew. The reader is responsible for both reordering the chronology of the chapters according to the present time of Profane and Stencil (mid 1950s), since events occur in various historical periods of conflict, as well as constructing the events' meanings in relationship to both Profane and Stencil.

One specific example within the novel's action of this process of reordering and construction is the visit that Profane makes to his parents' house that takes place towards the end of the novel. This short section not only demonstrates the need for the reader to take an active role in narrating him/herself but also mimics the interaction with the archive. "All things gathered to farewell" (Pynchon, *V.* 408) is the opening line, emphasizing the "gathering" aspect that takes place when one begins the

narrative process as well as the nod towards finality that such a gathering invites. “For no special reason, Profane decided to look in on his parents” (408). Thus, the narrator specifically points out the absence of cause/effect in Profane’s activities—no contextual reason is given for his visit. The scene is without a known cause for the reader. He enters his parents’ apartment, and the narrator reports what he finds inside:

A ham, a turkey, a roast beef. Fruit: grapes, oranges, a pineapple, plums. Plate of knishes, bowl of almonds and Brazil nuts. String of garlic tossed like a rich lady’s necklace across fresh bunches of fennel, rosemary, tarragon. A brace of baccale, dead eyes directed at a huge provolone, a pale yellow parmigian and God knew how many fish-cousins, gefülte, in an ice bucket. No, his mother wasn’t telepathic, she wasn’t expecting Profane. Wasn’t expecting her husband Gino, rain poverty, anything . . . He stayed in the kitchen an hour, while night came along, wandering through this field of inanimate food, making bits and pieces of it animate, his own. (408)

Before him is strewn what Profane interprets as the evidence of his mother’s personality—“Only that she had this compulsion to feed”—because he has knowledge of her that the reader does not. The reader, however, is provided only with an inventory of sorts, of the kitchen with no direct connection to the figure of the mother. The food does not exist for any temporal reason—the absent figure has accumulated pieces of food with neither an expectation of its consumption by anyone nor as a result of any impending event. And Profane’s entry into the space heightens the quality of the inanimateness of the food because only in his presence is it animated by being

eaten, an act of incorporating the inanimate into his living body. Furthermore, this section of seven paragraphs is untethered to the sections before or after it, presented with no explanation other than the opening line “All things gathered to farewell” which hints at a meaning but does not provide it for the reader. Within this passage, Pynchon subtly signals the winding down of his novel, but more importantly, he also provides here one of the clearest thematic expressions of the novel. Laying out the inanimate tangible debris in whatever form, whether as food or as scattered events, opens a space for creativity for the author, the narrator and the reader, who metaphorically encounter that debris and reconstruct a personal certainty of its meaning. Within such a space many stories are possible.

There are two main stories in *V.* amongst the multitude of narratives which branch out within the novel, revealing the interaction between knowledge, the tangible, the true, and the creative aspect of imagination. This difference is, according to Vico, between the True and the Certain most clearly seen through the prism of the material and immaterial archive, this gathering together. These two stories are indicated, appropriately enough, by the two-pronged shape of the title letter, and as these two stories are not parallel but intersect, this important juncture is also symbolized in the title letter. On the back of the 2005 Harper Perennial edition, it reads: “The wild, macabre tale of the twentieth century and of two men—one looking for something he has lost, the other with nothing much to lose—and “V.,” the unknown woman of the title.” This blurb is nothing more than a convenient and pithy quip to define a difficult narrative. It is, in a way, somewhat misleading. The reader

is left to decipher which of the two men, Benny Profane or Herbert Stencil, is looking for something and which has nothing to lose.

Conventional wisdom on the subject is that Stencil is the one on a quest for knowledge, and Profane is the one with nothing but imagination. Given my paradigm of knowledge as the True and imagination which leads to narrative as the Certain, Profane enjoys a privileged status since he can theoretically find identity and agency within the milieu of imagination, the Certainty of narrative construction. And Stencil would therefore be forever in the thralls of the inanimate debris since he is never going to find the original. However, the delineation between the characters is not so clear or precise. Both characters are drawn as questing figures looking for information or a place to belong, and both characters are given no infinitely sustainable story that allows them to feel complete or grounded, ultimately forcing them to constantly loop back and forth from knowledge to imagination.²⁹ Stencil is indeed searching for V., but Profane is searching, too, for a sense of his own identity. And Profane does possess very little and has few important ties to others, but Stencil feels as if he has nothing either until he finds the allusive/elusive V.

This blurb on the book jacket also seems to imply that V. is a character on the same par as Profane and Stencil. This idea, too, is misleading since Pynchon never provides a definitive answer as to who or what V. is, and most critics agree that V.

²⁹ The questing figure is central to Pynchon's work. This figure appears in various forms—for example, housewife (Oedipa Maas, *The Crying of Lot 49*), army investigator, (Tyrone Slothrop, *Gravity's Rainbow*) and detective (Larry "Doc" Sportello, *Inherent Vice*). All his questing figures are charged with mapping out complex, interconnected plots that may or may not be significant thus leading to paranoid themes and an ultimate lack of narrative closure for the quester him/herself, the characters and the reader.

takes the form of various female characters throughout the novel, or, even more precisely, that an idea that is V. is embodied by various female characters. Stencil himself tells Eigenvalue, referring to V., that “She's yielded him only the poor skeleton of a dossier. Most of what he has is inference. He doesn't know who she is, nor what she is. He's trying to find out. As a legacy from his father" (Pynchon, *V.* 161). Therefore, V the letter, not the manifestations in character form, is a marker, a sign given in our most familiar sign system, language, in its most meaningless form, the single letter which does not function as a morpheme as “a” or “I” does, which can change signification and alter narratives given any context that even partially references the sign. In this way, V the letter, but more specifically, V. as a referent only, is the archive. Within it, multiple stories are possible. All can be referenced by it, connected to it, made out of it, and what will have been meets what might have been.

The architecture, whether a street, a room, a house, or even the prostheticized female body or any consciously built space, in association with which a character functions, is narratively important for structuring time for the reader but also structures memory, therefore identity, for the character. In *V.*, two characters, Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil, are positioned within certain architectural frameworks which illustrate their respective abilities to narrate their own stories. The archive is given “status and power” (Mbembe 18) by its architecture. Furthermore, the archive is “a religious space because a set of rituals is constantly taking place there, rituals that . . . are of a quasi-magical nature, and a cemetery in the sense that fragments of lives and pieces of time are interred there, their shadows and footprints inscribed on paper and

preserved like so many relics” (18). In the narrative world of *V.*, these religious spaces and cemeteries are represented in three main ways—the street, a house, and the female body—and are all carnivalesque and purposefully ironic renderings of the original domicile of the Greek archon where documents were preserved. Profane and Stencil occupy specific spaces and interact with these architectural structures which encase or encompass the archive and the materials which inhabit the archive, and in their roles reveal two distinct ways of narrating one’s identity based on traces from the past.

These various manifestations of the archive are scattered in many ways and in many forms in *V.* In Chapter 11, “The Confessions of Fausto Maijstral,” Stencil encounters the journal of Maijstral.³⁰ The chapter begins with the following lines:

It takes, unhappily, no more than a desk and writing supplies to turn any room into a confessional. This may have nothing to do with the acts we have committed, or the humours we do go in and out of. It may be only the room—a cube—having no persuasive powers of its own. The room simply is. To occupy it, and find a metaphor there for memory, is our own fault. (324)

To what room, exactly, is this referring? This excerpt illustrates the paradoxes and the ultimate problematics of the archive very specifically. The danger of the “real” archive—the real paper and material objects—is that although they are real, tangible, and historically traceable, through the encounters with them outside of their temporal

³⁰ See Stefan Mattesich’s chapter on *V.* in *Lines of Flight: Discursive Time and Countercultural Desire in the Work of Thomas Pynchon* for a discussion of the Fausto chapters as parody. He writes: “As parodies of writers and writing, the novel in which they function becomes a parody of its own production within that discourse” (26). This reading, therefore, underscores the questioning of the “authority” of any text.

and spatial origins their meaning is *given*.³¹ The room here has the double meaning of both the original room in which the journal was written but also the “room” or archive in which it is encountered, the one in which the original “journal” is transformed into a read “confession.”

The narrator specifically addresses the use of the room as a metaphor:

Why? Why use the room as introduction to an apologia? Because the room, though windowless and cold at night, is a hothouse. Because the room is the past, though it has no history of its own. Because, as the physical being-there of a bed or horizontal plane determines what we call love; as a high place must exist before God's word can come to a flock and any sort of religion begin; so must there be a room, sealed against the present, before we can make any attempt to deal with the past. (325)

The room with no history is the architecture that can contain dead time, sealed against the movement of the present. This “sealed room” or closed system is linked to other physical spaces, the horizontal bed and the high place, which are further linked to love

³¹ A scene in *The Crying of Lot 49* expresses this idea of a place and the memory it contains, the temporal and the locative joined in an archival union, clearly. Oedipa, after a night out wandering the streets of San Francisco, encounters an old man who asks her to mail a letter via the underground mail system to his wife who he left long ago. The narrator describes his experience in terms of his room: “What voices overheard, flinders of luminescent gods glimpsed among the wallpaper's stained foliage, candlestubs lit to rotate in the air over him, prefiguring the cigarette he or a friend must fall asleep someday smoking, thus to end among the flaming, secret salts held all those years by the insatiable stuffing of a mattress that could keep vestiges of every nightmare sweat, helpless overflowing bladder, viciously, tearfully consummated wet dream, like the memory bank to a computer of the lost? She was overcome all at once by a need to touch him, as if she could not believe in him, or would not remember him, without it” (102).

and religion, two other concepts which are culturally and individually created and determined. The physical space of the room dictates its function just as the physical bed or horizontal plane “determines what we call love.” Likewise, the archive is created within this space because we call it that—we set it apart as a sacred space through our language. “There, the future is sketched as the time of the arrival of the literary writing, which does not set up a relation of representation to a world beyond itself, but which rather sets out the limits within which a representation can take place” (Hodge 97). In other words, the creation of the archival space is through language, a representation of itself within a closed space.

Any room can become a confessional, and the privileged space in which one produces and encounters the narrative of another is one manifestation of the idea of the archive. It is in the metaphor that the space gains authority. “The room simply is . . .” means that there is no inherent meaning of the space, no Viconian Truth. We occupy the space as both creator *and* readers of the archive (a temporal and spatial designation), and we create the metaphor for the space (a narrative designation). The dissonance between the mingling of these human creations—the real, tangible debris and the reading of that debris—creates the crisis. How to make it work, to make it *meaningful*. We must narrate. And yet the irony is that although narration becomes the Viconian Certain, it is eventually cast back into the space of the archive and turned into the True. The Certain returns to exist as debris, the broken residue of a past that was constructed by humans.

Caroline Steedman, in *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, explains that “A reading of Vico might reinforce the notion that what had taken place in the past

was a matter of human action and endeavor: was dependent on environment, and on what was available from the material world to do the work of living with” (104). Steedman is referring to Vico’s verum-factum principle. Because humans are responsible for the creation of their environment, the environment provides the structures within which the human consciousness gains its framework for functioning. This famous and, for Vico’s time, revolutionary insight is particularly apropos for analyzing the use of physical spaces in relation to memory within narrative in two ways. Referring to the architectural element of “substrate,” Belinda Barnet also establishes that the structured environment of the archive dictates how history is perceived:

There is no archive without a substrate, and this substrate (which in the case we have been discussing—memory) itself has a machinic structure which at once produces what it stores. To put it more simply, the archive determines the archivable event. In the Derridean sense, this means that the archive constructs the ‘historical moment’ it is recording. Not a writing of history, but history as writing. (221)

Therefore, the physical space provides a framework for identity. The inscription and construction of identity, within a memory/history, constructs and conveys how past and present time is experienced.

The Street: the street and the hothouse

The two architectural elements most prominent in *V.* are the street and the hothouse. They reflect the different experiences of the two main characters, Profane and Stencil, respectively. However, they cannot be considered diametrically opposed

but only different versions of the same idea, that our built spaces reflect our conception and experience of living. Both of these elements exist within the metaphorical concept of the Street for Profane and the Situation for Stencil. The most frequently mentioned of these two architectural elements in *V.* is the street, the space which Benny Profane occupies throughout the text and with which he is most intimately associated. It is also associated with disorder, aimlessness and the absence of meaning. There are at least 276 uses of the word “street” in the text.³² The Harper Perennial Modern Classics version of the novel has 533 pages. That works out to be one use of the word “street” approximately every two pages. The French “rue” is used an additional ten times. By contrast, “road” is used in the entire novel only thirteen times. The two terms are similar and often interchangeable although a street can be a road, but a road is not necessarily a street. According to etymologist Earnest Weekley, the etymological distinction between the two terms is long-standing: "In the Middle Ages, a *road* or *way* was merely a direction in which people rode or went, the name *street* being reserved for the made road" (1428). “Street” in *V.* is the sweeping metaphorical device Pynchon uses to “ground” his narrative, to give it dimension, and because it implies a deliberately constructed spatial element and is used to both physically locate and psychologically remember, it functions as a type of archive.

Pynchon clearly prefers street over road for an obvious reason—he is writing about the structure of history and (post)modern life and how it has been constructed, both temporally and spatially creating an intersection of memory and architecture

³² One of Pynchon’s original ideas for the title of the novel was “Down Paradise Street,” offering insight into the importance of “streets” to the structure and theme of the novel (Herman 4).

which is psychologically natural and socially expedient. The street is therefore practical as a locative or directional device as any writer or narrator might use it but also sufficiently complicated as a symbol for Pynchon's interest in time and space and the concrete expression of an archival space.

This thematic concern with the intersection of dimensions was demonstrated early in his first novel but is still important for Pynchon in his most recent. John R. Holmes, in his review of *Against the Day*, sums up this historical concern and prevalent theme evident in the body of Pynchon's work: "One theme is that traditional methods of coherence, such as temporal and spatial sequence, are illusory and, conversely, that things that seem to that same traditional mind totally disparate, such as physics experiments and labor movements, are intimately connected" (19). The street in its economy of signification provides a dual perspective as street and Street. The street is the physical "lay of the land," but for Profane, it is within a larger psychological scape³³ that Profane terms "the Street" where both the street and the hothouse, associated with Stencil, are located. For Profane, his schlemihl³⁴ existence is tied directly to the street: he wanders along them, travels them, rides under them in

³³ The term "scape" used in this sense refers to any physical scene with and within which the viewer can interact both physically and in time, therefore encompassing the ideas of both landscape or timescape without excluding one or the other and highlighting their interaction.

³⁴ According to Ruth R. Wisse in *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero*, "Though the Jewish fool began as a typical prankster and wit in the Middle Ages, his utility as a metaphor for European Jewry was later perceived by the folk and its formal writers. Vulnerable, ineffectual in his efforts at self-advancement and self-preservation, he emerged as the archetypal Jew, especially in his capacity of potential victim. Since Jewry's attitudes toward its own frailty were complex and contradictory, the schlemiel was sometimes berated for his foolish weakness, and elsewhere exalted for his hard inner strength" (4). Also see Melvin J. Friedman's discussion of the use of the schlemihl in "The Schlemiel: Jew and Non-Jew."

the subway, and works under them in the sewers. They compose the entire parameters of his schlemihl world and world view.³⁵ Rachel even accuses him: “You've taken your own flabby, clumsy soul and amplified it into a Universal Principle” (Pynchon, *V.* 413). Pynchon relies on the connection between the constructed spaces of our daily lives (and the temporal experience that we have during our encounters with these physical spaces) and our understanding of the movement of time (and thus history and any political or social movements that take place during these temporal periods) within these constructed spaces. Therefore an associative continuum exists between our constructed environment and our metaphorical understanding of the movement, or lack thereof, of time. Therefore, Pynchon’s preference for and prolific use of the word in *V.* underscores and validates the theme of built spaces, the material surroundings of humans which are constructed by humans, and their relationship to the immaterial structure of human existence, time, and by extension, memory.

A street can be symbolic in several ways, both positive and negative. It indicates a journey and can show progress or an already established civilization. Its structure also suggests physical limits, material convergences, and real as well as psychological thresholds. Furthermore, streets are common spaces where all levels of society meet. In more modern terms, it can be identified with normalization, control, and encroachment made evident in grid-patterned city and suburban architecture in the United States, for example, or the atypical grids within French *banlieues*.

³⁵ Although Profane’s schlemihl-like attributes are important to his characterization, according to the genetic criticism of Herman Luc and John M. Krafft, Pynchon edited out many of his “schlemihl” references: “Profane's schlemihl self-image remains central to the published novel, but Pynchon seems to have felt he overdid it in the first version, and he cut quite a few such references throughout the typescript” (11).

In *V.*, however, the street is not symbolic of progress temporally or spatially since it is oftentimes viewed by the characters as static and indistinguishable from other streets. The streets are all the same to Profane, for example -- streets are a physical location, a space where experiences are equalized, standardized, and controlled just as the structure and practices of the archive equalize, standardize, and control artifacts from the past, or material memory. Therefore, the street is an archive; the Street is the archive (in the Derridean sense), and the characters who inhabit the setting of Pynchon's streets are searchers within, encountering the debris of civilization and forming their own narratives from it. The encounters, however, diverge—Profane finds no satisfying narrative possible on the street, and Stencil finds too many possibilities, too many stories in the enclosed space of the hothouse.

Within the larger scape of the Street, both the street and the hothouse reside. These two separate physical spaces signify two separate ideas but both are located in the larger concept of the Street. The hothouse, an image akin to what Pynchon also terms “the Back Room,” is related directly to the closed system aspect of the archive. Ronald W. Cooley argues that for Pynchon, the hothouse is an “irrevocably doomed thermodynamic system” (321). Don Hausdorff argues that the hothouse image represents a “world of the private, isolated soul, insatiably amassing inanimate Things, whether of money, ritual, or memory. The Hothouse sense of time is one which recreates the past into its own narrow purposes by virtue of a fraudulent nostalgia” (266). A hothouse is literally an enclosed environment with a regulated temperature in order to grow delicate plants. Within such a closed system, there is a stasis of energy, lack of movement and an absence of time or “dead time.” What Pynchon tries to

establish, though, is that all systems are closed, regardless of their size or architecture, and all are subject to eventual destruction or fissure.

Pynchon's use of the hothouse metaphor began with his earliest stories, and the similar themes of dead time and attempting to organize and maintain a sense of unity within an enclosed, sacred architecture against the chaos of the street is evident. His short story "Entropy" written in 1958/1959 and first published in *The Kenyan Review* in the spring of 1960, later collected in *Slow Learner*, published in 1984, illustrates these themes in an extremely succinct way over just twenty-one pages. The story features a couple, Callisto and Aubade, who inhabit a "Rousseau-like fantasy," or a hothouse, set against the story of Meatball Mulligan, a type of Profane character. The concurrent story line is a mini-version of the Profane/Stencil dichotomy. The hothouse, however, is of primary interest here. The couple's apartment has been constructed by Callisto to be a hermetically sealed, "tiny enclave of regularity in the city's chaos, alien to the vagaries of the weather, of national politics, of any civil disorder" (68). They have become necessary to its existence, "the swayings of its plant life, the stirrings of its birds and human inhabitants were all as integral as the rhythms of a perfectly executed mobile. He and the girl could no longer, of course, be omitted from that sanctuary; they had become necessary to its unity. What they needed from outside was delivered. They did not go out" (68). In other words, their very bodies along with the plants and birds have become part of the "mobile," an inanimate object that moves. The Rousseau reference alludes to the philosopher's delineation of natural man versus social man but is undercut by calling it a fantasy, thus establishing that no such distinction remains distinct.

Callisto has attempted to seal off the disorder of the universe, the multiplicities that are engendered by or inherent in chaos. He believes that this “sanctuary” or sacred space enables him and Aubade to hold off time as they try to avoid the inevitable heatdeath of the universe outside in the street. However, Callisto is described as “helpless in the past” (68), therefore, powerless to evade what he wishes to evade. He has essentially re-created a space in which timelessness accomplishes the fate he attempts to avoid. The dying of the bird that Callisto attempts to save by holding it against himself and supplying heat underscores the idea that no more energy is available within the hothouse, and death is the natural outcome.

In the introduction to *Slow Learner*, the collection in which “Entropy” appears, he himself accentuates the issue of time over energy: “When I think about the property nowadays, it is more and more in connection with time, that human one-way time we’re all stuck with locally here and which terminates, it is said, in death. Certain processes, not only thermodynamic ones but also those of a medical nature, can often not be reversed. Sooner or later we all find this out, from the inside” (Pynchon xxv). Within this hothouse space, time is in stasis as well; the movements of history are “outside,” and (heat)death can occur within the architecture of the hothouse. Disorder and order both lead to the same end.

Aubade’s position as “story” within the hothouse shows this: “The architectonic purity of her world was constantly threatened by such hints of anarchy; gaps and excrescences and skew lines, and a shifting of tilting of planes to which she had continually to readjust lest the whole structure shiver into a disarray of discrete and meaningless signals” (Pynchon, “Entropy” 73). Her readjustment is the same

process of rearranging the debris within the archive to tell a story, of making signals meaningful instead of meaningless. Aubade's name refers to a type of narrative poem that tells the story of lovers parting at dawn and therefore foreshadows the conclusion of their story when she breaks the window, rupturing the closed system, and allowing the outside to invade the sanctuary. She "turned to face the man on the bed and wait with him until the moment of equilibrium was reached, when 37 degrees Fahrenheit should prevail both outside and inside, and forever, and the hovering, curious dominant of their separate lives should resolve into a tonic of darkness and the final absence of all motion" (85-86). Therefore, the concept of order (hothouse) and disorder (street) eventually meet, and there is no escape from eventual death.

The word "hothouse" itself is mentioned at least eleven times and the nature of a hothouse more times than that. Sidney Stencil, Herbert's father, had himself used it to understand the world:

"If there is any political moral to be found in this world," Stencil once wrote in his journal, "it is that we carry on the business of this century with an intolerable double vision. Right and Left; the hothouse and the street. The Right can only live and work hermetically, in the hothouse of the past, while outside the Left prosecute their affairs in the streets by manipulated mob violence. And cannot live but in the dreamscape of the future. (Pynchon, V. 506)

There is a stark comparison between the concepts of the street and the hothouse which are *both* positioned within the Street. Pynchon clearly intends to suggest that the hothouse is analogous to the street and not to the Street since he does not capitalize it

in this comparative paragraph. Since Profane identifies all the streets as converging into one all-encompassing Street, the location of the hothouse is both physically within the scape of the street but metaphorically within the scape of the Street as well. The metaphorical representations of the Left and Right are presented as being diametrically opposed both in time and in location. However, there is the more subtle implication that both actually exist within the scape of the Street and that it is simply a matter of our “vision” that they occupy separate spaces.

In other words, the way we have constructed our own metaphors dictate our understanding of time and space. Within this dynamic, the present moment is not accounted for, only the past and the future, so the continuous play between the two is ignored. In Malta, for example, Sydney Stencil thinks that “all history seemed simultaneously present” and in London History “was the record of an evolution. One –way and ongoing.” London is the street and Valletta the hothouse where the tender plant of memory “almost” seemed to live (520). The street does not contain dead time like the hothouse, but it offers a flattening of experience because there is only chaos, and there is no narrative that gives any of the chaos meaning. It is both symbolic of a future to be told but at the same time a connection to the past as is the archive. The street and the hothouse rooms of the past are both anchored in a relational scape, the Street. Both exist within Pynchon’s controlling metaphor of the Street but neither are satisfactory on their own for properly conceptualizing history because they ignore the present moment in which the interaction between the street and the hothouse takes place. The interaction between the street and the hothouse makes narrative possible. The street is chaos and disorder. The hothouse is perfect order. Both must meet to

create narrative that moves into a future. The moment of narrative forces the hothouse to meet the street, and the past can therefore meet the future. This moment is spatialized as the Street, an always present time, which includes the street of Profane and the hothouse of Stencil.

As Profane's theories of the world are based on the Street, Stencil's are based around what he has personally dubbed the "Situation." While Profane's existence is primarily one of exteriority (thus street), Stencil's existence is one of interiority (thus hothouse). Stencil is a spy, one who researches to uncover possible existing plots. He must have information, and he must attempt to narrativize it, to piece it together, to fulfill his function. This necessity implies being "inside" the information structures. His theory of the "Situation" arises from this position of interiority and involves organizing all information, both spatial and temporal, in order to understand the "Situation" which invariably leads to a kind of paranoia wherein any reorganization of the "facts" is possible.

He had decided long ago that no Situation had any objective reality: it only existed in the minds of those who happened to be in on it at any specific moment. Since these several minds tended to form a sum total or complex more mongrel than homogeneous, The Situation must necessarily appear to a single observer much like a diagram in four dimensions to an eye conditioned to seeing its world in only three.

(199)

Stencil appropriately likens the Situation to a "diagram in four dimensions" because it would include a historical component; it would include time and memory seen from

the perspective of the minds that have created it in the first place. Inside the Situation, which is not objectively real, is the immaterial space in which narratives are produced *ad infinitum*.

Profane's dream world appears to be the antithesis in many respects (the apocheir to Stencil's aphelion) of the Situation. The dream is never fully realized and always connected to the physically constructed street and, further, the mentally constructed Street. The catch here is, ultimately, that no matter how "antithetical" the Street appears to be to the Situation, or the street appears to be to the hothouse, both metaphorical understandings of the world result in the same ending of the story.³⁶ In other words, while Profane's dream is never realized, neither is Stencil's, the desire to find V.

In this dream, he was all alone, as usual. Walking on a street at night where there was nothing but his own field of vision alive. It had to be night on that street. The lights gleamed unflickering on hydrants; manhole covers which lay around in the street. There were neon signs scattered here and there, spelling out words he wouldn't remember when he woke. (34)

This vision of emptiness reveals the concentration on the void that is full, or the littered space that is empty. He will forget anything that was there, so it does not exist. "[I]f we find nothing, we will find nothing in a place; and then, that absence is not nothing, but is rather the space left by what has gone; how the emptiness indicates

³⁶ Mark D. Hawthorne offers an intriguing reading of "The Situation" as the meeting point of all oppositions, rendering it "meaningless." ". . . it is also the place where the Situation with its fragmenting definitions and the obscure directives from the Foreign office Dissolve into Nothing . . ." (78).

how once it was filled and animated” (Steedman 11). The archival structures, architectural and material, seek to fill the void with debris; but in the case of Profane, his nature as schlemihl and endless wanderings on and under the street reveal that it is not actually possible since what was there is no longer even though it has left its trace.

One way Profane attempts to find connection and an identity is to anchor himself to women’s bodies. Rachel explains the story that Profane might be attempting to construct: “We’re older than you, we lived inside you once; the fifth rib, closest to the heart. We learned all about it then. After that it had to become our game to nourish a heart you all believe is hollow though we know different. Now you all live inside us, for nine months, and whenever you decide to come back after that” (Pynchon, *V.* 398). For example, he finds the possibility of connection in the female bodies that he desires, like Fina, Esther, Rachel, Paola, and Brenda; but his inability to go beyond the physical into meaning, to experience the humanity of another and not just the material evidence of what might be behind the body, ends these relationships. Rachel tells him, “Anywhere you go there’ll always be a woman for Benny. Let it be a comfort. Always a hole to let yourself come in without fear of losing any of that precious schlemihlhood” followed by the description of women as “bare brain, bare heart” (414) doubly charging Profane with the opinion of the female body as an object with no thoughts and no emotions yet still containing the trace of origin that he seeks. This opinion is no secret from the reader—Profane had already admitted this opinion to himself: “sometimes women remind me of inanimate objects” (307). In the case of Stencil, he too seeks origin in the form of a female body, but one particular body in many guises which, in essence, is not so different than the purpose of Profane’s

wanderings. Stencil's investigations undermine narrative as well since he never finalizes one narrative over another, thus returning over and over again to documenting and archiving.

The purpose of chapter one, according to its title is to narrate Benny's discovery of an "apocheir." The language is in need of decoding since the word "apocheir" is not a *real* word at all. Pynchon provides within the novel his definition of it, straight-forwardly admitting that the word was created by analogy: "If you look from the side at a planet swinging around in its orbit, split the sun with a mirror and imagine a string, it all looks like a yo-yo. The point furthest from the sun is called aphelion. The point furthest from the yo-yo hand is called, by analogy, apocheir" (29-30). This etymological move reveals the story-telling mode of the novel. According to Christopher Warren, "In the parlance of the novel, Profane and Stencil are the aphelion and apocheir, which, Pynchon instructs his readers, are the two points of the yo-yo's travel furthest from one another" (243).

Therefore, Profane and Stencil represent the spectrum of narrative trajectory from complete void and emptiness of all meaning and connection to virtually endless possibilities and infinite connections, the two furthest points one could reach in interpreting the novel with all the possible combinations of interpretation resting in between as the yo-yo string swings, extends and contracts. Steedman describes just this "in-between" position as the archive: "You find nothing in the Archive but stories caught half way through; the middle of things; discontinuities" (45). Because the archive is essentially a repository of items meant to help the community establish its identity through the process of constant re-construction, the archive participates in the

phenomenon of the death drive as Freud described it—we desire to find closure to our stories, to return to the state of the inanimate, pre-life, quiescence. Constant repetition is *modus operandi* of humankind trying to achieve the end of this desire to find the original which will in turn give us a moment of creation that identifies who and what we are. But our desire is constantly frustrated.

The element of desire in the Freudian death drive is constant for Profane as well as for Stencil since they are looking for the original which would, if found, resolve all narrative tension. The story would be told, definitively, because it would be the ultimate True, and there would be no further need to tell stories. Telling stories is the urge to find the original, a repetitive reconstruction that continues until the traces are exhausted which will return us to the original state of quiescence. Peter Brooks points out that

Freud seems . . . to imply that the two antagonistic instincts serve one another in a dynamic interaction that is a complete and self-regulatory economy which makes both end and detour perfectly necessary and interdependent. The organism must live in order to die in the proper manner, to die the right death. One must have the arabesque of plot in order to reach the end. One must have metonymy in order to reach metaphor” (107).

Hale makes the important connection between Barthes’ theories and Brooks’ finding that “Barthes’ view of knowledge as an endless performance of meaning becomes for Brooks a theory of the “right ending” (Hale 277). These desires, however, are constantly circumvented by the inability to complete their own stories, one because

there is no connection and the other because there are too many. No “right ending” can ever be constructed.

Therefore, Profane’s purpose in the novel is to illustrate the ever radiating *possibilities* of narrative that are contained within archival structures but that remain always dispersed and never reconstructed, never actualized and either remaining inanimate or even moving from the animate to the inanimate. The reader is first introduced to Benny Profane by means of positioning him in relation to a time and to a place, specifically a street. Our understanding of Profane’s inability to satisfy his desire for knowledge and identity is tied directly to his experience of and entrapment in the material street and the immaterial Street. The entire description on the first page of the novel gathers elements from what the reader might expect to be in place on this particular kind of street and what the reader might also expect from this particular author who is consistently concerned with historical connections and events:

Christmas Eve, 1955, Benny Profane, wearing black levis, suede jacket, sneakers and big cowboy hat, happened to pass through Norfolk, Virginia. Given to sentimental impulses, he thought he'd look in on the Sailor's Grave, his old tin can's tavern on East Main Street. He got there by way of the Arcade, at the East Main end of which sat an old street singer with a guitar and an empty Sterno can for donations. Out in the street a chief yeoman was trying to urinate in the gas tank of a '54 Packard Patrician and five or six seamen apprentice were standing around giving encouragement. The old man was singing, in a fine, firm baritone:

Every night is Christmas Eve on old East Main,
Sailors and their sweethearts all agree.
Neon signs of red and green
Shine upon the friendly scene,
Welcoming you in from off the sea.
Santa's bag is filled with all your dreams come true:
Nickel beers that sparkle like champagne,
Barmaids who all love to screw,
All of them reminding you
It's Christmas Eve on old East Main.

"Yay chief," yelled a seaman deuce. Profane rounded the
corner. With its usual lack of warning, East Main was on him.

(Pynchon, *V.* 1-2)

Many typically Pynchonian pre-occupations are immediately identifiable here: oddly named characters (Benny Profane), silly songs, crudeness (urination), the dispossessed (the old street-singer). The character's name automatically places him in opposition to the normally sacred time of Christmas Eve, and the juxtaposition of the street's attributes against the sacred time demonstrates the paradoxes inherent in the relationship of place and time within the archive. The place, the street, supplies the structure for the scene, and Profane is situated within this landscape that is described in language that makes the street both inviting and repulsive, both sentimental and threatening, continuing the relationships between the desired memory that is forever unattainable and the actual place that presents trace after trace of memory.

According to the song, time has become inconsequential or is in an endless cycle of repetition within this landscape since every night represents a type of Christmas Eve for the inhabitants, sailors, a populace which automatically calls to mind wanderers who have no spatial locus. In this landscape, all aspects are set up in opposition of expectation and reality. The traditional festive colors of Christmas are represented by the red and green neon signs of bars. The dreams of the sailors consist of cheap beer and sexually free barmaids, and yet the previous reference to women was “sweethearts,” and the beer looks like champagne. It is welcoming and reminiscent of desire, but it is a cheap welcome, and it fails to fulfill the desire. Pynchon underscores the power of this landscape by making the street active—“East Main was on him.” The atmosphere of the street is uncomfortable and dream-like, and the dream is not even worthy of being a dream. Therefore, any anchoring in time or space is continuously denied to the inhabitants. The time is endlessly repeating, and the space is the same each separate time and for the duration of each encounter with the space.

One characteristic of the archive is that the debris contained within it is equalized both temporally and locatively. The dream-like and nightmarish quality of the street where the Sailor’s Grave sits is not new to Profane but a condition of his position within the archive. The experience is a common one regardless of his specific location. All streets, all the constructed spaces for him, are the same.

Since his discharge from the Navy Profane had been road-laboring and when there wasn't work just traveling, up and down the east coast like a yo-yo; and this had been going on for maybe a year and a half. After

that long of more named pavements than he'd care to count, Profane had grown a little leery of streets, especially streets like this. They had in fact all fused into a single abstracted Street, which come the full moon he would have nightmares about: East Main, a ghetto for Drunken Sailors nobody knew what to Do With, sprang on your nerves with all the abruptness of a normal night's dream turning to nightmare.

(2)

The street is a “separate” space for those “nobody knew what to do with,” a gathering of human debris much like himself. And Profane is also an accessory to the construction of the Street as a road-laborer and for its use as a traveler. Not only is Profane enclosed within the single abstracted Street for which he is partially responsible, but he is also figured as an inanimate object, a yo-yo, within that space. To begin understanding Profane’s relevance to the overall theme of the novel and his relationship to V., one must understand the position in which Pynchon places Profane in reference to the architectural element of the street as well as the characterization of Profane as an inanimate object within that architecture.

First, his position in the street highlights the paradoxes of being in the midst of a constructed space that *seems* to lend its authority of identification to the inhabitants but only serves to expose its own absence. In other words, there is only an illusion of the True within the architecture of the Street.

Dog into wolf, light into twilight, emptiness into waiting presence, here were your underage Marine barfing in the street, barmaid with a ship's propeller tattooed on each buttock, one potential berserk studying the

best technique for jumping through a plate glass window (when to scream Geronimo? before or after the glass breaks?), a drunken deck ape crying back in the alley because last time the SP's caught him like this they put him in a strait jacket. Underfoot, now and again, came vibration in the sidewalk from an SP streetlights away, beating out a Hey Rube with his night stick; overhead, turning everybody's face green and ugly, shone mercury-vapor lamps, receding in an asymmetric V to the east where it's dark and there are no more bars. (2)

The first three transformations mentioned, on the one hand, force the reader into acknowledging that perceptions are often mistaken, and on the other hand, indicate that all things are fleeting. The dog is really a wolf. The day turns into night. The emptiness of anything is really never emptiness because emptiness itself can be a presence of some kind, a void filled in with the imagination which is the epitome of narration. Profane, as well as Stencil, is a somewhat ridiculously extended example of this manner of opposition which oscillates between identity and nothingness.

In this opening scene, the narrator's voice describes the scene outside the Sailor's Grave, not Profane's, an important distinction since it illustrates Profane's inability to contextualize his experience and gives that job to a more authoritative voice in the context of the novel. Narrators are trusted more than characters by readers—they are considered closer to truth in the economy of documentation within the archive even if that trust is unmerited in practice. Profane is almost oblivious to the overtones of meaning that the space impresses upon the reader or observer. Because all the streets are the same to him, there is no sense of trajectory, only dead time and

redundancy of experience, a repetition that is in itself meaningful but that he misses. Without his realizing it, the wolf, the twilight, and the “waiting presence” are all foreboding images, increasing the tension for the reader and serving Pynchon’s preoccupation with paranoia. Profane’s inability to draw any connections between his position in/on/of (and later, under) the street and any trajectory for himself also affects the narrative tension—he becomes a witless foil to the whims of chance, or fate as the case may be. In other words, Profane never tells a story; he never narrativizes his experiences.

At some point in the distance or at some moment in the past, there is a beginning and/or an end where the two lines of the V. meet and the events and time’s passing radiate out. The physical structure of the archive/street represent this dilemma—being positioned somewhere that is connected through time and place to the beginning but never able to reach it simply because it is an illusion of visual perspective to begin with. The “single abstracted Street” gathers together all of Profane’s memories of his interaction with “named pavements.” The tension that Pynchon builds between his characters and his settings illustrates in a negative way the function and impact of the archival structure. For an archive to work, for it to fulfill its purpose, it must provide both a material link to the past and an immaterial guiding narrative of the past for the reader. Profane’s response to any physical space that he encounters, most often the street, is to feel alien to it. To be alien, one must be originally from another space or outside of the narrative that one finds oneself within.

Profane’s entrance in the novel and his name provides us with his “coordinates” so that the reader may place him in his “alien” position correctly. First,

he is no longer a member of the Navy, so he is no longer a member of any community; but because he feels himself “sentimental” for his old life, he is returning to one of the primary physical places connected to that community, the Sailor’s Grave. However, his presence there is recorded passively in that he “happened to pass through Norfolk, Virginia.” His is not a purposeful journey. And he winds up at a “grave” or in the presence of death. Second, as a former seaman and a traveling laborer as well as a kind of urban peasant, Profane should be a proficient storyteller, one whose travels, experiences and perspectives would provide him and listeners with the “lore of far-away places” and the “lore of the past” (Benjamin 85). According to Walter Benjamin, there are two “tribes” of storytellers: “If one wants to picture these two groups through their archaic representatives, one is embodied in the resident tiller of the soil, and the other in the trading seaman. Indeed, each sphere of life has, as it were, produced its own tribe of storytellers. Each of these tribes preserves some of its characteristics centuries later” (84-85). Pynchon draws Profane as this archetypal character, and then consistently undercuts the power of the archetype, most obviously by naming him “Profane.”

This reading is quite blatant, and may perhaps hide the more interesting aspect of the word “profane.” Although it implies the opposite of sacred and thus provides a pejorative term, a more political and cultural aspect exists regarding the idea when applied to Profane’s characterization. The word profane is made from combining “pro” and “fano.” “Pro” is “in front of” and “fano” is the ablative form of “fanum” meaning “the temple.” Those who are “in front of the temple” are those not allowed to enter the temple. Therefore, someone who is profane is made profane in relation to

the accepted rituals of the society in which he/she lives and is prevented from becoming “sacred” in that particular society. The subject could also choose not to enter the temple, remaining an outsider out of his or her own will. Either way, the outsider is still an outsider. The designation of profanity then is simply a relational one, not an innate or natural quality. Benny Profane’s position in the novel places him outside of the “accepted” historical community, the “sacred place” over which the *arkhon*, as Derrida positions him, would hold sway.

The street is figured as a pathway, literally in this scene, to the grave populated with those “nobody knew what to do with,” the frightened, the sick, the scarred, the insane. Even the symbol of authority, the policeman, is threatening in his staccato version of a Hey Rube, the call of circus performers to a bloody fight. Again, the paradox is made uncomfortably clear between the expectation and the reality. As Mbembe points out, there can be no archive without the spectre of death, the need to repeat that Freud identified as the death drive made clear in Profane’s constant wandering and sexual lust. “On a more basic level, the archive imposes a qualitative difference between co-ownership of dead time (the past) and living time, that is, the immediate present. That part of its status falling under the order of the imaginary arises from the act that it is rooted in death as an architectural event” (21). Death is the reason for construction of an archive, to enshrine the past. If death had not taken place, no need for the archive would exist. Thus, the description of the street which functions archivally emphasizes the past, “dead time.”

The street is lined with lamps that make all the people look corpse-like. Pynchon describes the lamps as receding from Profane’s perspective in the shape of a

V. Alternately, then, Profane and the (Sailor's) Grave are at the wide section of the V, in the west, and far away from the point of connection which the point of the V symbolizes throughout the novel. This point of connection can be read as the place of origin, the place, according to Freud, that we all desire to find which becomes, ironically, death or the end of narrative possibility. The point of contact, however, does not exist; it is simply an illusion based on the perspective of the subject. Therefore, whatever or whoever V. is teases at giving the searcher the origins that he desires, constantly frustrating his efforts. For Profane, then, the architectural element that encapsulates his experience, upon which and under which he exists, is equivalent to the mysterious V. As Stencil follows the corporal architecture of the female V., so does Profane continuously follow and interact with the architecture of the street.

Second, Pynchon's use of the metaphor yo-yo for Profane contributes to his relationship to the overall theme of narrative entrapment. The title of chapter one is "In which Benny Profane, a schlemihl and human yo-yo, gets to an apocheir." His actions in the novel are figured to mimic the endless back and forth motion of the toy. He is therefore controlled by something else playing with him.

The most visible controlling force is Rachel Owlglass; but the more pervasive notion is that the controlling force is named Fortune, of which Rachel could be considered a manifestation since Profane's relationship to her is often haunted by the force, especially in relation to Profane's physical reaction to female bodies. For example, when Profane is searching for a job, he chooses an employment agency in what he considers an arbitrary way out of the newspaper.

He happened to look down. His erection had produced in the newspaper a crosswise fold, which moved line by line down the page as the swelling gradually diminished. It was a list of employment agencies. O.K., thought Profane, just for the heck of it I will close my eyes, count three and open them and whatever agency listing that fold is on I will go to them. It will be like flipping a coin: inanimate schmuck, inanimate paper, pure chance. (Pynchon, *V*. 227)

Then, when he arrives at the randomly chosen agency, his assigned counselor turns out to be Rachel:

Six interviewers, he counted. Six to one odds she drew me. Like Russian roulette. Why like that? Would she destroy him, she so frail-looking, such gentle, well-bred legs? . . .

"Profane," she called. Looking at him with a little frown.

Oh God, he thought, the loaded chamber. The luck of a schlemihl, who by common sense should lose at the game. Russian roulette is only one of its names, he groaned inside, and look: me with this hard on. She called his name again. He stumbled up from the chair, and proceeded with the Times over his groin and he bent at a 120 degree angle behind the rail and in to her own desk. The sign said RACHEL OWLGLASS. (228-229)

Profane's "fortune" here is to meet Rachel again, but it is framed in terms of another "one of its names." He realizes that he is at the mercy of his libido in response to

Rachel's body and to the force of fortune as he doubles over in a tortuous position when he approaches her desk, mimicking his metaphorical lashing to the wheel.

This force is present throughout the novel both because Pynchon alludes to Fortune and her wheel and also because V. can be identified with the goddess figure. "He came back to the ship that morning in the fog knowing that Fortunes' yo-yo had also returned to some reference-point, not unwilling, not anticipating, not anything; merely prepared to float, acquire a set and drift wherever Fortune willed. If Fortune could will" (395). The odd pairing of "Fortune" with yo-yo alludes to the well-known pairing of Fortune with the wheel. A digression into the identity of Fortuna is necessary to understand the relationship between Profane and V. since normally Stencil is associated with V. and not Profane. Pynchon sheds light on the passing allusion to Fortuna much later in the novel when describing Malta's situation during WWI:

A wheel, this diagram: Fortune's wheel. Spin as it might the basic arrangement was constant. Stroboscopic effects could change the apparent number of spokes; direction could change; but the hub still held the spokes in place and the meeting-place of the spokes still defined the hub. The old cyclic idea of history had taught only the rim, to which princes and serfs alike were lashed. (364)

The yo-yo, therefore, corresponds to this wheel and, for that matter, to the street and hothouse situated in the Street. The description of the wheel shows that whatever movement the wheel makes in its rotation is restricted by its physical structure—the critical error is in perception: although they appear during movement to look different,

the spokes will always meet the hub and the rim exactly the same way. History remains at the level of the rim, the “architecture” that contains the interior made up of spokes and hub. This image can be coordinated quite easily with the yo-yo. The hand is the hub; the string is equivalent to the spokes, and the yo-yo itself is the rim. It can only revolve and move within its own controlled radius. These two images express a type of architectural or constructed control of movement or what appears to be movement from the outside but which is internally restricted so that it can only move in specific and mathematically predictable ways.

The archive, too, is a restricted space within which any movement toward connection is controlled by its own construction. This construction, as Pynchon explains, is the epitome of the problem in trying to narrate history—it is restricted based on its own conditions of construction. This is the space in which Profane is operating and why he is simply a yo-yo, unable to move beyond or outside the constructed space of his condition. The normal understanding of history remains understood from an exterior perspective in which only the rim is accounted for, “the cyclic idea of history,” a perspective that does not take into account that what is moving the rim is only repeated motion that can never escape the confines of the rim in which it takes place. When viewed in yet another model used in *V.* and other Pynchon works, the thermodynamic one, this interior motion eventually results in the exhaustion of possibilities. At some point all possible combinations will be exhausted, and heat death will occur.

The first mention of “Fortune” as a proper name is within the thoughts of Stencil contemplating the Whole Sick Crew, the group with which Profane, not

Stencil, is most closely identified. “Perhaps the only reason they survived, Stencil reasoned, was that they were not alone. God knew how many more there were with a hothouse sense of time, no knowledge of life, and at the mercy of Fortune” (52-53). Again, Stencil’s thoughts place the crew as well as Pynchon within a community of the dispossessed who are entrapped within a certain physical structure, the hothouse (one of the elements of the Street along with the street) which limits their mobility in time. They are “at the mercy of Fortune,” again a reference to her using the wheel to dictate fate.³⁷

Fortune controls the yo-yo. Profane is a yo-yo. He is the embodied enclosed system which cannot escape its own construction and is controlled by fate or chance, unable to break free and control his own narrative, a powerless figure in the face of history and even his own memory. This conundrum defines his relationship to V. The original Etruscan name of the goddess Fortuna was Vortumna “Goddess of the Turning Year” (Davenport 188) who holds the wheel of fortune in her hand. Vortumna is, if not a candidate for V.’s identity, at least a general force at play in the theme of the novel since she is in charge of the yearly cycle and the consequential events which would come and go within that cycle, always returning and never escaping the possible combinations contained within. The novel-wide irony here is the double meaning of fortune which complicates the reader’s understanding of the narrator’s meaning but in reality serves to underscore Profane’s inability to narrate his

³⁷ This community of the dispossessed is represented in *The Crying of Lot 49* as well, most vividly by their resorting to an underground mail system, W.A.S.T.E., in order to circumvent control of their communication by governmental forces. In this way, they retain control of the production and dissemination of their written documents which allows their community to survive in practice, as users of the mail system, but also in resistance to outside interference with their written records.

story. Fortune can mean fate. It can also mean chance/luck. These two concepts are conflictual since fate implies what *will* be, what is definite, and chance/luck implies what *may* be, what is possible.³⁸ Profane is within the archive at the mercy of Fortune just as the reader is interacting with the archive from the future.

Vico's principle that humans can only understand what is made by humans comes clearly into focus within the yo-yo imagery—in *narrating* the inanimate object (in creating a metaphor) the narrative voice or Pynchon himself has successfully locked in a certain understanding of Profane's predicament. The metaphor which is no more than an imaginative way to see Profane cycles into the True for the reader: He *is* a yo-yo. This specific insistence upon this specific metaphor reveals the danger of storytelling because it locks out other possible interpretations. The storyteller gains authority, thus the meaning of the word "author" in the process of assembling the pieces of the archive into narrative. And the yo-yo is how the reader *must* understand him and how he understands himself. The cultural and physical associations built into the toy prevent any other reading of Profane. He is locked into that metaphor. It is therefore not at all instructive or informative to create this metaphor because it necessitates a fixed image. Pynchon's use of irony here is to make Fortune, either luck or fate, control the toy. Then the metaphor falls away, losing its transient power, because its meaning is really controlled by an inherent antonymic relationship, and reading with one or the other completely changes the meaning and therefore the

³⁸ In the Derridean concept of the future anterior, these two elements of Fortune constitute what was and what might have been. See Chapter 3 in this work for further discussion of the future anterior.

trajectory of the narrative. Which is it for Profane? Is his path on the yo-yo string pre-determined or is it always unknown and a matter of chance? It Vs.

The seemingly infinite radiating possibilities of the yo-yo's path or the wheel's rotation actually illustrates that only so many possibilities exist, not an infinite number. The variables involved are so numerous and so interdependent that no human could ever calculate much less have True knowledge of them. The answer lies in the narrative process which builds upon the foundation of the True and creates Certainty by its very nature of imposed chronological and constructed causal connections. Profane's inability to narrate is built into his character, so this inability is Pynchon's proof that the only way out of the cycle of history is a way that is intrinsically cut off. The archive provides the bits and pieces of lives, the yo-yo moments, the spinning wheel, the possible interruption of chance into narrative order that can only be achieved within the system. When history is written, or a story is told, the interruptions are smoothed out, and the arcs of the yo-yo are made unambiguous and resolved.

But Profane remains metaphorically lashed to the wheel and thus never finalizes his story, constantly in a state of being unresolved, because his character is unable to narrate. He can therefore not liberate his experience from the proscription of fate or luck. This inability to narrate, to achieve the "climax" of the narrative arc is illustrated in Profane's constant state of physical excitement which is often portrayed as ineffectual itself.

Strangely then the tumescence began to subside, the flesh at his neck to pale. Any sovereign or broken yo-yo must feel like this after a short

time of lying inert, rolling, falling: suddenly to have its own umbilical string reconnected, and know the other end is in hands it cannot escape. Hands it doesn't want to escape. Know that the simple clockwork of itself has no more need for symptoms of inutility, lonesomeness, directionlessness, because now it has a path marked out for it over which it has no control. That's what the feeling would be, if there were such things as animate yo-yos. Pending any such warp in the world Profane felt like the closest thing to one and above her eyes began to doubt his own animateness. (Pynchon, *V.* 229)

Peter Brooks uses the same language to describe the desire for narrative that Profane cannot fulfill: “For plot starts . . . from that moment at which story, or “life,” is stimulated from quiescence into a state of narratability, into a tension, a kind of irritation, which demands narration. . . . [this] narrative desire, [is] the arousal that creates the narratable as a condition of tumescence . . .” (103). Profane’s erection and his excitement at seeing Rachel subside, and he likens such a feeling to his own state of submission to whatever fortune wills. He is clockwork, a yo-yo, and this feeling is his ultimate fear, being inanimate.

Thus, the portrayal of Profane’s life within the covers of the novel is characterized by this aimless wandering at the mercy of chance or fate; and the reader is given information concerning his life in jumps and starts, strangely similar to the presentation of *V.* who appears to wander around the world and around time much as Profane does around the East Coast and New York. The various episodes of his life are archived through his interaction with the material world (because it is inanimate

like so much debris), but those separate events are always separate with no narrative arc to make them meaningful or to give him any sort of consistent identity, again like V. He is never defined, is only in motion, played by something else exterior to his own body and mind.

To Profane, alone in the street, it would always seem maybe he was looking for something too to make the fact of his own disassembly plausible as that of any machine. It was always at this point that the fear started: here that it would turn into a nightmare. Because now, if he kept going down that street, not only his ass but also his arms, legs, sponge brain and clock of a heart must be left behind to litter the pavement, be scattered among manhole covers. (Pynchon, V. 35)

Pynchon moves the metaphorical issue of control from the thematic level to the level of characterization by making Profane consciously fear becoming inanimate.

His feeling of becoming inanimate is directly related not to any lack of motion but to a lack of identity. The terms “animate” and “inanimate” refer to two different qualities, movement and spirit. Animate, derived from the Latin “anima,” refers to something that has breath which thus means it is alive.³⁹ By extension, alive things move and grow. However, the term can also refer simply to objects that move but are not alive. Pynchon purposefully points out in the text that his idea of animation is not simply the animation inherent in a moving object during Slab’s explanation of his painting of a pear tree since he differentiates between a thing that moves, “a machine”

³⁹ The exact etymology is given in the OED: “ad. L. *animt-us* filled with life, *also*, disposed, inclined, f. *anim-re* to breathe, to quicken; f. *anima* air, breath, life, soul, mind.”

and thing that is moved by another force: “The beauty is that it works like a machine yet is animate. The partridge eats pears off the tree and his droppings in turn nourish the tree which grows higher and higher, every day lifting the partridge up and at the same time assuring him of a continuous supply of food. It is perpetual motion . . .” (300).

If an object can be considered animate as long as it moves, Profane is not afraid that he will stop moving. Therefore volition is at stake—objects that move do not do so of their own volition; they are moved by something else outside of their control which exhibits complete control over them. This is the foundation of Profane’s fear of being inanimate, that being controlled from the outside will ultimately lead to his loss of identity, as an individual with a soul. This description could be applied to V. as well.

The fear or expectation of becoming inanimate is actually a way for Profane to preserve his identity, however, as counter-intuitive as that may be. In fact, it seems the only option that he has, given his entrapment within the system of the archive. If a person becomes inanimate, then that person continues, becomes immortal, cannot physically die (perhaps one explanation for V.’s endurance). The juxtaposition and merging of flesh and the inanimate and the subsequent temporal consequences are set up in the comments Profane makes to Rachel: “You know what I always thought? That you, flesh, you’d fall apart sooner than the car. That the car would go on, in a junkyard even it would look like it always had, and it would have to be a thousand years before that thing could rust before you wouldn’t recognize it. But old Rachel, she’d be long gone” (413). Rachel’s relationship to her car is erotically charged, and

Profane is almost jealous of the car. This description of Rachel being gone before the car fulfills Profane's desire to suppress his jealousy, but it simultaneously validates the significance of the discarded material elements of human life. The car, if it were considered residue from Rachel's life, would therefore serve as a trace of her long after her flesh were gone. The inanimate aspects of her life would survive her flesh but serve as a memory or trace of her.⁴⁰

Ronald Cooley cites the following Pynchon quotation from *V.*: "suppose . . . sometime between 1859 and 1919, the world contracted a disease which no one ever took the trouble to diagnose because the symptoms were too subtle—blending in with the events of history, no different one by one but altogether—fatal" (Pynchon 498). Cooley then goes on to identify the disease as "the conquest of the animate by the inanimate [which] proceeds, in *V.*, along fairly clear lines, from object-love to fetishism and sadism, and finally to self-destruction" (309). Profane is slowly becoming more inanimate than the world around him. So he has given this aspect of his condition some thought and has come to a rather libido-inspired Marxist conclusion:

Profane sighed. The eyes of New York women do not see the wandering bums or the boys with no place to go. Material wealth and getting laid strolled arm-in-arm the midway of Profane's mind. If he'd been the type who evolves theories of history for his own amusement,

⁴⁰ This idea of a type of preservation available through the inanimate is related to Profane as well in his characterization as a schlemiel. Albert Goldman observes that "The schlemiel's power rests on his daring to lay bare his own weakness and to acknowledge his own limitations. Although he may appear pathetic or absurd, the schlemiel conceals behind his mask a hidden strength: a shrewd sense of self-preservation" (qtd. in Friedman 140).

he might have said all political events: wars, governments and uprisings, have the desire to get laid as their roots; because history unfolds according to economic forces and the only reason anybody wants to get rich is so he can get laid steadily, with whomever he chooses. All he believed at this point, on the bench behind the Library, was that anybody who worked for inanimate money so he could buy more inanimate objects was out of his head. Inanimate money was to get animate warmth, dead fingernails in the living shoulder blades, quick cries against the pillow, tangled hair, lidded eyes, twisting loins . . .” (Pynchon, V. 226).

The end result for Profane is therefore tied directly to the flesh and its desires. His physical location given here in this excerpt, “on the bench behind the Library” (not library, but Library) is no literary accident. He is positioned in reference to the iconic archive of the city, the library. Furthermore, the narrator notes that he is at “the geographical center of the midtown employment agency belt” (225), also positioning him within the economic system of the city. He is politically and historically positioned, and time has not stopped for him because he is outside of it all—he is still *pro fana*, outside and behind the library, thus outside the acknowledged archive, and he is jobless, thus outside the economic system. To be exterior to the acknowledged archive is to live in a time that seems to pass, but his position within the Street introduces a rupture. His daydream illustrates the tension: “He had an interesting daydream all built up, which went: You’re jobless, I’m jobless, here we both are out of work, let’s screw. He was horny. What little money he’d saved from the sewer job

had almost run out and here he was considering seduction. It kept the time moving right along” (225). Profane feels that time is “moving right along.” But the moving is in direct relation to economic power and his sexual desire, both indicating what he lacks, his *mal d’archive*. What he is feeling is disguised by the fact that he is himself “lashed” to the rim of the wheel of fortune, forever cycling toward fate or chance with no power to manipulate the structure of the wheel. Time moves, but it is not from desire to fulfillment, only from desire to more desire, or “fever.”

Connecting through these traces is Profane’s constant unfulfilled desire. At the end of the penultimate chapter, Profane has the following exchange with Brenda Wigglesworth:

"You've had all these fabulous experiences. I wish mine would show me something."

"Why?"

"The experience, the experience. Haven't you learned?"

Profane didn't have to think long. "No," he said, "offhand I'd say I haven't learned a goddamn thing." (490-491)

The reader has been aware throughout the novel that Profane’s experiences, his journey, have been characterized by both the narrator and himself as yo-yoing and ultimately related to his powerlessness in the hands of Fortune. The fact that Profane declares he has learned nothing is therefore no surprise. The interesting aspect of the exchange is that it reveals why Profane exists as a veritable inanimate object in the way he does. Brenda had earlier announced that she was an artist: “I write poetry” (490). She then proceeds to read one of her poems to Profane.

"I am the twentieth century," she read. Profane rolled away and stared at the pattern in the rug.

"I am the ragtime and the tango; sans-serif, clean geometry. I am the virgin's-hair whip and the cunningly detailed shackles of decadent passion. I am every lonely railway station in every capital of Europe. I am the Street, the fanciless buildings of government; the café-dansant, the clockwork figure, the jazz saxophone; the tourist-lady's hairpiece, the fairy's rubber breasts, the traveling clock which always tells the wrong time and chimes in different keys. I am the dead palm tree, the Negro's dancing pumps, the dried fountain after tourist season. I am all the appurtenances of night."

"That sounds about right," said Profane.

"I don't know." She made a paper airplane out of the poem and sailed it across the room on strata of her own exhaled smoke. "It's a phony college-girl poem. Things I've read for courses. Does it sound right?" (490)

Brenda's dilettantish attempt at poetry identifies her as a reader and archive. Her characterization of herself through her poetry provides her with an identity; she identifies herself as poet and therefore has acted and has attempted to control what she is called, at least. Because of the associations and identifications that she creates in the poem itself, she also doubly signifies history as the sweeping river of time but also the bits and pieces, the debris, left over and discarded by the tide. She is the whole twentieth century as well as the artistic, scientific, cultural, and political events which

occurred within it presented in pieces. Her written record of those events is simply a list, not a narrative. Indeed, as she confesses, there is something somewhat disingenuous about the references she makes. They were not experienced but learned from books, thus confirming that the archiving of information institutes yet another layer between Truth and Certainty. These events are things she knows (Certainty) but not from immediacy in time or place but from the written word. And then she in turn creates another piece of debris which re-inscribes the original into yet another type of debris with its concomitant metaphors and allusions.

She then asks for some kind of validation from Profane who can only weakly confirm that it “sounds” right although he had already answered her question before she asked it. In other words, his answer was not in response to her question—it was out of sequence. Therefore, he was responding to his interpretation of the poem in reference to his own criteria and according to an outside structure, hinted at when the narrator tells us that he rolls away from her and stares instead at a pattern in the rug. It is close enough to work, a verification only of the certainty of convention. The identity that she has created for herself, to identify herself both on a literal level as poet or writer or artist and the metaphorical level of history and debris, is institutive of yet another archive. Its creation grants authority to the previous works as well as becomes inscribed in a text which is endlessly re-presentable, and both contain the trace of the past but become a trace themselves. Its existence is its own validation, and it thus becomes “archivable.”

The more indelible this trace becomes, the more distant the Truth moves from the Certain.⁴¹ And to distinguish the two becomes an exercise in finding where they meet (through historical research of time and place), thus ironically and finally erasing any distinguishing element. The problem with the Certain and the True is identifiable in the archive—the one rests upon and within the other (the Certain rests upon and within the True as in the figure of a palimpsest); the one is mistaken for the other (on both the individual and community levels, what is Certain is regarded as True); one is all that is knowable (the Certain); one is not knowable (the True). The act of creating the archive and the use of the archive continues this dance between the two, repeatedly becoming what for Derrida becomes a sickness, or “fervor” to slightly alter the translation, mimicking the drive toward ultimate inanimateness and/or death.

⁴¹ Randolph Driblette, the director of the fictional Jacobean play *The Courier's Tragedy* written by the equally fictional Richard Wharfinger, in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, identifies the difference in the search for truth and the finding of truth within texts: “You guys, you're like Puritans are about the Bible. So hung up with words, words. You know where that play exists, not in that file cabinet, not in any paperback you're looking for, but . . . in here. That's what I'm for. To give the spirit flesh. The words, who cares? . . . I'm the projector at the planetarium, all the closed little universe visible in the circle of that stage is coming out of my mouth, eyes, sometimes other orifices also.” (62) He tells Oedipa, after she questions why he made certain choices of how to tell the story, “You can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several, about why characters reacted to the Trystero possibility the way they did, why the assassins came on, why the black costumes. You could waste your life that way and never touch the truth. Wharfinger supplied words and a yarn. I gave them life. That's it” (62). Driblette is the storyteller, and he has projected the story regardless of any “traces” of the path that he calls “dead, mineral, without value or potential” (62).

CHAPTER THREE

Stencil in the Hothouse

*If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard;
Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
The Word without a word, the Word within
The world and for the world;
And the light shone in darkness and
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
About the centre of the silent Word.*

☞ T. S. Eliot, "Ash Wednesday: V"

While Profane's lack of direction and identity positions him within the street and as participating in dead time, Stencil's reaction is quite different because he occupies a different space within the Street, the hothouse, a sealed space in which narratives are continuously constructed and reconstructed. The endless cycling of possibility within the hothouse supports an environment of paranoia. When equivalency is created among any possible combination of fact, as long as the facts are themselves authorized by their imagined proximity to truth, then paranoia is the natural outcome. "Paranoia" means "beside" the "mind" and "paranoid" is created further by adding the two etymological roots "like" and "form." In other words, it is the penchant for mentally taking what is simply *like or near* something and making it into that thing, basically a stronger form of metaphor.

Criticism around the themes of paranoia has been one of the major thrusts in Pynchon scholarship from the beginning of critical work on Pynchon's writing and has

been dealt with comprehensively. Bernarnd Duyfhuizen reports in a review of Pynchon criticism up until 1989 that “In 1979, Tölölyan saw the first wave and phase of Pynchon criticism . . . as being overly concerned with narrow readings of ‘entropy’ and ‘paranoia’ as distinct themes rather than integrated features in a full textual matrix” (75).⁴² For example, in “Pynchon’s Paranoid History,” Scott Sanders states that paranoia is indeed the basic structuring element to Pynchon’s fiction (178).⁴³ Ursula K. Heise contextualizes the thematic issue of paranoia in postmodern novels in relation to narrative experiments in temporality:

Very strikingly, the multiplicity of temporal universes in these novels does not seem to lead to a wider spectrum of plot possibilities and a vastly enriched narrative repertoire, but on the contrary to the almost obsessive repetition of a relatively restricted inventory of scenes and, even in texts with wildly proliferating plots such as those of Thomas Pynchon, to a pervasive sense of paranoia and control. (65)

Heise identifies the use of multiple temporalities and the proliferation of plots based on the repetition of “restricted inventory” which underscores the “found within the archive” sense of usage but also establishes the paranoia to be found in a chaotic closed system. As Heise notices, repetition and endless re-copying are inherent in Pynchon’s work.

⁴² Tölölyan, Khachig. "Prodigious Pynchon and His Progeny."

⁴³ See also Edward Mendelson, “The Sacred, the Profane and *The Crying of Lot 49*”; Louis Mackey, "Paranoia, Pynchon, and Preterition"; Tony Tanner, *Thomas Pynchon*; and Aaron S. Rosenfeld “‘The Scanty Plot’: Orwell, Pynchon, and the Poetics of Paranoia” among others for various critical accounts of the theme of paranoia and its causes and effects in Pynchon’s fiction.

Stencil's mental state is predisposed to this particular type of narrative construction. Stencil, as his name suggests, contains the ability to make copy after copy, and he does this by creating narratives that he desires out of the interaction with the material artifacts he encounters. These artifacts are made up of the bits and pieces of stories he is told as well as physical evidence, like the teeth that Eigenvalue possesses in his own private collection, and journals. It is no mystery that the paranoid instinct is so pervasive in Pynchon's texts. If his narratives do indeed support the idea that History is a narrative created to equalize and justify actions of the past, to make unlike things equal, and then arrange them to obfuscate the Truth and fashion a presentable past, then the True is destroyed and disassembled *in order to* reconstruct it as if it were still the True. However, it can only be encountered within the realm of the Certain. The Certain can therefore be a paranoid state, seeing connections everywhere as Stencil does.⁴⁴ Furthermore, he consistently refers to himself in the third person, which has the effect of making him seem unable to situate himself outside of the narrative structures he himself creates, the mark of the hothouse sense of time and history.⁴⁵

Stencil's search for the corporal manifestation of his story functions as the controlling image throughout *V.* with the various possible V.s, including Vera in

⁴⁴ In Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa is also victim to an avalanche of connections she cannot quite map out in a satisfactory narrative that makes sense: "Now here was Oedipa, faced with a metaphor of God knew how many parts; more than two, anyway. With coincidences blossoming these days wherever she looked, she had nothing but a sound, a word, Trystero, to hold them together" (87).

⁴⁵ This "poor trick," as Pynchon refers to it, was made in revisions to the novel and did not exist in its first drafts. According to a letter to his editor, Corlies Smith, Pynchon wanted to "align Stencil's voice in the 1956 chapters with the narrative voice of the historical chapters" (Herman 7-8).

Mondaugen's story and the Bad Priest in Fausto's story. This manifestation of the archive in *V.* is language in the form of narrative, language chronologized and located. *V.* is an enigmatic character (or characters) because she is the locus of language in its most reductive *and* inscribed form. She is both the document to be read and the story to be listened to, highlighting the schism between the written record, a manifestation of what claims to be True, and the spoken story, a manifestation of the Certain. Language as both written and spoken is presented as the only way to know the world; and Pynchon's text can be read as an elaborate argument that in the twentieth century, we have taken language apart, stripped it from its organic origins and therefore have both elevated it and destroyed it. In the twentieth century, the Word has become so meaningless that our creation of the world through language is unemotional, a body without sensation like a prosthesis, a trajectory that Pynchon's writing attempts to utilize in two ways.⁴⁶ He wants to follow that trajectory in order to expose its end. He wants to document a kind of imaginative history at the same time he also wants to play the part of the storyteller who both interprets the past but also plots the possible future. The key symbol of this two-pronged objective is the body of *V.*

Pynchon's first novel is the prostheticizing of the body, an ongoing process which is developed piece by piece in *V.* Any reference to the physical body in the text is first created through language (the looking back to the past where the origins of the story are) and is itself a reference to a type of communication, not a material being, that the body of *V.* represents, itself an amalgamation of debris gathered from the past. Paradoxically, this material body of *V.* is transformed into the immaterial because of

⁴⁶ See Alec McHoul's and David Wills' *Writing Pynchon*. They argue that the entire text of *V.* functions within the structure of prosthesis.

its relation to history, language, and story-telling. Pynchon scholar Thomas Schaub, in an interview concerning Pynchon's novel *Against the Day* and his long career, stated that "Pynchon is a great writer of alternative and underground histories, telling a different history from what one gets from mainstream histories of the twentieth century. He's interested so much in what it is that has created the modern world and the conditions in which we live and the threats that we endure..." These "alternative histories" are pulled from both the material records of the past that an author like Pynchon must study and from his imagination based on the ways these material records are recomposed in narrative. His corpus of work is invested in the story of history, and as Schaub stated "A longing that it might have been different."

Pynchon gathers together the debris of the past, recasting it in an ever-present narrative that envisions both the trajectory that the past did take and continues to create. However, the melancholy voice of the storyteller suggests a different story could have been told or still can be told even though it was not the original story.

Finding V. is for Stencil a quest to create his own story; more precisely and ultimately, it is to finish his father's story. In the beginning of Chapter Three, entitled "In which Stencil, a quick-change artist, does eight impersonations," the narrator likens his quest to sexual desire, scientific research, and technology and production: "As spread thighs are to the libertine, flights of migratory birds to the ornithologist, the working part of his tool bit to the production machinist, so was the letter V to young Stencil" (57). These images also conveniently mimic the V shape of Stencil's object of desire in physical expression. Moreover, inherent in Stencil's finding a story (like the researcher) is desire (like the libertine), a work (like the machinist) and the

attempt at a type of return or the participation in a cycle (like the birds' migration). The images are all v-shaped. He must find what he lacks and does not himself understand. Indeed, the narrator exposes his quest as unreal: "He would dream perhaps once a week that it had all been a dream, and that now he'd awakened to discover the pursuit of V. was merely a scholarly question after all, an adventure of the mind, in the tradition of *The Golden Bough* or the *White Goddess*" (57). Ironically, as the story the reader reads is the story of his own creation of a story, so his dreams are made up of learning that he is dreaming. Yet he discovers that it is not a dream, just as the reader discovers that it is not a story only about Stencil's certainty but that the reader is implicated in the story as well.

Pynchon is sure, too, to mention two great works of "history." He does not refer to the volumes by Herodotus, Michelet or Toynbee, but to *The Golden Bough* and *The White Goddess*. These works are about striving to lay out the histories of stories, relying on no necessary historical evidence but instead on poetic sensibilities, literary connections, and etymologies. These works are also created in a space in which history and imagination meet; and the production can be nothing other than interpretable art, a narrativized version of history which has in turn become the foundational text of modernism since they consciously create mythological constructs.⁴⁷

Vladimir Nabokov, a possible influence on Pynchon since he took Nabokov's class at Cornell as documented by many critics including Susan Strehl and Alexei

⁴⁷ See Joseph Fahy's "Thomas Pynchon's V. and Mythology" for an account of Pynchon's reliance on Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* and James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*.

Lalo, described the space within which he makes his art: “There is, it would seem, in the dimensional scale of the world a kind of delicate meeting place between imagination and knowledge, a point, arrived at by diminishing large things and enlarging small ones, that is intrinsically artistic” (167). This imaginative space, this point where imagination and knowledge coalesce, is the archival space. Within that space exists the debris which is tantamount to knowledge since it provides tangible evidence of the existence of an original whole thing. This space is manifest within postmodern novels that self-consciously approach that point, highlighting the double strands of historical knowledge and personal imagination. All narratives, which are created through imagination from the re-construction of the original thing, must do this to a certain extent. However, it is the novels, like *V.*, that openly admit this function and do so in the service of purposefully exposing the process by and space in which narrative is created. Pynchon’s drawing of Stencil’s character as well as his quest for *V.* opens this space. Stencil’s characterization hinges on his multiple acts of narrative creation about *V.* In fact, he is the space, the stencil, which can be used to recreate narratives repeatedly, and *V.* is the body he searches for which will “fill in” the stencil perfectly.

The entity *V.*, for the reader never discovers exactly what or who *V.* is, is first mentioned in the novel by Stencil as he recalls an entry in one of his father’s journals or “unofficial log of an agent’s career.” He says, “Under ‘Florence, April 1899’ is a sentence, young Stencil has memorized it: ‘There is more behind and inside *V.* than any of us had suspected. Not who, but what; what is she. God grant that I may never be called upon to write the answer, either here or in any official report’” (Pynchon, *V.*

43). The interactive aspect of language and myth plays on several levels here. First, Pynchon is sure to give a properly symbolic name to the character who searches for V.—Stencil, a stock pattern or model with which one can create letters or forms but which possesses no quality on its own, recalling Eliot’s line in “The Hollow Men”: “Shape without form.” His name allows play with the idea of the “original” or the archetypal in that a stencil allows one to make an endless numbers of copies.

A stencil then is not the original; it is a pattern from which many copies can be made—and no original of the form which the stencil outlines has to have existed before. In fact, the stencil is itself a “blank” or “empty” form—it is only an outline, not the form itself. Therefore, Stencil’s character is an empty archetype, and in his search he is looking for that which may perhaps fill in the blank. So in his particular story, he is a quest figure searching for that which is lost or lacking which is identified in the most cryptic and mysterious way possible. Continuing the ambiguity of the traditional quest narrative, the letter conceals meaning since it is in and of itself meaningless other than the name of a voiced labiodental fricative or the most diminutive form possible of a human’s name. But Stencil’s quest, his activity, his imagining of the possibilities that are V., allow him to maintain his subject position, even his humanity, in that he is only animate due to the search. He can create a story, many stories in fact, which are what compose half of Pynchon’s novel, around his own knowledge of his world and his quest. Through that story, he *is*. Stencil’s “animateness” is created and sustained by the stories he hears, interprets and even imagines while searching for V.:

Work, the chase - for it was V. he hunted - far from being a means to glorify God and one's own godliness (as the Puritans believe) was for Stencil grim, joyless; a conscious acceptance of the unpleasant for no other reason than that V. was there to track down.

Finding her: what then? Only that what love there was to Stencil had become directed entirely inward, toward this acquired sense of animateness. Having found this he could hardly release it, it was too dear. To sustain it he had to hunt V.; but if he should find her, where else would there be to go but back into half-consciousness? He tried not to think, therefore, about any end to the search. Approach and avoid.

(50-51)

Stencil refers to an “acquired sense of animateness,” one which is the converse of Profane’s predestined sense of inanimateness. This is another way of designating the basic, human storytelling urge. Profane nurtures this aspect while Profane cannot seem to enable it. We understand ourselves through our stories and through our bodies, there being two parts of our experience, the spatial and the temporal. Because Stencil is “blank,” only a stencil, having no form, he fills up his physical space by the movements towards V. and he fills out his temporal space by the progressive search for her/it. This work is devoid of any connection to the sacred or the eternal soul, only of the body, a joyless and grim one of necessity, of staying animate, of not falling victim to the death that lies beyond Decadence.

Pynchon provides ample explanation through his narrators/characters for the definition of Decadence. “Decadence, decadence. What is it? Only a clear movement

toward death or, preferably, non-humanity” (344). And again: “A decadence . . . is a falling-away from what is human, and the further we fall the less human we become. Because we are less human, we foist off the humanity we have lost on inanimate objects and abstract theories" (437). Etymologically, decadence comes from the Latin “de” for “apart” and “cadere” for “to fall” and is related to the word “decay” which most specifically signals a falling apart after death. Therefore, “decadence” is an apt word for how history becomes more and more piecemeal as time passes, metaphorically becoming inanimate or dying. The putting back together again that storytellers do would therefore be an act of resistance against decadence, a way to keep together the pieces in numerous ways, and maintain animation, maintain humanity, maintain life. The relation between this constant sorting out of possibilities, rearranging the pieces, of telling the story over and over again in different configurations and its eventual end, death, is identified within the conversations of the Whole Sick Crew which Stencil uses as one of his sources of information.

Conversations at the Spoon had become little more than proper nouns, literary allusions, critical or philosophical terms linked in certain ways. Depending on how you arranged the building blocks at your disposal, you were smart or stupid. Depending on how others reacted they were In or Out. The number of blocks however was finite.

"Mathematically, boy," he told himself, "if nobody else original comes along, they're bound to run out of arrangements someday. What then?" What indeed. This sort of arranging and rearranging was

Decadence, but the exhaustion of all possible permutations and combinations was death. (Pynchon, *V.* 317)

The process of constructing one's knowledge and then communicating it out of the building blocks of language is mirrored in the act of piecing together any number of pieces of debris from the archive. Eigenvalue's comment regarding the mathematical finitude of possible arrangements references Pynchon's metaphorical alignment of physical entropy with informational entropy, heat death with the death of intelligible communication.

The narrator steps in to answer Eigenvalue's question for the reader: "the exhaustion of all possible permutations and combinations was death." The irony is that Eigenvalue is scared by this mathematical inevitability and takes comfort in the inanimate: "He would go in back and look at the set of dentures. Teeth and metals endure" (317). The narrator is therefore placing value in the inanimate even though it is not "natural" and "living" as Plato charges in his argument against writing. But the memory is short, and the flesh is weak, so humans archive because it is in the prosthetic, not the flesh, that memory can be resurrected. The objects are then causally fetishized, imbued with a magical link to the represented immaterial but desired for their very ability to resurrect the lost memory and past. Within the material the imagination can ultimately resurrect the immaterial. Stencil then lives because *V.*, the letter itself, not the woman/thing he seeks, is his fetish, a desired object that makes his own functioning possible solely because it is not obtained. Finding *V.*, Stencil would become "half-conscious" or inanimate or inhuman, no longer capable of

sustaining himself or his story because within the inanimate his imagination stalls decadence, rearranging over and over again the possibilities.

This personal story of Stencil's constitutes the Certain of Vico's paradigm for him and for the reader, underscoring the lack of ultimate truth and the connections to the True by means of the traces within the archive.⁴⁸ The constant "hide-and-seek" between Stencil and V. reveals this connection between the Certain and the True because the True story that Stencil seeks (validation and identity for himself) which he believes she represents can only be told and completed when he finds her, which never happens. But the quest continues throughout the novel; and in that constant quest, the myth gains its nourishment, and the story continues, and the Certain becomes over and over again enfolded in the traces which lead back to the unreachable True. Multiple stories can be told on the basis of these traces.

The book (and the "story" of Stencil) ends at a point chronologically previous to the "present" time of the book in which Stencil and Profane exist. The older Stencil sails off into the Mediterranean and, after "calling something in English, which none of the observers understood," disappears after being slammed by a water-spout—"the

⁴⁸ Roland Barthes shows how this seeming distance between what is Certain and what is True results in the creation of the story itself, the spiral toward truth through personal, certain experience: "The essential point . . . is that the form does not suppress the meaning, it only impoverishes it, it puts it at a distance, it holds it at one's disposal. One believes that the meaning is going to die, but it is a death with reprieve; the meaning loses its value, but keeps its life, from which the form of the myth will draw its nourishment. The meaning will be for the form like an instantaneous reserve of history, a tamed richness, which it is possible to call and dismiss in a sort of rapid alteration: the form must constantly be able to be rooted again in the meaning and to get there what nature it needs for its nutriment; above all, it must be able to hide there. It is this constant hide-and-seek between the meaning and the form which defines myth. Therefore, there is no "reserve" here in which meaning lies complete to be accessed, only an empty referent" (118).

Mediterranean whose subsequent surface phenomena . . . showed nothing at all of what came to lie beneath, that quiet June day” (463). This ending is usually read as evidence that there is no “finding” of the True and therefore no available truth. But a more accurate reading would take into consideration that something does indeed, although undetectable, “lie beneath” the surface of the water. This “undetectable” thing haunts the younger Stencil. As the archive holds material evidence that the past happened, that people existed, that events occurred, it is only and always a referent to that past and all that it contained. The story that is created from the material archive is the immaterial archive, a conjunction of imagination (and here is where art enters) and material traces.

Derrida’s idea of the archive as “shelter” is a designation that can be linked to both architecture and body. In keeping with Barthes’ explanation of continual death and reprieve, Pynchon has created several spaces of archival significance that “shelter” the traces of the past as well as possible embodiments of V. in the novel, none definitively identified as *the V.*, which contain the traces. The mysterious “body” of V., yearned for by Stencil, is his *opposite* in that she is only archetype with no form and no real copies since the original is missing. The missing original is yet another indication of the futility of the quest to find the True since it is no longer a whole, living being but a body prostheticized to make up for the missing living flesh. Any prosthesis reveals the frustrated quest to find the original, the True, because it only serves to highlight the *lack*. So the body of V., in its various forms, contains the traces of memory that Stencil seeks. She is the archive where memory and traces are gathered. From this gathering, Stencil hopes to find that which might complete him

and therefore create a cause/effect in his personal story as well as the universal history that is meaningful. He is the form into which the pieces, through narrative, might take a shape and complete him, transforming him into something whole instead of an empty form, a stencil.

Stencil encounters traces of the past in various ways, but two in particular eventually lead to the female body as the ultimate archive. This centering upon the female body as a site of memory and connection to the original is no surprise, really, since the novel is built around the search for the figured female, V., and draws upon the age-old symbolic identification of the female body as life source. Pynchon, however, subverts this originary myth by showing that although the female body is culturally significant and can serve as a source of power through the creations of its own narrative, it is also simultaneously at the mercy of narratives which undercut and disassemble it depending on the power structures of the community. One of the significant encounters which both establishes the process of narrative reconstruction within the archive and leads to the female body as the ultimate representation of that system is the receipt and reading of Fausto's Confessions. The other significant encounter is the "yarn" about Mondaugen which allows Stencil to revisit the early twentieth century and the vestiges of the system of colonialization of South-West Africa by the Germans.

The first significant encounter that Stencil finds during his search is related to a house situated in German-colonized South-West Africa. The connections to his own search for V. become suggested within the architecture of this house. The house, therefore, serves as an authorizing agent for Stencil as he listens to the story as well as

for the community of expatriates who inhabit the house in the story. This section of *V.* takes the reader into the history and consequences of imperialism which haunt the novel, most specifically German aggression as also seen in Malta. The primary ways that Pynchon engages with the dehumanizing and revisionary aspects of imperialist power are through the South-West African experience of Mondaugen and the various re-figurations of the female body. *V.* is read by critics as a satirical criticism of imperialism and, therefore, part of the tradition of anti-imperialist novels. Ronald W. Cooley, attempting to define an “anti-imperialist” novel, writes that

it would have to subvert two sets of novelistic conventions: the discursive conventions that make any attempt by an authorial I (however disguised) to tell the story of another, a reductive, and potentially a totalitarian enterprise; and the narrative impulse towards closure—towards a re-establishment of order that is always in some sense political” (307-308).

The archive’s ability to support the creation of narratives in order to situate oneself within the community and define one’s own community is illustrated by Stencil’s use of this oddly archived narrative. Mondaugen’s Story is introduced at the end of Chapter Eight and illustrates Pynchon’s attempts to “subvert novelistic conventions.” The story is a short recollection, which took no longer than 30 minutes, of the time Kurt Mondaugen spent in South-West Africa. He is described as “yarning” the story in a bar over a beer to Stencil who in turn relates the yarn to Eigenvalue a few days later. The yarn then appears in the novel as Chapter Nine properly named “Mondaugen’s Story,” thus properly archived. In its material form presented to the

reader as a chapter in a novel, the reader encounters a story that has been, in the judgment of Eigenvalue, “Stencilized” (Pynchon 241). “Stencilized” is the appropriation of another’s narrative in order to make sense of one’s own. The story of Mondaugen is taken from Eigenvalue by Stencil, who subsumes it into his own story. Therefore, the Mondaugen tale becomes Stencil’s personal history.

Within that appropriation, all manner of adjustments are necessarily made since one must move from the Certain of another to the Certain of oneself, a process inherent in the encounter with the archived past. These adjustments are the mechanisms through which narratives always pass, but in *V.* the reader is made hyper-aware of this narrative process, a process which is usually so slow or so subtle as to be hidden from the reader. In making this process visible, Pynchon reveals the impossibility of narrating the story of “anOther” (Cooley 308). This impossibility is marked by the hot-house process of constant recirculation. The narrator is presenting a narrative told by a fictional character, then reformed by another fictional character, and judged by a third fictional character to be corrupted in some way. The traces of “truth” become more and more broken down the farther they are from the original. However, for a reader, this layering of perspectives does not necessarily create problems with what could be called the Certain (the narrative aspects) but does reinforce the understanding that what is being told is most definitely not True (the original, before it as archived). But it is consciously constructed to be inauthentic, and in that turn, there is a sense of honesty in accordance with narrative structures. If a story is revealed as a story and not a report or re-creation of events, then it has ceased to hide behind the veil of Truth and can be accepted as the Certain, judged upon its

own merits. The reader's task is to contextualize that certainty and find the significance of it. This task is mirrored in Stencil's listening to the story and reinscribing it for Eigenvalue. It serves his purpose.

The bulk of Mondaugen's Story is set in a "baroque plantation house" owned by one Foppl. This setting has an overwhelming similarity to Prospero's castellated abbey in Poe's "Masque of the Red Death" where the revelers revel in spite of their impending doom. Mondaugen goes there to escape the rising tensions between the natives and the colonizers, not realizing that within the walls of the plantation house, he will find an exaggerated state of affairs. He finds there what is described as a kind of "eternal Fasching" for the expatriates under normal circumstances or a "siege party" under the circumstances of native and colonial violence.

This description recalls and reinstitutes the importance of the architecture in which the characters are placed, particularly the enforced and illusive limits of the street surprisingly enough, since within the scape of the Street both the street and the hothouse exist. A "fasching" is typically a street party with a carnival atmosphere which should be taking place in a public and free environment, a place of convergence which allows the coming together of all classes of people and the subsequent leveling or erasure of their differences behind "le masque." This atmosphere, however, takes a macabre and sinister turn at Foppl's. The usual libertine atmosphere is certainly an element at Foppl's, but the usual reversal of status where the jester and the king are interchangeable does not exist. Instead, the colonial penchant for degradation and enslavement has increased. In essence, it becomes an enclosed timescape of imperialism. Mark Sanders argues that "'Mondaugen's story' is an allegory, much in

the tradition of Heart of Darkness, in which Africa is called upon to provide a space in which the European Zeitgeist can be visited by its disavowed spectral double. The Europeans, who enact their sexual fantasies within the walls of Foppl's caste, are, by Pynchon's account, typical of European colonizers in general" (82-83). It is within this space that European colonialism can surface without check, without the European Christian justifications of "civilization" and proselytizing.

Mondaugen's headquarters in which he conducts his "sferic" research is "a room to himself in a turret at one corner of the house; a little enclave of scientific endeavor, buffered by a number of empty storage rooms and with access to the roof through a stained-glass window portraying an early Christian martyr being devoured by wild beasts" (251). The research that Mondaugen is doing mimics Stencil's search, as Mondaugen's story is actually Stencil's.⁴⁹ Mondaugen is attempting to find meaning in atmospheric noises just as Stencil is trying to find meaning in random events. The turret of the house places him in a privileged and symbolically imbued architectural position, above the fortress, separated from the rest of the house by storage rooms where any amount of debris may be gathered and within a space overlooked by the religious artifact of a stained glass window. Mondaugen's sacred

⁴⁹ This play concerning narrative creation, the story of one being really the creation of another, as well as the location of creation as a tower, is reminiscent of the tower Pynchon refers to in *The Crying of Lot 49*. Referring to the Remedios Varo painting entitled "Bordando el Manto Terrestre," Pynchon shows that Oedipa is incidental to the story being told, that she too is created by another's story and has not known it, and there is no escape from it. "Such a captive maiden, having plenty of time to think, soon realizes that her town, its height and architecture, are like her ego only incidental: that what really keeps her where she is is magic, anonymous and malignant, visited on her from outside and for no reason at all" (12). Furthermore, the sferics are similar to the communications, via signs and popular culture, that Oedipa must try to decipher throughout the novel, possessing a pattern but not one that is decipherable.

space is therefore ironic since the religious figure is meeting his death, a nod to the “fate” of Stencil as the sacred questing figure in that he is Profane’s opposite.

Mondaugen remains inside the walls of Foppl’s fortress for two and a half months. “In that time no one had ventured outside, or received any news from the rest of the district” (248), although Mondaugen does climb out of windows, go on the roof and into the inner courtyard. Mondaugen meets Vera Meroving, one of the possible inspirations or origins for the elusive V., in the house. Even the names in Pynchon become archives, layered in dusty references to historical personages and periods, etymologies, and legends, all of which create their own narratives. Her last name is a reference to the Merovingian dynasty, a period which is replete in legend but with only a small amount of archeological and epistolary evidence of their activities as well as some land-deeds (Fouracre 4). The Merovings were Frankish kings who ruled Gaul from the mid 5th century until the middle of the 8th century, known for their penchant for warring over governing. The Merovingian kings and their associations have been highly mythologized, arguably due to the lack of source material. In other words, what the archives and archeology provide the historian is little, so what is missing has been narrated to fill in the gaps.

The most amusing nod to the Vico problem that the archive reveals is her first name, Vera. “Vera” can be traced (or “V”ed) via two separate origins, one meaning “truth” and the other “faith.” Therefore, this possible incarnation of V. is both True and Certain and directly positioned in reference to a mythologized political power. Being ensconced in a house situated in the middle of a colonized territory, her existence is accurately representative of the powers that create the story of the

conquered territory and actively control the way history will understand the actors and actions within the territory. Reinforcing her position as authoritarian and the imperialist connotations, her companion is Lieutenant Weissman (White Man); and she is from Munich, a city associated with German power.

Vera Meroving is the *possibility* of V. made flesh to both Mondaugen and Stencil. Because V. is a gathering together of the twentieth century, she is representative of the archive. She even tells Godolphin “I have remembered for us,” (Pynchon, *V.* 261) when discussing Vheissu, and Godolphin relays a scene from the past “as if the memory were his own” (262) underscoring her role as keeper of memory. Thus, Vera is the archive made flesh for the other characters, especially for Stencil. And where does she reside? She is always within the fortress, Foppl’s house, the house of power in colonized Africa. Furthermore, her position within the house is static, sequestered even. Indeed, she even asks Mondaugen “What was it like outside?” (250) and just after this first encounter with Mondaugen, Weissman appears to pull her “back into the depths of the house” (250). The archive does not interact with time. It freezes it, stops it, and until it is encountered by someone searching through it, it is outside of time or it is dead time. Only through the encounter with the inanimate debris of the archive is time reintroduced, as it is within the Stencilized narrative.

Vera does not go outside of the house, and because of this, the perception of time that she experiences is restricted, much like the experience that Profane has within his street architecture. Another aspect of Vera mirrors Profane’s experience—Profane fears he is becoming inanimate, but she is already partially inanimate. These

two aspects of the prosthetic body parts and the experience of time are fused in Vera (as in some other V. manifestations). Her left eye is false and is constructed from pieces of a watch. The narrator describes its curious nature:

A bubble blown translucent, its “white” would show up when in the socket as a half-lit sea green. A fine network of nearly microscopic fractures covered its surface. Inside were the delicately-wrought wheels, springs, ratchets of a watch, wound by a gold key which Fräulein Meroving wore on a slender chain round her neck. Darker green and flecks of gold had been fused into twelve vaguely zodiacal shapes, placed annular on the surface of the bubble to represent the iris and also the face of the watch. (250)

This eye, evocative of the false eye to be found later in the text as a part of the Bad Priest, is replete with the symbolism of time. The eye as a symbol consistently represents the basic subjectivity of the individual as it is the organ which takes in the world as well as “reflects the soul” of the individual. It is both an outward and inward focused element of a body, letting in light as well as forming the physical impression of the outside world. In this case, it also is slightly repulsive, being associated with death and decay in its ghostly “green” appearance instead of the healthy, human white. Furthermore, Vera’s eye is wound by a key, an indication that the eye is thoroughly mechanical, and the function of letting light in or forming impressions is wholly substituted by another function. A clock or watch is inanimate in the sense that it has no life—“The party, as if it were inanimate after all, unwound like a clock’s mainspring toward the edges of the chocolate room, seeking some easing of its own

tension, some equilibrium” (47)—it is a material manifestation of an immaterial thing which humans view metaphorically depending on culture. The Western view of time is that it is an object moving toward us, and it is a valuable commodity that we possess—we say “The time *will come*” (Lakoff and Johnson 468) and “I don’t *have* the time” (456). A clock or watch is material metaphor. Through the material manifestation of the clock or watch, we live in the world and we see our existence as if it were reflected to us in a mirror. In fact, Pynchon establishes this temporal relationship toward the beginning of the novel: “No ticking: The clock was electric. Its minute hand could not be seen to move. But soon the hand passed twelve and began its course down the other side of the face; as if it had passed through the surface of a mirror, and had now to repeat in mirror-time what it had done on the side of real-time” (47). The “hands” in this clock cannot be seen to move, a further indication of the inanimate nature of the clock. In the void of the original function of the watch, the meaning of the physiological eye is subverted, indicating an absence, a lack of animate function. All that is left is metaphor. Finally, the eye is not only a watch but also a zodiacal reference. The zodiac is a mystical controlling force, predicting one’s fate and indicating that the human lacks real agency and is in fact more like the inanimate yo-yo of Profane’s imaginings. The gears of the inanimate clock revolve just like the wheel of Fortune.

The most important “historical” moment for Stencil comes from a conversation that Mondaugen overheard between Vera and Godolphin in which she demonstrates her ability and desire to be a reservoir of memory. She tells Godolphin that “I have remembered for us” (261) when he falters in his own memory. Its questionable nature

as a Truth is mentioned by Eigenvalue: "I only think it strange that he should remember an unremarkable conversation, let alone in that much detail, thirty-four years later. A conversation meaning nothing to Mondaugen but everything to Stencil" (264). Eigenvalue therefore calls the whole narrative into question. There is no real reason to remember such a moment, but because it makes Stencil's narrative function for him, it is created. Again, the story of Mondaugen is transformed into a narrative that justifies both Mondaugen's experience as a story, so Stencil can use it as a valid clue, and also Stencil's conviction that Vera might be the illusive V.

The second encounter that Stencil has is revealed in the chapter "Confessions of Fausto Maijstral" which lays bare many of the considerations thus far discussed, and the female Bad Priest's physical disassembly which is witnessed by Fausto is arguably one of the climaxes of the novel. Thematically, Maijstral's configuration of self into distinct and numbered identities acutely illustrates the linear identity formation in terms of Derrida's notion of the future anterior which is available through the archive. In every sense of the three main positions on the timeline (past, present, future) the future position is every present in relation to the moment of the story which is created by the story itself.

The Derridean concept of the future anterior⁵⁰ suggests that this meeting of the documented past with the imaginative reconstruction of it is the same "point" on the timeline but seen from opposite chronological positions. In other words, Pynchon's longing for what might have been is the same position his characters inhabit within the

⁵⁰ Carolyn Steedman phrases it like this: "The archive is a record of the past, at the same time as it points to the future. The grammatical tense of the archive is thus the future perfect, 'when it will have been'" (7).

past but looking forward. There is therefore a chronological distinction but not a philosophical one—both admit doubt which allows multiple meanings/interpretations to be possible through the imagination of the storyteller. Within this gap of perceptive ability (for the character in the past could not look backwards to his own position at the same time that the storyteller does) is the function of language and narrative, to articulate for the past position as well as the present audience and eventually for the future audience, creating a future position upon the timeline, a projection or a trajectory which the narrative itself brings into existence. Peter Brooks states “All narrative may be in essence obituary in that . . . the retrospective knowledge that it seeks, the knowledge that comes after, stands on the far side of the end, in human terms on the far side of death” (95). Narrative seeks the knowledge that exists once it is written or told, once there is a corpse.

The body, connected to all three positions, is the *porteur* of this kind of language, a language that is able to articulate possibilities (a future-dependent concept) even when the time for them is chronologically over. For example, Derrida explains his position in the future compared to a photograph, a primarily archival representation of the body:

I read at the same time; this will be and this has been; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me to the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. What points me, pricks me, is the discovery of this equivalence. In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself; she is going to die; I shudder . . . over a catastrophe that has

already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead every photograph is this catastrophe. (*Psyche* 291)

The future anterior position therefore resonates through the association of the life and death of the body itself. Derrida defines the pose of his mother's body as "aorist," a linguistic indication of a completed action or event in the past which has no relationship to the moment of enunciation of that event in the present or future. He is indicating that at the moment of the photograph, the pose of the body is a singular disconnected event at the same time that his viewing of the photograph connects him most forcefully to the knowledge of that body's death which would take place in the future of the photograph but in the viewer's past.

The collision of these moments of "this will be" and "this has been" is in direct relationship with the body that he views in the photograph, which is in reality simply a trace of that body ruptured outside of time. The body therefore remains in stasis through its appearance as a trace. It nevertheless carries the longing (both for a different past and a different future) just as the archives that a community, society or person keeps contain multiple "might have beens" and "will have beens."

Structurally, Fausto's "confession" is a study of interaction with the archive because it is the same type of interaction with the past as is the viewing of the photograph. The chapter is a "confession," a piece of autobiographical writing which presents the past as composed image and tellingly focuses on three distinct personages. Maijstral is a self-identified poet and Paola's father. Paola gives Stencil a "packet of typewritten pages" (323) and tells him he should read it. Fausto writes that poets are those who

are alone with the task of living in a universe of things which simply are, and cloaking that innate mindlessness with comfortable and pious metaphor so that the 'practical' half of humanity may continue in the Great Lie, confident that their machines, dwellings, streets and weather share the same human motives, personal traits and fits of contrariness as they. (Pynchon, V. 360)

Therefore, the term "poet" holds within it three impressions, all related, but all having special significance to the reading of the archival work that Fausto is doing in this chapter as imagined by Pynchon. First, as poet, he is literally an artist whose material is words. Second, since he works with words, he is also involved in the "creation" of his own story from the future anterior position on the timeline, a line he clearly designates by framing his history according to successive personalities. Third, he is unreliable as a historian since his work is to formulate experience in terms of metaphorical systems.

Fausto describes himself in successive personalities from Fausto I to Fausto IV, each personality taking its definition from events of his life. Even within Fausto's "Confessional," he gives excerpts from journals he himself has written, quoting himself as if quoting another. He explains his reasoning for doing so and then introduces a quote in the following way: "Already you see: the "is"—unconsciously we've drifted into the past. You must now be subjected, dear Paola, to a barrage of undergraduate sentiment. The journals, I mean, of Fausto I and II. What other way can there be to regain him, as we must? Here, for example:" (327). Fausto seems to admit here that the only way to "regain" the past is through the written record of it even

though the physical being that Fausto is still exists. Fausto's confessional chapter is not only autobiographical but also simply biographical since he separates his own identities. This is perhaps one of the outcomes of a history lived through language and archive—the past must speak in a different context than the present, a “what might have been” personality meeting “what will have been” once the biography is written. Northrop Frye writes that “Most autobiographies are inspired by a creative, and therefore fictional, impulse to select only those events and experiences in the writer's life that go to build up an integrated pattern” (307). As in all archives, objects—representations of events—are chosen. Not everything can be displayed nor would everything always narrate the same story even if all could be displayed.

Fausto's “confession” is a more formalized version of Stencil's “writing” of himself in his everyday communication, most notably by his continual referencing of himself in third person. Although the speech of Stencil and the writing of Fausto are both unreliable, the Fausto chapter is presented as a more reliable source because it follows the conventions of classical apologia whereas Stencil's autobiographical utterances are considered evidence of his psychic imbalance. This chapter is yet another instance of the power of the “architecture” of the archival record. The material structures of the archive give weight to those conventional documents, whereas speech is denigrated. The oral recitation of the storyteller may be considered “folk art” but not valid source material. Therefore, Fausto's written confession is considered authentic, or True, whereas the stories Stencil tells (almost continuously, since he always speaks in third person and is therefore constantly narrating) are considered fiction and evidence of only an individual Certain.

The irony here is that moving from the oral (or organic, as Derrida would argue) representation of events to the written (or machine-like) reproduction of events actually adds a layer of fiction to the narrative even though Benjamin's and Plato's denigration of the written is in direct opposition to this consideration. "Discussions of autobiography that are skeptical toward the notion of a subject existing independently of its construction in language have pointed out the degree to which the textual nature of autobiographical writing subverts the supposed authenticity of the account" (Brown 50). Pynchon as writer, by creating a written record of a poet, is therefore revealing the imaginary construction of stories regardless of their forms and erasing the usual understanding of the dichotomy between written and oral communication.

Furthermore, Fausto articulates the problem of relating a story before one knows the end of it, a problem compounded when the story is autobiographical since the "end" would be the death, a point after which an autobiography would be impossible. Waiting for biography is simply another way of waiting for one's archive to be invaded, pilfered and used as the material source for one's own story—this is paralleled in Esther's experience when she is physically re-written.⁵¹ Fausto writes:

⁵¹ As "L'origine du Monde," the painting by Gustave Courbet, communicates the double significance of the separated single body part as a way to simultaneously exalt and diminish the female identity, so does Esther's rhinoplasty comically and ironically address these same concerns. The appropriation of the body here is nuanced by the switch to the sexualized female body and echoes identity formation of the other by colonial forces, a type of writing on the body of the colonized. The inscription upon the body of the other, who is here representative of an historically distant colonial occupation, reinforces the reading that it is the body that maintains archival status:

"Now," gently, like a lover, "I'm going to saw off your hump." Esther watched his eyes as best she could, looking for something human there. Never had she felt so helpless. Later she would say, "It was almost a mystic experience. What religion is it—one of the Eastern ones—where the highest condition we can attain is that of an object—a rock. It was like that; I felt myself drifting down, this delicious loss of Estherhood, becoming more and more a blob, with no worries, traumas, nothing; only Being. . . ." (Pynchon, V. 93)

Esther's physically violent transformation here is rendered in the transcendent language of spiritual experience. What is disturbing about Esther's experience is that she relates it to an awakening of sorts.

How, the reasoning goes: how can a man write his life unless he is virtually certain of the hour of his death? A harrowing question. Who knows what Herculean poetic feats might be left to him in perhaps the score of years between a premature apologia and death? Achievements so great as to cancel out the effect of the apologia itself. And if on the

These medical and technological acts upon her body mimic the colonization dynamic and appropriation of the culture of the master, and Esther passively accepts the medical reshaping of her body. She is no longer a living body, but “Being” in the sense of “object,” even “rock.”

She is being physically manipulated to conform to the idealized image by the dominant culture, and so the physical traces of her “real” heritage are being re-imagined. She is implicit in this process, desiring to make her appearance “Identical with an ideal of nasal beauty established by movies, advertisements, magazine illustrations” (91), and she welcomes the process which ultimately results in her own subjectivity being erased – the ultimate destruction of the archive of the body. There seems to be little choice for one in her position—because she is inanimate and lies in the hands of the powers that be, her body an object to be rendered as desired by the culture at large, her story is either erased by the physical re-imagining of her body and incorporated into the accepted story of the society or she is simply rejected by society and practically erased anyway because she is no longer to be included within the story. The story that her body represents is re-imagined, re-interpreted by the doctor here, making her body into the ultimate object which lies inanimate in the archive.

The narrator states that she wanted an Irish nose as “they” all do. “Few had ever asked for a ‘perfect’ nose [. . .] All of which went to support his [the doctor’s] private thesis that correction—along all dimensions; social, political, emotional—entails retreat to a diametric opposite rather than any reasonable search for a golden mean” (90-91) Again, the process of colonization required the eradication of the original culture, never an integration, by more advanced technology and more advanced storytelling apparatus, propaganda and the media. But it does not stop there; the stories employed are often propaganda which destroy and recreate attitudes and Truth even after the brute force subsides.

Esther is left with the appearance she desired, which was “sold” to her through the stories of the culture that she encountered through the media, and with a “souvenir” of her former self. “[W]ith the bone-forceps, [he] removed a dark colored lump of gristle, which he waved triumphantly before Esther. ‘Twenty-two years of social unhappiness, nicht wahr?’ End of act one. We’ll put it in formaldehyde, you can keep it for a souvenir if you wish” (94). The drive to destruction of the archive, which Derrida warns, is the most obviously violent in the case of colonial power taking over the *arkhon*. The dominant culture forcefully enters the culture of the other, removes the offensive elements of the culture, and remakes it in their own image and offers the people their culture back as a “souvenir,” a memory held within the closed archives that signifies only a lack of their culture. That is all they have left, “gristle in a jar” to signal their previous existence, a space dedicated to their memory which may be accessed but no longer lived. The inanimate has taken complete hold.

To consummate the imagery, her body is also sexually appropriated in the scene of her rhinoplasty. She is passive and sexually aroused, worked upon by masked men wielding invasive tools who leer “appreciatively as she squirmed, constrained, on the table” (92). The narrator himself even seems to take an erotic pleasure in describing the surgery in grotesque and minute detail. Interestingly, the characters fully recognize the overtones as well. “The sexual metaphor in all this wasn’t lost on Trench, who kept chanting, ‘Stick it in . . . pull it out . . . stick it in . . . ooh that was good . . . pull it out . . .’ and tittering softly above Esther’s eyes” (92). When the surgery and recovery are over, Esther returns to the doctor’s office, and they have sex, making believe it is the operation, a reinscription and validation of the symbol as well as the act.

other hand nothing at all is accomplished in twenty or thirty stagnant years - how distasteful is anticlimax to the young!

Time of course has showed the question up in all its young illogic. We can justify any apologia simply by calling life a successive rejection of personalities. No apologia is any more than a romance - half a fiction - in which all the successive identities taken on and rejected by the writer as a function of linear time are treated as separate characters. The writing itself even constitutes another rejection, another "character" added to the past. So we do sell our souls: paying them away to history in little installments. It isn't so much to pay for eyes clear enough to see past the fiction of continuity, the fiction of cause and effect, the fiction of a humanized history endowed with "reason."

(Pynchon, *V.* 325-326)

The past must be seen as "little installments" or pieces of the archive. Only after looking back on them within the context of "it might have been," can one lay out a logical linear progression of cause and effect. This linear progression would automatically be a fiction since it would be created from the Certainty of the future anterior position. Fausto believes that the autobiographer, the storyteller of self, is "paying" away his/her own soul in any storytelling because the installments are always fictionalized. His reasoning here casts all doubts upon the Truth of his own confession. He as much as admits that his recollection will be fiction in having already referred to himself as someone who has gone through "successive identities." And by extension, he reminds the reader of *V.*'s suspicions that anything could be

cause and effect, and anyone and everyone could be V.—just separate characters made up of separate identities, either one person changing over and over again or many people taking on one identity at different times in linear time.

Finally, his confession includes the scene which might perhaps answer and conclude Stencil's quest, identifying a composite of V. or perhaps just V. or perhaps the final embodiment of V.—a female body in the guise of one dedicated to the service of God and mankind as an intercessor. She could be all three at the same time, given Fausto's conception of identity and characters in fiction. The scene begins as Fausto, following the sound of children after an air raid, finds them crowded around the Bad Priest who has been trapped under a fallen column in the cellar of a destroyed house, thus immobilizing her body. Children, in "Fausto's iconography," were "quite real. . . . They seemed to be the only ones conscious at the time that history had not been suspended after all" (363). In other words, children do not participate in or exist within the hothouse sense of time. David Coughlin interprets the children's roles as follows: "Neither bound to nor limited by the images of the past, but open to and responding to the experiences of the present, the children actively produce the memories of the future. This everyday poetry is important because of the acknowledged power that the human imagination holds over the material world" (45). There is no suspension or death of time in their experience of the world and its events, and so they are capable of writing outside of the constant turnstile which simply recycles and reconstructs. Children, according to Fausto, were active agents within a progressive history casually referred to as "recording angels" (364). Children are responsible for the spectacle that Fausto witnesses. He also refers to children as

“poets in a vacuum, adept at metaphor” (365), recalling Vico’s staging of poets as “makers,”—in other words, creators of something original outside of any force and from nothing, the nature of a vacuum.⁵² Children/recording angels, divine beings responsible for the writing of human deeds, are responsible for taking apart V. They also lend V.’s death an implied judgment and sense of finality, having written her end in their own actions. It is written. It is created. It is done. Although this chapter seems as if it is indeed a climax—the death of V., the cessation of the turnstile—Pynchon has organized the book so that the possibility of V. continues, not necessarily because she still exists but because Stencil still searches for her, thus proving Stencil’s entrapment within the hothouse.

The children’s interaction with V. is rife with taking apart, not constructing—a physical dissection of sorts that reveals the lack of body underneath. Because the children are historical creatures, not trapped within the timelessness of the prosthetic body, they simply record V. from an outside position. Her disassembly, not her assembly, becomes the record, a story that should end the search for her. The Bad Priest’s female body is an amalgamation of all the previous signs of V. as well as a veritable treatise on the flesh becoming machine or prosthesis or inanimate, both the architecture and the debris of the archive. From his perch on the roof of a house in ruins, Fausto can watch the activity in the cellar below and narrate the pieces which they take apart. In so doing, he can symbolically end the narrative that is V.

⁵² Coughlin also notes that “The children are at the forefront of a living textuality that challenges the limited view of a supposedly universal imagination defined by Yeats through the works of Blake, Shelley, Keats, and Wordsworth—all male, English, and white. The children represent the chance to attend to the real world, not to some imagined greater reality, and the chance to inscribe now in the *Anima Mundi* the previously unrecorded memories of those who had been consigned to the sewers” (47).

The children mock the fallen priest who is trapped under a fallen beam, undermining both her sacred power and her physical power. “Speak to us, Father . . . What is your sermon for today?” (368). But the Bad Priest is incapable of giving a sermon, only able to utter three short utterances asking for help: “Please” and “Please lift this beam” and “If you can’t lift the beam, please get help” (368-369). He sees that the body around which the children have gathered and are taking apart has an ivory comb in her hair, a tattoo of the crucifixion on her scalp under her wig, an artificial foot, false teeth, and a glass eye, all apparatuses either prosthetic or sacred, associated with the other embodiments of V. throughout the novel. And one boy pries a star sapphire from her navel with a knife, a clear allusion to the *omphalos* or *axis mundi* and thus an act which removes once and for all any sense of life or causal chains of events. The children have, for themselves, symbolically asserted the lack of both any original and the absence of any structured history by their encounter with the body of V., ultimately denying her existence as a whole entity and reestablishing the dispersal of traces.

When an air raid siren sounds again, the children disperse “bearing away their new-found treasures, and the abdominal wound made by the bayonet was doing its work” (370). Fausto describes what the children left, a body re-integrated once again into Fausto’s personal narrative: “I lay prone under a hostile sky looking down for moments more at what the children had left; suffering Christ foreshortened on the bare skull, one eye and one socket, staring up at me; a dark hole for the mouth, stumps at the bottoms of the legs. And the blood which had formed a black sash across the waist, flowing down both sides from the navel” (370). The children/recording angels

dispersed with the pieces and were able to avoid the intricate constructions of the archive in which V. and Fausto were active as well as its power structures. They avoid the archive while they are children; but as the adults in Pynchon's narrative show, they will eventually become entrapped within it.

After their dispersal, Fausto tries to come to the aid of the disassembled body lying prone below him. As the sounds of the air raids outside drown out her cries, Fausto gives her Extreme Unction using her own blood instead of blessed oil. The sacrament of Extreme Unction is to be used on a dying believer by an ordained priest in order to offer forgiveness of sin and apply grace to the person's situation. In the full application of this sacrament the priest would apply the holy oil to the five sense organs and the feet and offer up a prayer for pardon of any sins or offenses committed with the particular body part. In this case, however, Fausto notes that "I could not hear her confession; her teeth were gone and she must have been past speech" (370). Her inability to utter her own confession is just the first of three other problems: Fausto is not a priest; no oil is available; and V.'s body has been disassembled so that some of the parts to be anointed are missing. Fausto's actions here are imitative in all respects. Because he cannot reassemble her pieces and participate in the sacred aspect of death, he approximates the sacred act that is supposed to reintegrate the flesh with the spirit of God. So Fausto remains firmly entrenched in the cycle of narrative, the reconstruction of events from the debris left over, as the existence of his journal attests. He states, "I detected a sincere hatred for all her sins which must have been countless; a profound sorrow at having hurt God by sinning; a fear of losing Him which was worse than the fear of death" (370). Fausto insists that "I did not hear only

what I wanted to hear in these sounds that issued unceasing from the poor woman,” (370) but his interpretation that she was sincerely repentant and fearful is based on no actual information but only indecipherable noises. Because he uses V.’s own blood, there is a distinct circularity enacted within the archival space of V.’s body. This circularity results in either the inability to reconnect the flesh with the Word (the True or the Original) or in the exact opposite, the absolute connection between the flesh and the Word. The irony of the female body as holy male Priest or Christ-figure is echoed here, indicating another variation on the story of V., another possibility of who she really is.

The body of V. has become, in front of his eyes and at the hands of the children/recording angels, “cold” like his sleeping flesh that is “night’s cold, objects’ cold, nothing human, nothing of me about it at all” (371). V. is linked to the island of Malta itself since this scene happens in concert with the bombing raid, her cries being echoed or drowned out by the artillery, and she falls silent just as the “all-clear” sounds. She is another piece of debris, along with the destroyed architecture of Malta, which the children have left behind in order to participate in a moving history.

Jennifer Bloomer, in her essay “Big Jugs” included in the anthology *Gender Space Architecture*, confirms the construction of V. both physically and narratively which allows her to “come apart” (369).

In Thomas Pynchon’s novel *V.*, a novel whose entire pages are devoted to a search for a figure which seems to be a woman . . . who exists only in traces and hints, V herself is masked by a seemingly infinite constellation of guises, forming the fetish construction that is the novel

itself. Through the text there walks a figure known as the Bad Priest. Walks until, at a certain point of intersection, he falls down and falls apart, revealing himself to be a beautiful young woman who is in turn revealed, by the children and the imagination of the narrator who dismantle her body, as a machine assemblage of objects; littering stones and precious metals, clocks, balloons, and lovely silks. The Bad Priest is a fetish construction mirroring the novel. . . . (377)

As Bloomer points out, the children *and* the narrator dismantle her body. The action occurs as the German bombs destroy Valletta and Malta. Furthermore, the witness, Fausto, is a poet, or creator, who constructs his version of the destruction and records it in written form. Stencil then uses this record as a hint or trace, to follow after a body wholly constructed by narrative and contained within his conscious through narrative. Pynchon layers the signifiers of architecture/bodies destroyed by different forms of power and the subsequent reconstruction of those bodies through the prosthesis of narrative and history. Valletta and Malta are being destroyed by the Germans, the power most closely associated with imperialism in Pynchon's work. The body of V. is being destroyed by the children/recording angels and the narrator, two forces that also control the narratives they construct. The body of V., as Bloomer suggests, is the location of the archive, where the construction inherent in writing produces the traces that facilitate reconstruction of the body. The specific body of V. becomes the quintessential and pervasive female body where the archival space is located.

The focus on the body is transmuted in the chapter “V. in Love” to the treatment of the idea of fetish. This chapter is replete with numerous references to various body parts, natural, altered, prosthetic—the body becoming within the text, little by little, “inanimate.” The traditional uses of the fetish and the totem allow them to be identified with two human impulses, the desire for self-fulfillment and the desire for community. The relation to the archive is important in its contrast: the fetish is a singular, selfish desire and related to the individual materials located within the archive without context outside the singular relationship with the reader/researcher/viewer. The archive as a whole—its architecture, its place within the community at large, its ability to rearrange blocks of materials into a narrative structure—represents the desire of the community, a totem. Thus, the fetish leads to decadence and death while the totem leads to unity and life. We must not mistake the meanings of fetish and totem as mutually exclusive notions since they are simply the two tensions that result in the possibility of stories being told. The interaction between these two desires, of the self and that of the greater community, results in narrative tension. Excluding one over the other removes the possibility of narrative altogether.

The “V. in love” chapter is Pynchon’s illustration of the fetish, not the totem, and demonstrates how removing the narrative, removing time, produces only decadence and death, a move further toward the inanimate accommodating the instinctual drive toward death, the ultimate goal. This move is figured literally in the figure of V. and its/her manifestations. In her manifestation as the patroness in “V. in love,” the concept of the death drive and its power in giving all stories “the right

ending”⁵³ is clear. The first lines of Chapter Fourteen, “V. in love,” are thick with references to confused time, showing how the chronology of the narrative is confused:

The clock inside the Gare du Nord read 11:17: Paris time minus five minutes, Belgian railway time plus four minutes, mid-Europe time minus 56 minutes. To Mélanie, who had forgotten her traveling clock—who had forgotten everything—the hands might have stood anywhere. . . .By the cover of *Le Soleil*, the Orleanist morning paper, it was 24 July 1913. (424)

The fact that the clocks are all different points to the unreliable aspect of time. Although humans have codified time into clocks and watches, they are merely human constructions through which we understand reality, but they are not actually real. And Mélanie has “forgotten” her clock as well as everything else, placing her outside of both time proper (historical time) and her own personal memory. As narrator, Pynchon inserts a sense of history, however, by giving a firm date, exactly one year until the July Crisis was in full swing leading up to the declaration of WWI in August 1914.⁵⁴ Pynchon discounts the human construction of time as artificial at the same moment that he reaffirms our historical consciousness through the act of narrative.

However, Mélanie cannot escape time since she is literally named after it. Mélanie’s surname is *l’Heuremaudit* which is French for “the cursed hour” or “the cursed time.” Doubling the sense of doom, Pynchon is also careful to choose the given name “Mélanie” which is derived from the Latin for “dark.” The implication here is the paradox of the archive. It is indeed a space outside of time where objects

⁵³ See Peter Brooks’ *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*.

⁵⁴ The Austrians would issue their Ultimatum to Serbia on July 23, 1914.

are kept “forgotten” in order to be remembered again when needed, but it a closed space which is dead until it is interacted with and narrativized. The description of Mélanie is fitting: The fifteen-year-old’s “eyes were dead” underscoring the relationship to the inanimate, and she “resemble[s] the classical rendering of Liberty” (425), underscoring her object status as a statue. She is a dancer, and her stage name is “Mlle. Jarretière” which means “Miss Garter.” And once, she is simply called “fétiche” as a kind of pet name. Pynchon wants her position as object to be unmistakable so that it is only possible for her to be animate through interaction with narrative.⁵⁵

She arrives in Paris on the eve of the Great War in a time of decadence, thus “the cursed hour,” and her relationship with V. and subsequent death fulfill the requirements of Freud’s theories on the death instinct via Pynchon’s concern with the inanimate. Because decadence is only forestalled by the resurrection of the pieces of the past through narrative, Mélanie’s life and death signal an instance of ultimate destruction because her story ends in the right death. Consequently, V., who loses the human time-bound emotion of love, moves further toward inanimateness herself.

Like the garter, Mélanie is *already* an inanimate object within Pynchon’s fictional world. She feels as if “She was not pretty unless she wore something. The sight of her nude body repelled her” (428), further implicating her role as fetish because her flesh was not acceptable, subordinate in attraction to the inanimate objects

⁵⁵ Hanjo Berressem reads the “V. in Love” chapter as a challenge to the Freudian psychoanalytical system precisely because of this complete objectification of Mélanie.. He argues that “Freudian psychoanalysis is based on specific assumptions concerning the status of the subject and defines itself as the science of this subject. Pynchon questions this position by applying Freudian concepts to a ‘subject’ that has turned in a pure ‘object’” (6).

which she could attach to it. Psychologically, the repulsion she feels for her flesh might have been a result of the molestation by her father. The narrator tells us that Mélanie's father often molested her and terms the molestation "their game," an adaptation of language into euphemism that serves to diminish the actions of the one in power and a mimicking of the role of the molester who characterizes his actions in terms that defer their true import. Having been such a player in her father's language games further removes the chances that Mélanie could tell her own story in a way that reflected her certainty. So she is inanimate as a result of her father's abuse—she cannot tell her own story, and she must be filled in with pieces of other objects in a vain attempt to create a narrative for her.

As Freud points out in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, those who have suffered trauma often revisit the trauma in dreams as Mélanie does. She has a dream one night that her father comes to her and is also "a German" at the same time. He winds her up with a key between her shoulder blades and tells her that she would have stopped otherwise (433). Mélanie is exhibiting the repetitive returning to the memory of her father and their relationship. The winding of a spring as in a toy or clock to make it work is consistent with the images of Meroving and the Bad Priest, who are both fitted with mechanical bits and wind-up clock eyes. This connection between the various female bodies, machines, and time illustrates the inanimate attributes of the female body and its dependence upon an artificially inscribed time structure which supplies a suitable narrative arc. In this case, since she is also wounded by "a German," the narrator places her body as an object within the history of the aggression of the Germans, in particular toward France, which would eventually lead to WWI. Mélanie

is easily identified with the French given her nationality, her “French nose,” and the fact that she resembles the classical Liberty, a symbol for the Entente Powers relative to the Central Powers.

Mélanie was an object to her father, and she dreams that she is simply a thing to be wound and used, thus a fetish in the sexual sense, but the additional political and historical aspects reference a more pervasive issue of power that goes beyond Mélanie’s personal situation. The story’s temporal setting of 1913 indicates a moment of rupture, indeed the Great War which marks the man-made historical rupture we have named modernism. This subtle but striking indication links Mélanie’s existence in the text to the issues of the archive and the narrative of the history of the twentieth century. This connection therefore underscores Pynchon’s concern with the decadence of history and the dissolution of Western culture which is articulated in the theory of the death drive for the individual, Mélanie in this case. He represents Western culture of the twentieth century as lacking a unifying totem that would counteract the chaotic desires that arise from selfish interests of power.

V., called alternately “the woman” and “V.” depending upon the point of view of the narrator, appears in this time frame as she does throughout the novel at moments of historical upheaval. The narrator tells us that she finds herself “excommunicated” from the Street and “bounced unceremoniously into the null-time of human love” (441) when she meets Mélanie. Thus, the timelessness of the archive begins to exercise its power over their situation. They become entrapped within a “null-time” of the archival space where a narrative could be possible but is subverted by the nature of the fetish. V. is the patroness of the ballet in which Mélanie is the

prima ballerina. Upon first seeing Mélanie, the woman tells her “You are not real. . . . Do you know what a fetish is? Something of a woman which gives pleasure but is not a woman. A shoe, a locket . . . une jarretière. You are the same, not real but an object of pleasure” (436). After the two women begin a romantic relationship, V. says to her ““Do you only lie passive then, like an object? Of course you do. It is what you are. Une fétiche (sic)” (438).

The dual connotations of the term fetish are important in terms of its relation to the notion of archive. First, a fetish is an inanimate object which has been imbued with magical, religious, and/or sacred attributes. Second, it is an object of erotic pleasure that is not flesh, as V. states. The word itself is composed of these two strains meeting in the Portuguese *fetiço* “charm, sorcery” and *feitiço* “made by art, artificial, skilfully contrived” arising in the Latin *facere* which means “to make” (OED). The psychological sense of fetish in relation to an erotic object seems therefore to naturally arise from the combination of “charm” and “artificial.” A fetish, then, is a creation, a substitution of one thing for another—in the end, a metaphor and a prosthesis. It is a thing to be desired that is a substitute for the original, and the frustration at never being able to claim the original adds to its power. “Frustration at not being able to fragment herself into an audience of enough only adds to her sexual excitement. She needs, it seems, a real voyeur to complete the illusion that her reflections are, in fact, this audience” (442). The mirrors, or better yet, her reflection, are Mélanie’s fetish which is a substitute for the audience she needs. A mirror is the ultimate symbol of “Self” as “Other” but it is reliant upon one physical body.

In Mélanie's case, her need of a real voyeur to "complete the illusion" is telling. She needs an outsider's presence to give context to her experience (just like she had with her father) and narrate it. V. is that outsider. However, as V. realizes, Mélanie and V. are one and therefore the illusion is just that, an illusion. In this case, no one exists to tell the story. Furthermore, Mélanie cannot "fragment herself into an audience of enough," so not only is there no narrator, but there is also no audience to read the story. She is caught in a self-referential feedback loop which can never escape the boundary of one inanimate object. The situation therefore moves only toward death since there is no reconstruction, only repetition.

She exhibits the power of the inanimate to be anything necessary to those who interact with her, the same power that the inanimate material records within the archive exhibit. Archived materials seduce with their ability to "fill in the gaps" of history, and they too are imbued with a type of sorcery that comes from the mystery of their being hidden away from public consumption within a sacred space. V., however, is normally in the metaphorical position of archive, so this reading of Mélanie seems to undermine that position. The text itself resolves this apparent contradiction in two ways. First, it hints at the parallel nature of other manifestations of V. and Mélanie by ascribing them similar attributes—Mélanie wears pretty ladies' slippers with buckles, and later the Bad Priest will be found to have on the same slippers.

More convincing, however, is the idea of mirroring that Pynchon introduces. For the "lovers," "certain fetishes never have to be touched or handled at all; only seen, for there to be complete fulfillment" (440). Thus, V. supplies Mélanie with mirrors: "dozens of them. Mirrors with handles, with ornate frames, full-length and

pocket mirrors came to adorn the loft where-ever one turned to look” (440). Their “still-life of love” as reported by Porcépic years later to Stencil, was constructed as follows:

V. on the pouf, watching Mélanie on the bed; Mélanie watching herself in the mirror; the mirror image perhaps contemplating V. from time to time. No movement but a minimum friction. And yet one solution to a most ancient paradox of love; simultaneous sovereignty yet a fusing-together. Dominance and submissiveness didn’t apply; the pattern of three was symbiotic and mutual. V. needed her fetish, Mélanie a mirror, temporary peace, another to watch her have pleasure. (442)

Pynchon refers to a “pattern of three” although, of course, only two actual bodies are involved. The third is the mirror-image. But Pynchon reduces all of them to “one”: “for the other [V.] is also her own double” and “They are she.” (442). No friction occurs because one must have two objects to create friction, and with no friction, then there is no production of heat, another indication of death. No dominance or submissiveness exists either, only sovereignty and fusion because there is really only one object.

Again, because there is no other, there is no audience, and since Mélanie is inanimate and therefore cannot function as narrator, there is no story to interrupt the feedback loop. A closed system with no heat cannot continue to function because it has reached maximum entropy. The drive toward death and the end of narration will be complete. Benjamin indeed posits that “Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death” (94). Benjamin’s idea

supports the general assertions of archival theory: since the archive is the space of death in material form, then the archive is the space that authorizes the story.

V.'s thoughts on the subject corroborate the idea that the obsessive and unidirectional "out of time" qualities of the fetish are a step toward the inanimate and therefore toward a type of heat-death that occurs within the confines of the archive.

As for V., she recognized—perhaps aware of her own progression toward inanimateness—the fetish of Mélanie and the fetish of herself to be one. As all inanimate objects, to one victimized by them, are alike. It was a variation on the Porpentine theme, the Tristan-and-Iseult theme, indeed, according to some, the single melody, banal and exasperating, of all Romanticism since the Middle Ages: "the act of love and the act of death are one." Dead at last, they would be one with the inanimate universe and with each other. Love-play until then thus becomes an impersonation of the inanimate, a transvestism not between sexes but between the quick and dead; human and fetish" (Pynchon, *V.* 442).

The exit strategy is not through human love, according to this construct, or at least physical human love. Pynchon locates the issue here, appropriately enough, in the realm of myth and narrative, ancient themes which have been communicated from one person to another in narrative or from one generation to another in myth—"Porpentine's theme" and the "Tristan-and-Iseult theme."⁵⁶ These "ready made" constructions teach us in this instance that human love ultimately leads to death

⁵⁶ See Lila Graves' "Love and the Western World of Pynchon's 'V'" for a discussion of the Tristan and Iseult myth in *V.*

according to the narratives we tell about it because these stories follow the principle of the right ending. Scott Sanders laments this aspect of Pynchon's fiction: "His fiction is so dominated by an awareness of the pressures that lead to a dissolution of personality and to the disintegration of culture itself that he finds scant space for imagining contrary historical impulses, possibilities for recovery, for renewal, for reunion" (191). Indeed, the "V. in love" chapter ends in the death of Mélanie. But of course it does—for Pynchon it is necessary. The possibilities are scant because our narratives prescribe such a reading. It is the right ending.

And these preconceived narratives or thematic categories we share are stored in our memory structures because they are supported by social narrative structures. Human memory is finite, and in order to arrange our recall and understanding of life in the most efficient manner possible, we categorize. We draw parallels through "themes." We classify based on male and female, dominant and submissive. Porcépic even attempts to record the possible combinations in order to help sort out their story:

[he] produced . . . a chart of the possible combinations the two could be practicing. It came out to 64 different sets of roles, using the subheadings "dressed as," "social role," "sexual role." They could both for example be dressed as males, both have dominant social roles and strive for dominance sexually. They could be dressed different-sexed and both be entirely passive, the game then being to trick the other into making an aggressive move. Or any of 62 other combinations.

(Pynchon, *V.* 440)

The V./Mélanie relationship skews or upsets these fundamental cognitive processes as well as reinforces them—their relationship validates the narrative themes we recognize at the same time that it disrupts the gender categories society and history have constructed. Porcépic’s mocking chart symbolically plays out the finite arrangements of their relationship and foreshadows its death.

Although V. is aware of the “death” drive in which she is participating, she is blinded by love to a pattern of decadence to which Stencil thoroughly ascribes. Since much of the story the reader receives is framed and structured through Stencil’s retellings, having been “Stencilized,” then the structure which supports such a reading of conspiracy is not surprising.

If V. suspected her fetishism at all to be part of any conspiracy leveled against the animate world, any sudden establishment here of a colony of the Kingdom of Death, then this might justify the opinion held in the Rusty Spoon that Stencil was seeking in her his own identity. But such was her rapture at Mélanie’s having sought and found her own identity in her and in the mirror’s soulless gleam that she continued unaware, off-balance by love. (443)

The Kingdom of Death reference recalls Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, which is itself a comment on the condition of Europe due to WWI. Pynchon’s meaning echoes Eliot but is a broader judgment of society and history at large. The “opinion held in the Rusty Spoon” shows that Stencil’s identity is wrapped up in believing in a “conspiracy leveled against the animate world.” Since V. is not aware of what Stencil sees looking back at her story, Derrida’s future anterior becomes active. Stencil imagines “had she

known” (443) scenarios which he surmises would have ultimately led to V.’s death. He imagines that she would have chosen to “establish . . . so many controls over herself that she became a purely determined organism, an automaton, constructed only quaintly, of human flesh” (444) or that she might have “journey[ed] even deeper into a fetish-country until she became entirely and in reality . . . an inanimate object of desire” (444). Both past possibilities are relevant for Europe in the aftermath of WWI, V.’s body being for Stencil the locus of history and the “what will have been” scenarios that occupants of post-WWI Europe might have contemplated.

The notion of the archive enables a reading of the novel as if it were itself an inanimate artifact amidst the rubble of the twentieth century, one piece of many which can be added to the whole story and itself a microcosm of that story. The archive is figured to be objective, meaningless, raw material just as language in itself is supposed to be inanimate and meaningless without context and elaboration of the signifiers. But the silent archive, formed and interpreted, produces the unstilled word, and Pynchon’s novel shows that language is the inanimate, prosthetic debris. The world still whirls about the center of the silent Word. This is the mystery, the power, and the danger of the archive in Pynchon. The novel is indeed an artifact of the technological advancement of storytelling, a kind of prosthetic memory which has itself subsumed the role of communal storyteller. Within the archive, the hidden and authoritative material records of the past, the story-telling whirl is able to continue—the word made flesh, or at least “narrative,” through the interpretive function of the storyteller for better (identity formation and resistance) or worse (political control and historical justification).

CHAPTER FOUR

Rememory within the House at 124

So when I was writing Beloved, part of the architecture was the act of forgetting.

☞ Toni Morrison, "Predicting the Past"

Archival characters allow authors to enter into larger debates of social, political and historical import because character construction and behaviors reveal the open-ended interpretive process of storytelling and allow for both the Certain and the True to co-exist. Toni Morrison explains her intent in her writing in terms of this open-ended process: "It should be beautiful, and powerful, but it should also *work*. It should have something in it that enlightens; something in it that opens the door and points the way. Something in it that suggests what the conflicts are, what the problems are. But it need not solve those problems because it is not a case study, it is not a recipe" (341). Morrison's personal writing metaphors establish the relationship of writing to the archive. She expresses herself in terms of architecture and space: "open the door" and "point the way" are used along with rejecting the recipe metaphor with its implied known quantities and pre-determined outcome, opting instead for the metaphor involving process, discovery, narrative, and analysis.

Morrison's conception of storytelling as a way through a door and toward a direction are both consistent with the notion of the archive. Here is evidence of Lakoff's theory that the way we conceive the world is through metaphor, and Morrison's mental metaphors show how she structures her understanding of her work

and dictate the architecture of that work. The door metaphor corroborates an architectural component of the archive in the sense that the space is limited, and there are pre-determined pathways of access built into it. This pre-determination and limited space implies a certain amount of control but does not imply complete control within the archival system. There is still room to maneuver. Gail Caldwell describes Morrison's writing process: "Morrison says she works from the ground up, conceiving of 'the smaller details, the images,' before the entire architecture of a novel appears" (241). The contents of the archive, these details and images disconnected from any narrative structure, can be arranged in various configurations, not infinitely but imaginatively nonetheless, which is the work of the artist.

These observations on Morrison's use of metaphor to describe her writing philosophy illustrate the way she conceptualizes her writing and how the similar paradigms within which a writer works appear also in their creative productions. In this interview, Morrison probably did not intend on the spot to create anything other than surface metaphorical phrases to point out the lack of finality in her writing, that there is an open-ended quality to an artist's work. But her choices of metaphor do indeed reveal the underlying paradigm of how the pieces of the past, the debris that an artist encounters, move from the individual pieces of material past into the immaterial narrative that constructs what Vico, and later Nietzsche⁵⁷ and Lakoff⁵⁸, argues is our metaphorical understanding of our being in the world.

⁵⁷ See Nietzsche, Frederick. "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense (1873)." *The Nietzsche Reader*. Eds. Keith Ansell-Pearson and Duncan Large. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2006. Print.

Morrison also insists upon the word “work,” which suggests that the novel is an active agent, that within its form and structure an energy is at play which moves something, the process of moving the inanimate language and debris into the animate story. This aspect of Morrison’s work in particular underscores her regarding of the work of the novel as political. She states that “. . . if anything I do, in the way of writing novels . . . isn’t about the village or the community or about you, then it isn’t about anything. I am not interested in indulging myself in some private exercise of my imagination. . . which is to say yes, the work must be political. . . .” (Rootedness 339). This adamant refusal that her writing is a “private exercise of my imagination” perfectly indicates the paradox of the artist: how to be both part of the community and a solitary imaginative creator at the same time without undermining the voice of the community itself. On the contrary, Benjamin contends that “The novelist has isolated himself” (*Illuminations* 87). Benjamin accuses the novel writer of indulging in a private exercise of imagination. He asserts that the novel writer is no storyteller, that he/she is disconnected from the community, and because of this disconnect cannot properly represent the voice of the community in which he/she belongs. However, Morrison’s approach to her work purposefully attempts to ameliorate this paradox and Benjamin’s charge, both technically by blending the attributes of oral storytelling into the written word, and thematically by constructing characters which mirror the storytelling function and serve as archives and archivists themselves.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ See Lakoff, Georg. “The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor.” *Cognitive Linguistics: Basic Readings*. Ed. Dirk Geeraerts. NY: Mouton de Gruyter, 2006. 185-238.

⁵⁹ The initial situation of the character Shadrack in Morrison’s *Sula* could be symbolic of what occurs when there is no archive. He is first described “with no past, no

Furthermore, Morrison refuses any notion that writing is “art for art’s sake,” like many artists from historically marginalized communities. W.E.B. Du Bois’s concept of the “double-consciousness” with which black artists work and create runs through Morrison’s approach to writing and illustrates the work of archival construction. He writes in “Criteria for Negro Art” that “all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda.” Throughout this watershed piece, Du Bois is arguing that black artists must not accept the pre-fabricated (read “already constructed from the archive *for us*”) roles to which American society is willing to allow them access. The double-consciousness that a black artist possesses, the sense of “always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others,” (Du Bois, *Souls* 215) denies a “true self-consciousness” or a certainty of one’s own experience in comparison with the representations of one’s own experience produced by the other. The struggle of Black Americans to find not just identity but also agency within the larger encompassing hegemonic society after being stripped of their natural historical identities has been a prevalent theme in many Black American writers. To make one’s own art, to make one’s own story is then to use this double-consciousness manifested in the constantly re-inscribed perceived True

language, no tribe, no source, no address book, no comb, no pencil, no clock, no pocket handkerchief, no rug, no bed, no can opener, no faded postcard, no soap, no key, no tobacco pouch, no soiled underwear and nothing nothing nothing to do . . . he was sure of the one thing only: the unchecked monstrosity of his hands” (10). Later, he finds “National Suicide Day” which no one participates in but eventually brings the community of Medallion together in one last celebratory parade that ends in death, the fear of which Suicide Day was meant to ease.

of the hegemonic culture and obtain the Certainty of the community necessary for individual agency found within the stories of subaltern communities and individuals. In this way, the position of the black artist in relation to the archive is one of narrative power. He or she is granted a kind of “invisibility,” as Ralph Ellison phrases it, which allows her to move within and without the architecture of the archive, traversing imposed borders/walls with active knowledge of the barriers’ existence, understanding their meanings both temporally and locatively. In this way, one can reassemble the pieces *oneself* to tell one’s own story, a powerful movement toward agency, because the relationship to the past is more complete and sophisticated.⁶⁰

Morrison’s approach to her art echoes these concerns. She states “. . . the work must be political. It must have that as its thrust. That’s a pejorative term in critical circles now; if a work of art has any political influence in it, somehow it is tainted. My feeling is just the opposite; if it has none, it is tainted” (*Rootedness* 344-345). Art is needed by the community to express its fears, complaints, joys and triumphs and, furthermore, to allow a place of return where identity can be established, maintained, reaffirmed, and adjusted as needed. For a community that has

⁶⁰ Morrison opens *Song of Solomon* with a witty example of the interplay of architecture, memory and documentation in the milieu of a power struggle between the powerful and the marginalized when she explains the genesis and resistance to the name of a street. What is officially “Mains Avenue,” a properly Anglo street name, becomes “Doctor Street” because the only Black doctor in the city had lived there. The city legislators, concerned with “the maintenance of the city’s landmarks” placed public notices regarding the street’s proper name. “It was a genuinely clarifying public notice because it gave Southside residents a way to keep their memories alive and please the city legislators as well” (4). This document provides, therefore, an official status to the name of the street at the same time that it acknowledges its counter-history although that history is silenced by the document. This space of silence, however, is that prosthetic space within the archive where silenced voices indeed speak.

endured generations of absolute exclusion followed by generations of legal and physical separation and discrimination, the pathway toward undermining and eventually eliminating these pervasive and insidious institutionalized injustices never begins at the highest levels of legal or social action but must begin in the voices of the members of that community, in their art and their stories.

Morrison does not discount, however, the importance or primacy of aesthetic value. In order for the political message to survive, to propagate, it must “work,” or create the energy appropriate to the subject. In order for energy to be produced, the parts must seamlessly interact. The construction of a working memory out of the debris of the archive creates the prosthetic that allows the community to live, to survive. The author casts the prosthetic from the bits and pieces of the dead historical record and attaches it to the community. After this re-animation has occurred, there is then a secondary relationship that comes into play. This secondary relationship is between the story and the reader.

In order to function within the community proper, the archivist is required to be a seeker of workable knowledge first, to collect the past of the community in the form of material records, casting them in a form that is deemed appropriate to include in the story of the given community—in other words, choosing and constructing a prosthetic memory that will work to re-animate the specific community. For a long time the literal archive of Black experience within the United States was directly related to slaves as property and not human beings. Since slaves were typically denied literacy, they could produce no written record to successfully counter the hegemonic

construction of Black identity that this original archive began and instituted.⁶¹

Although oral storytelling within the community of slaves did its own immaterial archival work and should be recognized, it was relatively powerless against the written record held sacred within the archival space.

In the case of slavery, the relationship between the community and the archive is rife with examples of the ways in which material records created by the “other” systematically defined and controlled the community. For example, the archival record of Black Americans consists in part of records including ships’ manifests regarding the Middle Passage. According to Justine Talley, Morrison’s novel fills a “memory void” based on the “the specific ‘disremembrance’ of the infamous Middle Passage, an experience so traumatic that it seemingly confined its victims to silence—no stories, no songs, no anecdotes, only certain accounts from white captains and a certain ‘factual,’ statistical information of its commercial aspects” (30). One such record chillingly states, “Manifest of Negroes, Mulattoes and Persons of Colour, taken on board the Schooner Hunter of Norfolk Va whereof Robt Benthall is Master, burthen 119 Tons, to be transported to the Port of New Orleans for the purpose of being sold or disposed of as Slaves, or to be held to service or labour” (Manifest). This heading is followed by a list of 5 names: James Page, George Christian, Noah Nelson, Jerry Page, Oliver Perry, their ages, all 15 or 16, their heights, and their designation, Black.

⁶¹ O’Mealley and Fabre discuss in the introduction to *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, that literacy and orality are not necessarily opposing modalities, noting that the common Western assumption of the superiority of the written tradition is problematic and should be rejected.

This document, as simply one example among all the others, establishes a very basic premise of the archive, that the written record has a certain authority as History (what is conceived and perceived as sacred Truth although it is simply trace) but that the gaps which remain open up a space where narrative can enter—the archive is dead material waiting to be narrativized and thus resurrected. In this particular case, the space is evident—the names of the slaves. There is an absence here of their real names, since they have been given common English ones. Within that blank space is an entire story to be imagined and told, which would allow the unauthorized version of history to live again and unbind itself from the control of the “other” who used the violence of the pen and the blood of ink to strip away the identity from those boys. To use the same archive in a new way is to begin to resurrect the silenced voices trapped within the debris and reanimate the body of the individual and the community.

The archivist’s function is first to appraise and arrange the inert and inanimate material debris of the past. Others, both within the community and without, then interact with this debris, engaging in acts of interrogation and analysis, internalizing the material record of the archive themselves, in turn becoming a part of the archiving process. Most specifically, the storyteller (a narrator and/or writer) is then able, from that ordered debris, to construct an acceptable narrative out of many possible narratives for the community in which the archive exists. The storyteller then moves from the realm of “knowledge” to that of “wisdom,” from “display” to “narrative,” from the “locative” to the “chronological.” Readers of the novel follow a similar cognitive trajectory, moving from factual understanding of events to the interpretation

of the events given the concomitant issues such as plot, character, style, etc. as they progress in the story.

As an artist whose materials are found within that blank space, Morrison recognizes the power of the immediate interaction between storyteller and audience in trying to make her writing as “oral” as possible, because in the particular community of slaves, orality was the primary resistance to the false story being told by the masters and the only available way to approximate some sort of archive. Orality was the only available measure to be taken in order to move through the time when documentation was not available to the community and it became the first transmission of the slave experience. The techniques of orality that she applies to the narrative are the inclusion and acknowledgement of the necessity of the oral tradition in beginning the creation of an immaterial archive from which the community can continue to find nourishment for a sense of identity within the confines of the larger hegemonic society. And the process of authorship as “the affective and participatory relationship between the artist or the speaker and the audience . . . To make the story appear oral, meandering, effortless, spoken— . . . to have the reader work with the author in the construction of the book—is what’s important” (Morrison, “Rootedness” 59).

The aspect of Morrison’s orality is commonly cited in the critical literature.⁶² Anita Durkin, in her article “Object Written, Written Object: Slavery, Scarring, and Complications of Authorship in *Beloved*,” points out the curious ratio of critical responses to Morrison’s writing versus her “orality” to make the point that the aspect of a written text is ignored: “In the vast wealth of criticism on Toni Morrison’s

⁶² See Yvonne Atkinson’s “Language that Bears Witness: The Black English Oral Tradition in the Works of Toni Morrison.”

Beloved . . . many scholars rightfully and fruitfully devote extensive analysis to Morrison's use of the African American tradition of orality. Contrarily, relatively little criticism has analyzed the equally important examination of *writing*, which likewise occupies a central place in the novel's construction, as is evident in both Morrison's emphasis on the scarred bodies of slaves as *textual* bodies and in the yet more obvious fact of *Beloved's* status as written object" (541). Concentrating on the documents and texts inherent in the novel as part of the archive attempts to fill in this gap to a certain extent. However, although oral storytelling is the beginning of resistance, the document becomes imbued with a power through the archive that orality cannot accomplish. The storytelling process, the narrativizing which is drawn from the experiences and events represented in the material archive, is a community project in which all members of the community are responsible for its construction and maintenance, the artist being the principal organizer, and it results in the immaterial principle of "story" which binds a community and simultaneously reverts the power of personal identity back to the community. Morrison is now a canonical writer.⁶³ The paradox is that her voice is now "authorized" by being entered into an approved set of texts within the larger society which is often at odds politically and socially with the community from which the memories in the text originate. This paradox is played out in the common attention that critics pay to the "orality" of Morrison's writing. Karla F. C. Holloway writes that Morrison's "contrapuntal structure dominates the novel as a device that mediates speech and narrative, the visual and the cognitive, and time and

⁶³ For a discussion of Morrison's position in relation to the canon, see Denise Heinze's *The Dilemma of "Double Consciousness": Toni Morrison's Novels*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1993.

space” (518). In her article, Holloway takes for granted the oft-repeated, even by Morrison herself, emphasis on orality in Morrison’s writing. She states “Morrison’s blending of voice and text privileges neither.” The problem with understanding Morrison’s writing in such a way is that her writing is not oral. *Beloved* and all her other novels are written documents, records of a work of story-telling that is not oral. Morrison does attempt to approximate orality in her writing but this only serves to highlight the non-orality of the work, that it can only *approximate*. (41) ⁶⁴

Beloved, is something other than or more than a novel—it is an attempt to fill in the gaps, to become a prosthetic to reanimate a community. Morrison asserts that in writing about oneself, the author can say “My single solitary and individual life is like the lives of the tribe; it differs in these specific ways, but it is a balanced life because it is both solitary and representative” (“Rootedness” 57). This coagulation of the “solitary” and the “representative” designate the Barthesian space of Meaning and Form, the sign of the language system and the Signifier of the mythical system. She goes on to elevate community to a level of importance equal to the self in forming, empowering, and maintaining the self. The very thrust of the archive is to act as a reserve of those material elements that can define and bind together a community if the debris is constructed to work for and within the community. If we read the characters and the readers of fiction as participating in the archiving process, then the idea of community interpretation and community action within art is doubly apparent.

⁶⁴ For discussions centered upon the connection between memory and orality and literacy, see Kathleen J. Ryan’s “Memory, Literacy, and Invention: Reimagining the Canon of Memory for the Writing Classroom” and Helen Lock’s “Building Up from Fragments’: The Oral Memory Process in Some Recent African-American Written Narratives.”

An actual archive is made up of bits and pieces of individual stories, oral records, newspaper clippings, statistics, etc. These elements are intrinsic to the novel *Beloved*. Morrison has thus created a novel that is presented in archival form and with characters that mimic that form as well as the process of archival construction and behavior.

The novel *Beloved* was created from Morrison's encounter with archived material.⁶⁵ Her use of the "true" story of the escaped slave Margaret Garner comes to her through the same process—she read the accounts and from them constructed a story which serves her purposes as a writer, which is to transform History into story, thus constructing the Certain expression from the traces of the True. Indeed, Morrison stated that she knew only the basics of the story and did as little research on the real Margaret Garner as possible because she wanted to thoroughly imagine the story, the process of enfolding the historical True within the personal Certain which defines storytelling:

Now I didn't do any more research at all about that story. I did a lot of research about everything else in the book—Cincinnati, and abolitionists, and the underground railroad—but I refused to find out

⁶⁵ Morrison's "archival" work on *The Black Book* was the impetus for the story of *Beloved* as well as her novel *Paradise*. *The Black Book* was itself an attempt to create a physical representation of memory, an archive of Black experience in America, what Bill Cosby wrote in the original introduction: "a folk journey of Black America: a book just like this one—beautiful, haunting, curious, informative, and human" (Harris, M.). Barbara Christian notes that "Toni Morrison's shepherding of *The Black Book*, a scrapbook of black memorabilia, is especially important to us as we think about the ways in which memory intersects with history for the book not only documents the great heroic acts of the past but includes memory in the form of bits and pieces of everyday information—an indication of how history needs to be inflected by the folkways of the past" (413).

anything else about Margaret Garner. I really wanted to invent her life. I had a few important things. The sex of the children, how many there were, and the fact that she succeeded in cutting the throat of one and that she was about to bash another one's head up against the wall when someone stopped her. The rest was novel writing. I don't know if that story came because I was considering certain aspects of self-sabotage, the ways in which the best things we do so often carry seeds of one's own destruction (“Toni Morrison, In Her New Novel, Defends Women”).

The “facts” of the story which led to Morrison’s novel are sparsely represented within the fictional world that Morrison creates, but the physical evidence of this specific past was found, nonetheless, in newspaper archives. And the knowledge that Morrison has, as most authors have, of a past in which they were not present is also found in the representations of perceived Truth which exist in archives. However, Morrison, as many writers and storytellers report, describes the story as “coming,” not “found,” placing emphasis on the process of story creation or narrative and not the material records of factual events since it is the fictional story that *comes* whereas the records are *found*. Therefore, the imagination is the path toward dissemination of the story, not the reality of it, and thus the reason for its importance. Morrison’s “reception” of the story allows for the previous grounding of it in the True, but it is shaped and constructed using imagination, Vico’s concept, by the author into its story form, the Certain. Although the archive exists within a community-accepted sacred space, not until the narrative structure is applied through the imagination of the artist do the

debris, the traces, begin to work within the community. The debris is “material evidence,” but dead and inanimate.

This ability to provide a temporal nexus for the debris of the archive from a position of alterity is the only manner in which real subjectivity can be maintained and/or created. Simply relying on the debris itself and its internal coherence is problematic because the debris has been usurped by what Foucault calls “continuous history,” the idea and presentation that history is an uninterrupted, arrangeable, and single primary narrative simply waiting to be “refreshed” (7). He shows that

Continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject; the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity; the promise that one day the subject—in the form of historical consciousness—will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find in them what might be called his abode. Making historical analysis the discourse of the continuous and making human consciousness the original subject of all historical development and all action are the two sides of the same system of thought. In this system, time is conceived in terms of totalization and revolutions are never more than moments of consciousness. (12)

The active agent, the subject, in Foucault’s discourse is this history, not the subject. The history acts upon the subject, not the other way around. It is the thing which

guarantees, provides certainty, promises, ultimately reinforcing its own circularity by centering upon the subject and enclosing history into a system that is controlled by one hegemonic narrative without the possibility of multiple stories. This urge toward totalization is also the urge toward the True, the belief that it is possible to define and validate a single and universal understanding of the events of history based on the material evidence that history presents to us. Continuous or what might be termed enclosed and circular history, which is represented in Pynchon by the hothouse, is also represented in Morrison as rememory—always re-circulating and being reconstructed without end, reifying the subject’s position and entrapping him or her within that “abode” or architecture of the archive where truth is continuously deferred through traces.

But Morrison’s novel is an exercise in finding a way out of the continuous history, the rememory, through narrative. She is conscious throughout that the system which requires time to “disperse nothing” is powerful and seductive, but one must escape the entrapment through personal narrative. This danger is inherent in the archival space, the view and manipulation of history from a position of power. In Morrison, however, the archive is used to subvert this power from the position of the subaltern. In the end, we are left with the suggestion that Sethe as an individual may perhaps reclaim her own agency along with Paul D, but Morrison also suggests, in a kind of poetic postscript, that moving on does not necessarily mean that one moves away from memory altogether. It always “re”appears as is evident in the use of the term “rememory” introduced in her writing, which is why the archival space is always

close by. As in Sethe's case, rememory is best interpreted as being entrapped with the archive.

She tells Paul D before Beloved arrives, "No moving. No leaving. It's all right the way it is" (*Beloved* 15). Her living present is transformed into dead time, a time and a place that she chooses not to escape because she refuses to ever "run from another thing on this earth" (15). However, this choice is no real choice at all. She is not yet conscious that her refusal "to run" is not truly her choice as it is a prescribed response within the economy of slavery which forces her to stay within a situation that should be intolerable and refused. Paul D. asks her "You going to tell me it's all right with this child half out of her mind?" referring to Denver. Sethe responds: "I got a tree on my back and a haint in my house, and nothing in between but the daughter I am holding in my arms. No more running—from nothing" (15). Sethe's entire life has been prescribed by the system in which she had to exist and the restrictions of the choices she had, and she is marked by the symbols of that entrapment and subscription both on her body in the form of scars and architecturally in the form of the house at 124.⁶⁶ She therefore feels that not running is a choice she can finally make, although it would in the end almost be the death of her. At some point, the memory of her experience must be situated properly, placed in a narrative context to remove its power for continuous repetition that only leads to death. Sethe must come to a point in which her choices are no longer connected to the prescribed architecture of her condition and

⁶⁶ In *Sula*, both Nel and Sula are also entrapped by their households: Nel was "surrounded by the silence of her mother's incredibly orderly house, feeling the neatness pointing at her back" and Sula was "[s]imilarly, Sula, also an only child, but wedged into a household of throbbing disorder constantly awry" (44). Furthermore, Sula bears a birthmark above her eye that "marks" her to all who see her and interpret the mark differently from a rose to snake to a tadpole.

can be made from outside of it. The appearance of Beloved as corporeal memory finally makes this positioning possible for Sethe as well as for Paul D and Denver.

These various realities among the three main “living” characters in *Beloved* are best exemplified by a rather simple scene in a one-and-a-half page chapter, seemingly unimportant in and of itself, midway through the novel. Beloved and Denver are in the kitchen after Sethe and Paul D have left. Denver knows that Beloved is not happy with Paul D’s presence in the house and tells Beloved that Sethe likes him there. “Make him go away” Beloved says. “She might be mad at you if he leaves,” Denver responds (133). And then the subject moves to the tooth that Beloved pulls out of her mouth, apparently with little to no physical discomfort but with great psychological uneasiness. A longing is evident in Beloved’s thoughts. She is yearning for what is lacking, her union with Sethe, later referenced as the “join.” The place of union calls forth the notion of prosthesis again. All of her parts are subject to disassembly because the natural links that should be present are not. She is all pieces, and she needs to be rejoined to become the prosthetic memory of a past that only Sethe’s narrative can reanimate and rejoin to the present. Beloved thinks,

This is it. Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe. Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once. . . . It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself. Among the things she could not remember was when she first knew that she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces. She had two dreams: exploding, and being swallowed.” (133)

Denver knows based on her own experience that it must hurt physically, so she asks if it does. Beloved responds in the affirmative, and she begins to cry after Denver asks twice why she is not crying. However, despite Denver's belief that the crying should and does come out of physical pain, the crying comes accompanied by a description of her mental anguish, not any physical pain.

Cried the way she wanted to when turtles came out of the water, one behind the other, right after the blood-red bird disappeared back into the leaves. The way she wanted to when Sethe went to him standing in the tub under the stairs. With the tip of her tongue she touched the salt water that slid to the corner of her mouth and hoped Denver's arm around her shoulders would keep them from falling apart" (134).

Beloved's psychological pain arises from her inability to "join" with the living, to make her story continue beyond the trace and into resurrection. She is "jealous" of the mating of the turtles and the mating of Sethe and Paul D because they are examples of the union or joining of living beings which engenders continuance of narrative and is ultimately the continuance of life. The melding of the physical and the psychological is of primary importance to the understanding of Morrison's novel. In fact, she underscores this fundamental theme in one of Beloved's soliloquy chapters: "I want the join" (213). In Beloved's own words and voice, the join is her utmost desire. Critics have read this mostly in terms of wanting to "join" her mother, to become her mother, especially using sections of the novel in which Beloved seems to suck the life from Sethe and likening that need to the infants' Lacanian "mirror stage" in which he/she feels as if he/she is part of the mother.

However, although the phrase “to join” is used, it is also nominalized into “the join”—this linguistic move transforms the import of the meaning. “The join” creates a place, a node of union, of physical presence predicated upon the action of joining which takes place in a period of time. Homi Bhabha argues that this desire “to join” is a manifestation of social solidarity (27) in which the individual is both distinct from and part of the community, so that they can both continue individually but also be linked to a larger presence. Through the strength of the individuals that make up the community at large, the community can maintain its structure, identity, power and life.

In connecting the archive both historically and linguistically to the power of the community to set social expectations and codify them into law (either written or unwritten), Derrida underlines the point that the physical *place* of the archive has extraordinary symbolic power over those within the society. Derrida describes the nature of the archive as both “*institutive* and *conservative*. Revolutionary and traditional. An *eco-nomic* archive in this double sense; it keeps, it puts in reserve, it saves, but in an unnatural fashion, that is to say in making the law (*nomos*) or in making people respect the law. . . . It has the force of law, of a law which is the law of the house (*oikos*), of the house as place, domicile, family, lineage, or institution”

Invalid source specified..

The first place one encounters in *Beloved* is a domicile, a house where Sethe and Denver live, 124 Bluestone Road.⁶⁷ Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, *Paradise*, and

⁶⁷ Elizabeth T. Hayes discusses the politically and socially charged act of naming in “The Named and the Nameless: Morrison’s 124 and Naylor’s ‘The Other Place’ as Semiotic Choraē.” She points out that neither the crawling already? baby nor the character Beloved have actual names, “beloved” really being a word on a tombstone for how Sethe felt towards her child, but that the house is named 124. Hayes further

Sula all start with specific references to places of residence and attach the significance of identity and community to them. The house in *Beloved* is likewise important and is the centerpiece of the narrative—all action in the novel centers *in* it, *around* it, *to* it, and *from* it. The first lines of each of the three parts of the novel are in reference to the house, and, therefore, the house mirrors the arc of the story itself, making the state of the house representative of the major parts of the story and, thus, making the house constructed by and constructed of the story itself: Part 1: “124 was spiteful”. Part 2: “124 was loud.” Part 3: “124 was quiet.” Teresa N. Washington states that “Morrison emphasizes 124’s humanity” (175) by these descriptions. The house as an inanimate thing comes alive when characterized within the narrative. Carole E. Schmutde states that

124 Bluestone Road is both the traditional haunted house of the conventional ghost story, and a radically possessed and repossessed arena of historic and mythic confrontation. Situated between the Ohio River, which marks the boundary between slave and free territory, and a stream marking the watery boundary African myth places between the worlds of the living and the dead, 124 is a point of intersection for powerful antithetical forces: North and South, black and white, past and present, this world and the other. (410)

Schmutde’s reading of the house as “haunted” is not surprising in the least—it follows the literal interpretation that the main characters in the novel have as well as the

notes that 124 was chosen deliberately by Morrison: “‘124,’ however, contained ‘4,’ a number associated with magic in both West African and Western cultures; and instead of a simple arithmetic progression, each successive number in ‘124’ doubles the preceding number, creating an open-ended geometric progression” (679-680).

readers who also accept the haunting as a reasonable although supernatural explanation for its peculiarities. The second reading of the house as an “arena of historic and mythic confrontation” is also pertinent given the role of architecture in authorizing the archive which has been established as the placement of Barthes’ “turnstile” and the oscillation between the Certainty of communal experience and the Truth of archived debris and/or History.

However, Schmutde’s conclusion from her point about the house’s role is to raise the issue of “antithetical forces.” In so doing, she misses one of the hallmarks of Morrison’s fiction taken from African philosophical traditions and one of the techniques and ontologies that makes the novel work and reinforces Barthes’ reading of myth.⁶⁸ No antithesis exists between these elements she discusses, no true and false or mutually exclusive categories of experience or place. Instead, they continuously replace each other, moving from Meaning to Form and back again. Although her ideas begin to move the relevance of the house as simply a place or setting into the more fluid realm of time, she does not carry through the logic of the “comparisons” in relation to the obvious metaphorical aspects of rivers and water to time itself.

Morrison herself makes a specific reference to the relationship between water and time and the process of narrative when she explains how flooding is simply water “remembering where it used to be” (“The Site of Memory” 77). Furthermore, within

⁶⁸ Concentrating on the mythical aspects privileges the recycling and copying of themes and tropes already present in the literature and the stories of the past instead of on the imaginative reconstruction of those myths. Barthes’ cycling structure provides a bridge from reading a text from a mythical perspective to an archival one. One can read from a product centered rather than an origin centered perspective. Focusing on the archival elements, including those that could be mythic in nature, allows for a more inclusive and alternate reading.

the novel itself, her conception of this relationship is borne out in the description of Edward Bodwin's journey to 124 before Sethe mistakes him for schoolteacher. The scene serves to negate Schmutde's overly simplistic categorization about the qualities of the house (location) and memory (time). When Bodwin approaches the house during the penultimate chapter, his mind automatically begins to think about time and "the way it dripped or ran" (Morrison, *Beloved* 259). In remembering his residence at 124, he remembers "There was a time when he buried things there. Precious things he wanted to protect" (259). His thinking about time, as he draws physically closer to his old house, expresses the relationship of the memory to the physical aspect, the archive: "As he drew closer to the old homestead, the place that continued to surface in his dreams, he was even more aware of the way time moved. Measured by the wars he had lived through but not fought in . . . it was slow. But measured by the burial of his private things it was the blink of an eye. Where, exactly, was the box of tin soldiers? The watch chain with no watch? And who was he hiding them from?" (260). Bodwin is white and was never a slave, so his memory is not tied to the same history as Sethe's. However, his familial education made certain that he was sympathetic to and knowledgeable about that history, his family being staunch abolitionists.

Creating these large mutually exclusive categories as Schmutde does obfuscates the complicated ways in which these forcefully categorized concepts of time and place interrelate, inform each other, and, historically speaking, cannot be delineated. Legal capitulation to the Fugitive Slave Law effectively erased any strict geographical boundary in the pre-bellum United States because escaped slaves were still slaves regardless of their geographical location under this law and could be

captured and returned to their masters. Black and white as absolute categories were created by the slaveholders and no biological “racial” division actually exists; the past stays there only when there is no memory to make it part of the present; the existence of the ghost in the house is itself a graphic representation of the lack of separation between this world and the other.

This house is, therefore, a receptacle of memory, a location around which a “community of time” has been established. This community of time creates “the feeling according to which we would all be heirs to a time over which we might exercise the rights of collective ownership: this is the imaginary that the archive seeks to disseminate” (Mbembe 21). The house, located at 124 Bluestone Road, is presented almost as if it were simply another character, dynamic in fact, who changes as the story progresses, with the proper name “124” appearing often. Its history encompasses the Bodwin family, Baby Suggs, Sethe, Denver, and eventually Beloved. Weaving together a history of slavery and freedom and its consequences, this material house is also time made manifest.

The house was at first alive with the ghost of Sethe’s murdered daughter—“full of a baby’s venom” (Morrison, *Beloved* 4). The narrator metonymically refers to the ghost’s actions as the actions of the house itself, thus correlating the two entities—the ghostly presence and the physical structure of the house—while explaining the effect of the haunting on Sethe’s family:

Neither boy waited to see more . . . Each one fled at once—the moment the house committed what was for him the one insult not to be borne or witnessed a second time. Within two months, in the dead of winter,

leaving their grandmother, Baby Suggs; Sethe, their mother; and their little sister, Denver, all by themselves in the gray and white house on Bluestone Road. It didn't have a number then, because Cincinnati didn't stretch that far. In fact, Ohio had been calling itself a state only seventy years when first one brother and then the next stuffed quilt packing into his hat, snatched up his shoes, and crept away from the lively spite the house felt for them. (3)

The narrator points out that the house was also not "named" as of yet since the city had not yet recognized its existence, just as neither the baby in life nor the ghost is given a name until it is officially recognized as Beloved, the woman who appears at the house much later. This metonymic relationship between the ghost and the house not only reinforces the idea of the house as archive but also invests archival characteristics into Beloved, who is assumed to be the resurrected baby.

The house is also remembered as "living" during the period before the murder of the baby and therefore not yet an archival space: "Years ago—when 124 was alive—she had women friends, men friends from all around to share grief with. Then there was no one, for they would not visit her while the baby ghost filled the house, and she returned their disapproval with the potent pride of the mistreated" (95-96). But Sethe's act of violence shattered the outside community connected to the house, and consequently the space of the house became dead and closed off. The ghost who appeared, the ghost which represented that violence Sethe committed as well as occasioned the odd and unacceptable pride in Sethe, created another kind of community within the home. Mbembe notes that the archival material is

placed under a seal of secrecy—for a period of time . . . The process that results in a document becoming ‘archivable’ reveals that there are only products which have been deliberately stripped of what would make them simply ‘secular’ documents . . . As a result, they become part of a special system, well illustrated by the withdrawal into secrecy or ‘closing’ that marks the first years of their life. For several years, these fragments of lives and pieces of time are concealed in the half-light, set back from the visible world. (20)

This interior community made up of Sethe, the ghost, Baby Suggs, and Denver maintained a kind of sacred communion amongst themselves, so sacred that the boys, none of whom are complicit with the matrilineal relationships between the four female figures, were run off. In this way, the house and its occupants are set apart from the community and represent a memory to be actively forgotten and avoided, things unseen and mysterious, a place where the other world had become a part of this world.⁶⁹ This setting apart, this veiling of the interior of the home against the outside secular world, is also replicated in the process of creating the archive: records are sealed away for a period of time during which their power in the community actually grows and solidifies but becomes less frightening because evidence of past lived experience is removed in space and time from the community into a “safe” place.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ The Convent in Morrison’s *Paradise* is another example of this type of gendered community, set apart from the community as a whole, and denigrated into the status of a coven of sorts.

⁷⁰ Another version of this “removed” and “sacred” archive, open to interpretation because it is inscribed on its “lip” with the community’s memory in the form of a religious motto/command, is The Oven in Morrison’s *Paradise*: “A utility became a shrine . . .” (103).

Morrison describes the house, a description which could be just as pertinent if the subject were “archive”: “Before 124 and everybody in it had closed down, veiled over and shut away; before it had become the plaything of spirits and the home of the chafed, 124 had been a cheerful, buzzing house . . .” (*Beloved* 86). Before the killing of the baby girl, the house had been alive. After Sethe’s actions forced her “outside,” the house became a place of memory only, not forward-moving history.

The arrival of *Beloved* means that Sethe no longer has to be visited by memories because *Beloved* herself is the archive of those memories, the Derridean “safe place” that can hold the memory and yet could fall apart at any time. The house represents the architecture inherent in the power of the archive; but when Paul D arrives, the possibility of a future arises, and the placement of the memory is displaced eventually and *takes up residence* in *Beloved* when Sethe and Paul D. begin to contemplate a future together. Sethe wonders if she could “Trust things and remember things because the last of the Sweet Home men was there to catch her if she sank?” (18) and later Paul D. tries to persuade Sethe to make a life with him by telling her, yes, indeed, he would catch her: “Sethe, if I’m here with you, with Denver, you can go anywhere you want. Jump, if you want to, ‘cause I’ll catch you, girl. I’ll catch you ‘fore you fall” (46). She “thought also of the temptation to trust and remember that gripped her as she stood before the cooking stove in his arms. Would it be all right? Would it be all right to go ahead and feel? Go ahead and count on something?” (38). And for Sethe, “the notion of a future with him, or for that matter without him, was beginning to stroke her mind” (42). Sethe would be able to escape the Derridean “what might have been” position that “rememory” keeps her in if she could find a way

to allow memory to stay anchored to the past and not invade the present or deny a future. When Sethe decides that Beloved is her daughter, memory becomes corporeal, and time for Sethe and the possible movement into the future with Paul D becomes impossible. She is at that point re-integrated through her “rememory” into the closed system of the archive, a timeless space where memory cannot escape static repetition without narrative.

The description of the space within the house and the various debris contained within it illustrates the invasion of the past into the present for Sethe:

When she woke the house crowded in on her; there was the door where the soda crackers were lined up in a row; the white stairs her baby girl loved to climb; the corner where Baby Suggs mended shoes, a pile of which were still in the cold room; the exact place on the stove where Denver burned her fingers. And of course the spite of the house itself. There was no room for any other thing or body until Paul D arrived and broke up the place, making room, shifting it, moving it over to someplace else, then standing in the place he had made. (39)

The material objects with the house exist as mere objects, but they also recall for Sethe specific images of the past that recycle through her present days, never reaching any sense of resolution. Paul D’s arrival is the first step for Sethe to remove the “re” from her memory, to make memory a thing situated in the past instead of constantly interrupting her present. The description of Paul D’s living presence in the house is markedly physical—he breaks it up, makes room, shifts things, moves things and takes up a physical presence. Later, when Beloved takes up residence in the house, she

actively reverses this process by moving Paul D out of the house—“She moved him” (114), the first line of Chapter 11 reads. In order for the house to maintain its archival status as the location of dead memory, Paul D cannot remain. Because Beloved’s survival depends on dead time, she cannot allow his presence within the house.

Furthermore, Stamp Paid, feeling morally torn by Sethe’s actions which he always refers to as “the Misery,” begins to be worried about Sethe and Denver and wants to visit them at 124. However, each time he attempts to do so, he cannot bring himself to knock on the door. And from the outside, he is bombarded with voices and words, language he cannot comprehend because its syntax is disturbed.

What he heard, as he moved toward the porch, he didn’t understand. Out on Bluestone Road he thought he heard a conflagration of hasty voices—loud, urgent, all speaking at once so he could not make out what they were talking about or to whom. The speech wasn’t nonsensical, exactly nor was it tongues. But something was wrong with the order of the words and he couldn’t describe or cipher it to save his life. All he could make out was the word mine. (172)

That is why Stamp Paid hears disembodied voices and scattered, misaligned words as he approaches 124, the voices of the archived past held within the house. But these voices are not coherent, having no temporal grasp, no narrative arc to give them substance. He is entering into the architecture which enshrines the dead past, and the voices overwhelm him. They overwhelm him because they are the voices and words of the archive, a montage of language and complaint that exists in the sacred, sepulchral space of the archive and within the dead past.

The community at large was not altogether whole at the point of the inauguration of the archive at 124; they were not yet healed from the scars of the past, but their movement had always been away from the past. Before the murder, 124 participated in that forward movement as well. They all attempted to behave as if it were a new time and space, feasting at 124 with Baby Suggs and her family, but a sense of disproportion made the community uncomfortable with the abundance in which they shared. This discomfort gave Morrison an important plot point because it provides the reason that no warning was given to Baby Suggs or Sethe about the approach of the slave hunters, but it also clearly reveals the confused struggle of a community which is searching for a sense of self, attempting to piece together a story that would give an identity which did not feel wrong or inauthentic. It felt wrong to have abundance when their relatives were still chattel. It felt wrong to have pride when their lives had previously been dependent upon submitting to base, inhumane treatment. But mostly, it was a sense of jealousy of the abundance of 124 that stripped the community of its solidarity and played a part in Sethe's actions.

In the 18 years between the murder and the appearance of *Beloved*, the house becomes a sacred space to the community, one that resounds with fear and awe. The community establishes this role of archive for the house, a memorial of willing forgetfulness. Out of practical necessity, they still maintain their community related to their past status as slaves—companions who shared the same past if not the same present. Their exclusion is an attempt to assert their own identity in opposition to those who live at 124, thus plotting a new space and new time separate from the hauntings of the past they actually share and that 124 maintains. Therefore, 124 and

its inhabitants are shunned by most even though they are not altogether banished, most notably not by Stamp Paid. According to Mbembe, the space of the archive “rests on a fundamental event; death” (21). The religious event and the death inaugurate 124 into its status of archive. Its existence allows the dark and deadly events that they all share to be safely stored apart from the rest of the community. The plot of the story provides the death moment at which the archiving process could begin. The death of Sethe’s daughter occurs within the community after a huge community gathering which celebrated the freedom and abundance, in almost biblical terms, of the freed slaves. The moment is religiously significant, reminiscent of the feeding of the multitude with five loaves and two fish.

The “excess,” however, turns the community against 124 even before the murder.

Now to take two buckets of blackberries and make ten, maybe twelve, pies; to have turkey enough for the whole town pretty near, new peas in September, fresh cream but no cow, ice and sugar, batter bread, bread pudding, raised bread, shortbread—it made them mad. Loaves and fishes were His powers—they did not belong to an ex-slave who had probably never carried one hundred pounds to the scale, or picked okra with a baby on her back. (137)

Stamp Paid himself gathered the blueberries which became the centerpiece of the feast, blueberries which tasted “so good and happy that to eat them was like being in church. Just one of the berries and you felt anointed” (136). These allusions to a sacred space heighten the sense that 124 is an architecture meant to hold a special

place in the community. The ensuing murder and closing off of the house results from the community's own need for an identity that allows for their dual pasts as both slaves who "carried one hundred pounds to the scale" and "picked okra" while carrying babies as well as a people who were not going to sanction murder. They need to embrace their pasts as both the assigned "animals" and "beasts of burden" but also their real past, present and future as men and women, fully human. Only by closing off the space and making it sacrosanct, a totem from which to resist the definitions from outside that they are still animals and not human, can they then take the power to define themselves.

The solidarity of the community is threatened, however, when Beloved's presence begins to thwart the "coming back into time" that Sethe and Paul D were beginning to accomplish at 124. The longer that Beloved stays at the house, the more isolated it becomes, even pushing out Denver who had once so closely identified with the house. Once Sethe begins to believe that Beloved, the woman, is her daughter come back from "the timeless place" (182), she feels a freedom because "her mind was busy with the things she could forget" (191). As Derrida explains, the archive allows for this kind of willful forgetfulness, and Beloved's presence reinforces the archival nature of the house. The narrator relates that Sethe doesn't see the "prints nor hear the voices that ringed 124 like a noose" because "she no longer had to remember" (183). The unremembered multitudes have gathered in the sacred space of 124, the past which is not past.

Sethe sees only her own particular past in Beloved, the woman, not the past of the beloved, those who came before her on the Middle Passage. So she feels as if she

can lay down the memories of the consequences of her own personal actions—the death, the effect on her other children, her being outcast by her own community. For example, Sethe attends only the burial of her daughter, not the funeral (183), so she is not part of the ritual of death, only the interment of the body, which would have reintegrated her into the community via ritual. “I can forget it all now because as soon as I got the gravestone in place you made your presence known in the house and worried us all to distraction. I didn’t understand it then. I thought you were mad with me. And now I know that if you was, you ain’t now because you came back here to me and I was right all along; there is no world outside my door” (184). But after eighteen years of being closed off from society, Sethe had begun a re-entry into the community by going with Paul D and Denver to the carnival⁷¹ where their shadows held hands and she thought to herself that “it was a good sign. A life. Could be” (47). Giving herself this possibility of a future would allow her to introduce narrative coherence and structure to her life and thus alter the archival space, in this scene specifically ushered in by the communal activity of a carnival. But when Sethe believes that Beloved is actually the crawling already? girl, she begins the archiving process anew, shutting herself off again from “the world outside my door” and re-establishing forgetfulness.

Only while she is willingly forgetful does her rememory continue. Here is the difference between memory and rememory. Rememory is forceful, cycling, diffused, unnarrated eventfulness, whereas memory is placed in the past, and it cannot be

⁷¹ In “‘Play mas’: Carnival in the Archives and the Archives in Carnival: Records and Community Identity in the US Virgin Islands,” Jeannette Bastian discusses carnivals as cultural archives in relation to the indigenous peoples of the Virgin Islands and how the carnival, among other cultural performances, should be valued as “archival.”

physically in the present even when it is remembered. Carole Boyce Davies defines rememory as "the re-membering or the bringing back together of the disparate members of the family in painful recall," involving "crossing the boundaries of space, time, history, place, language, corporeality and restricted consciousness in order to make reconnections and mark or name gaps and absences" (17). Sethe has suffered from rememory, not memory, for 18 years in the form of a ghost and all the other images that "roll[ed] out before her eyes" unbidden (Morrison, *Beloved* 6). When Paul D arrives, she feels she can perhaps remember again, and the carnival symbolizes the aborted attempt at doing so. If Sethe wants to re-integrate into the community, she must share the same relationship with the archival space that the community does, as a place separate and with no danger that the dead will enter the present or, more specifically, that the dead will *replace* the present. Thus there is a safety in the archive as Mbembe states, but a safety ringed with danger: "The function of the archive is to thwart the dispersion of these traces and the possibility, always there, that left to themselves, they might eventually acquire a life of their own. Fundamentally, the dead should be formally prohibited from stirring up disorder in the present" (Mbembe 22). The community had successfully avoided the interactions with 124 for those 18 years, and no one but Paul D, Denver, and Sethe had interacted with Beloved. Although the archive provides a sacred space, it is a space separate, and if it does not remain separate, a place to go to, it can force rememory on a people and keep them bound to a future-less place.

The identity of the force which threatens to "acquire a life of [its] own" is, however, unknown by the readers as well as the characters, all of them reading her/it

differently. The community avoids 124 for its ghostly resident, and Sethe and Denver remain entrapped within the house because of this inauguration of death. Once a fleshed presence arrives, the consequences of 124's sacred separation become less localized and threaten the community at large. Ella notes this threat: "As long as the ghost showed out from its ghostly place—shaking stuff, crying, smashing and such—Ella respected it. But if it took flesh and came in her world, well, the shoe was on the other foot. She didn't mind a little communication between the two worlds, but this was an invasion" (Morrison, *Beloved* 257).

Along with Ella, the great majority of readers take for granted that *Beloved* is the reincarnation of the murdered crawling already? daughter of Sethe who had been haunting 124 in her baby rage. "I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too a hot thing" (210). These lines can be interpreted according to the Lacanian conceptions of the mirror stage of child development, that *Beloved* is the child seeing herself mirrored in the face of the mother. From this interpretation among others, the idea is fixed that the speaker of the narrative in *Beloved*'s chapter is also definitively and logically the baby which was murdered.⁷² Readers as well as some of the other characters can accept this interpretation because it exists as a traditional and accepted behavior of ghosts, in the Western tradition from earlier gothic texts, namely that those killed in horrible ways come back to haunt the place or the people

⁷² Deborah Ayer Sitter calls *Beloved* "the incarnated ghost" (17); Gayle Green writes "when the ghost returns in the form of *Beloved*" (316); Jean Wyatt reads the nineteen-year-old *Beloved* as "the dead baby" (474).

involved.⁷³ If this is the most logical reading of the text, then what is the purpose of a fleshed Beloved? Why does she have a body? The most probable reason arising from the Judeo-Christian model is that it is necessary to have the material appear to act as a container of the ideal, to have the flesh resurrected in spite of and as a conqueror of death. In this way, proof for the eternal existence of the material is established. The material body of Beloved is the Word, and in that language is the memory of the “Sixty Million and more” which does not die.

The subversion of memory is accomplished by the commodification of the bodies of the slaves. Since the slaves were themselves commodities, they were cut off from their own history (Terdiman 12). The horrific scene of the two boys stealing Sethe’s milk as schoolteacher looks on with his pen and notebook in hand highlights the social, political, psychological, and even economic consequences of slavery, most specifically the lineage or racism and erasure of identity. In this scene, what is most human and precious to Sethe is stolen from her and “studied” by schoolteacher as if she were an object which lacked memory. But the fundamental mistake in this dynamic is that Sethe is not simply an object, and memory would imprint upon her and lead to the psychological burden she would carry into the life she wanted to lead outside the system of slavery.⁷⁴

⁷³ In “The Story Must Go On and On: The Fantastic, Narration, and Intertextuality in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *Jazz*,” Martha J. Cutter postulates, based on both her research and her experiences teaching *Beloved*, that the need for a totalizing narrative, one that provides closure and prevents the need for “re-reading,” requires that *Beloved* be read definitively as the reincarnated murdered daughter.

⁷⁴ See Helene Moglen’s fascinating discussion of this scene in “Redeeming History: Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*.” She identifies the nephews’ attack as “A perversion of the primal scenes which Freud describes as marking the origins of the subject, sexuality,

Morrison chose a symbol of slavery which could not be represented any differently—only through the literal ripping asunder of the most primal relationship between mother and child can the story of slavery and its consequences on the psyche of a people be conveyed. The image of a saw wielded by a *loving, good* mother slicing through the flesh of her child holds within it a most powerful symbol of the subversion of natural human tendencies which occurred and occurs in systems of slavery or even despotism. Morrison uses infanticide as the violent reminder of the inhumanity of these systems; but the use of the ghost and ghostly woman to prolong the interaction between Sethe and her deed as well as between the community and Sethe's deed truly underlines the historical process that the 300 years of slavery in North America began because it enforces the presence of the past. The consequences are not buried because the past is over—they rise again and again in newer and stranger forms to “haunt” the present. Morrison uses this historical memory as a thing and not a psychological process only—in *Beloved*, memory is material, not just ideal, the memory that is readily apparent in the archive in material memorial form.

The unnamed child is symbolic of nothing—she only obtains symbolism in her death, burial, and remembrance. More specifically, the act of her killing is not symbolic or “meaningful” until she is written—the story in the paper, the pictures that the public sees, the court documents, the tombstone engraving. The appearance of *Beloved* as a fleshed entity rather than as a ghost, or what might be called a “conceptual” entity, mirrors the move from language to myth as defined by Roland Barthes in *Mythologies*.

and sexual difference, this scene lays bare the whites' impulse to reject black subjectivity in order to eradicate the black roots of the white Imaginary” (26).

Sethe's struggle throughout the novel is consistently related to moving beyond the individual history that the baby-ghost represents and the universal history that Beloved embodies.⁷⁵ The ritual of a funeral and burial is the prescribed method for moving on emotionally and psychologically after a death, as the presence of the baby-ghost and Beloved attest; but that ritual failed in the crawling already? child's case because she is not allowed to leave the jail for the funeral. Sethe must then find another ritual to move beyond the death and attempts to do so by inscription.

However, the only writing available to her was through a trade-off based on her body.

Sethe trades sex for the engraving on the baby's tombstone: "Ten minutes for seven letters. With another ten could she have gotten "Dearly" too? [. . .] But what she got, settled for, was the one word that mattered" (Morrison, *Beloved* 5). The description of Sethe's experience reinforces the generative aspect of "naming" because the process of obtaining the "one word that mattered" was, for Sethe, a moment of forgiveness and acceptance: "but those ten minutes she spent pressed up against dawn-colored stone studded with star chips, her knees wide open as the grave, were longer than life, more alive, more pulsating than the baby blood that soaked her fingers like oil" (5). Embedded in this description is the conflation of life and death,

⁷⁵ In his caustic and bitter review of *Beloved*, Stanley Crouch argues that Beloved "fails to rise to tragedy because it shows no sense of the timeless and unpredictable manifestations of evil that preceded and followed American slavery, of the gruesome ditches in the human spirit that prefigure all injustice" (40). Apparently, Crouch misses Morrison's major point completely since it is the "re-memory" that traps the characters within timelessness and makes Beloved's existence timeless and universal. Furthermore, if Sethe's killing of her child is not an "unpredictable manifestation of evil" and a "gruesome ditch of the human spirit" and results in a grave injustice to the baby, I'm not sure what would qualify.

the universal with the particular, the enfolding of the True with the Certain, the movement from Meaning to Form.

Furthermore, the signified is the baby herself, the baby in death, not in life. In life, she would have had a real name. “Beloved” is the signifier that generalizes her and moves her from the Certain to the True, from Meaning to Form for the reader as well as for the other characters in the novel. Finally, the sign is therefore meant to be exactly what it always is in these particular events—the death and life of a human being encapsulated in the word on stone. The meaning is loss, sadness, dignity and a need for closure.

However, no closure is possible because although Sethe finds forgiveness or “stillness of her own soul, she had forgotten the other one: the soul of her baby girl” (5). Sethe did what was necessary on a practical level—she buried her daughter and gave her a tombstone to recognize her existence. But “Rutting among the stones under the eyes of the engraver’s son was not enough” (5). Sethe’s penance, her giving of herself once again so her choices would be understood by everyone, including the baby, was not enough. Why? Because the sign itself, the meaning of the baby’s life and death and her name on the stone signifies *something else*; that something else must have a presence to attest to its absence in the material record. At that moment, for Sethe, “memory” becomes too powerful to allow the sign to lie latent in the grave. There must be an appearance in the flesh, so the story can be told, so that the language of those memories can continue to exist and serve as a counterforce to the hegemonic inscriptions which lie in the archive. Since the body is the ultimate *porteur* of memory (as exhibited in Derrida’s notion of the future anterior quality of the archive),

Morrison's fleshed memory is necessary, the material reality that death is not inevitable in fact although it is in experience. In this way, the truth of a material death and the certainty of the ideal that continues through memory can simultaneously exist.

Morrison's narrative sets up the need for a body to occupy the space that the word "beloved" signifies, which is the space of the archive. This necessity is evident in the process laid out by Barthes in his turnstile explanation. The ghost of the murdered child is trapped without a story; there is only a word on a tombstone, all Form and no Meaning. The word itself, "beloved," gives her a place in reference to her mother but not an identity of her own. The word makes a general reference to the community, but she has no story to give her existence, no narrative which creates her. Gabrielle Schwab states that "[T]he subject is indivisible from the language it speaks; yet this language may only constitute it as a lack, a void to be filled with phantasms" (1). Following Vico's axiom that language developed from sensory experience, it is possible to give her a story only by giving her a body, and conversely, it is only possible to give her a body by giving her a story.

Beloved, representing the immaterial made material and the eternal made temporal and thus the locus of knowledge, can infiltrate all the aspects of the characters around her, Sethe, Denver, Paul D and even Baby Suggs. In the first four days of Beloved's presence, she sleeps and then awakens to notice the colors on her quilt. "It took three days for Beloved to notice the orange patches in the darkness of the quilt. . . . She seemed totally taken with those faded scraps of orange, even made the effort to lean on her elbow and stroke them" (54). Baby Sugg's last days are marked by a fixation on color as well.

Suspended between the nastiness of life and the meanness of the dead, she couldn't get interested in leaving life or living it . . . Her past had been like her present—intolerable—and since she knew death was anything but forgetfulness, she used the little energy left her for pondering color. “Bring a little lavender in, if you got any. Pink, if you don't.” And Sethe would oblige her with anything from fabric to her own tongue. (3-4)

The similar actions of Baby Suggs and Beloved, lying in bed, suspended between the dead and the living, fixating on color, invite the speculation that Beloved is just as much an aspect of the dead matriarch as she is anything or anyone else. Thus, Beloved is the re-membered aspect of those who surround her. Robin Blyn underscores this point by calling Beloved “a mnemonic muse for Sethe, Paul D and Denver” (qtd. in Marks 80), which therefore allows them to create their own stories. In the end, however, she is never stripped of her association with a greater community as her similarity to Baby Suggs suggests.

The lisle dress mentioned in the cold house passage connects Beloved with Baby Suggs as well, although the connection is more significant in the confusion it causes between the identities of the women in the story and what that confusion reveals about the nature of the archive and storytelling. Denver sees the dress when she looks through the window of what was Baby Suggs' room at 124.

When Denver looked in, she saw her mother on her knees in prayer, which was not unusual. What was unusual (even for a girl who had lived all her life in a house peopled by the living activity of the dead)

was that a white dress knelt down next to her mother and had its sleeve around her mother's waist. And it was the tender embrace of the dress sleeve that made Denver remember the details of her birth—that and the thin, whipping snow she was standing in, like the fruit of common flowers. The dress and her mother together looked like two friendly grown-up women—one (the dress) helping out the other. And the magic of her birth, its miracle in fact, testified to that friendliness as did her own name. (Morrison, *Beloved* 29)

Many see in the lisle dress a more physical emergence of the murdered child, a sign that her absolute appearance is imminent. However, there are some problematic discrepancies in that interpretation. First, this interpretation limits the reading of *Beloved* as representative of more than the singular personage of the murdered baby. Second, the dress that *Beloved* is wearing when she arrives is not the white, filmy, simultaneously angelic and ghostly dress that Denver describes but a stiff, high-necked black dress. The description of Sethe's first sighting of *Beloved* underscores the contrast in the two images: "The rays of the sun struck her full in the face, so that when Sethe, Denver and Paul D rounded the curve in the road all they saw was a black dress . . ." (51). This image of a black dress with no one in it both mirrors and contrasts the image of the ghostly white dress. The reader must find a way to resolve the contradiction. How can what is obviously not the same dress signify the same entity? It only can if the entity is multifaceted and reveals the possibility that is inherent in the archive, that competing "truths" can be valid depending upon the construction of the narrative.

Interestingly, the physical book, the one that is held in the hands and read by the reader, in this case the 1988 Plume edition of the novel, further blurs this distinction and creates an alternative reading and different impression which is also often found in critical analyses of the novel—the cover image is indeed ghost-like, but the representation combines aspects of the two textual descriptions of the lisle dress and the black dress Beloved wears when she arrives. On the cover, the woman's face is faded, barely visible, but her dress is much more defined and visible and white, not black. Further conflating the two images, she is also shown wearing a white hat on the cover which references the hat worn by Beloved when she comes out of the water, but there was no hat present in the scene with the white dress. This constructed and blended image is the first one that the reader sees before reading one word of Morrison's work. This image, then, becomes part of the reader's memory and impinges upon any understanding of the narrative.

In conflating these two scenes, the publisher/artist of the novel's cover and many critics miss the significance that the two dress images reveal as well as the significance of conflating the images. When Denver sees the white dress in a tender and protective stance with her mother, the dress cannot be representative of either the baby ghost or the incarnate Beloved. The baby ghost was full of spite and venom, and Beloved is nothing if not harmful to Sethe. And Beloved, as shown, wears a black dress when she arrives. The white dress, then, must be someone or something else. But what? The clues are many. The image of the dress is recalled when Denver feels safe and important, the same feeling that she had with her grandmother, Baby Suggs. The white dress also appears next to Sethe when she is in Baby Suggs' room.

Furthermore, Denver interprets the dress and her mother as “two friendly grown-up women,” a reference that clearly eliminates the possibility that the dress could be representative of the angry murdered baby or the grown-up but infantile and “unfriendly” Beloved.

These clues point to a reading that the dress was in fact representative of Baby Suggs. However, the last line in this passage raises a doubt in that reading. Denver alludes to the “friendliness” of her name and the magic of her birth, both allusions which correspond to the involvement of Amy Denver, Sethe’s fellow traveler who helped her give birth to Denver and gave her the name. Yet another candidate for the apparition is introduced.

Washington attempts to solve the apparent incongruities: “A child of countless sacrifices and as many Mothers, Beloved bears on her neck the scar of the one for whom she vows to bite away a choking, silencing ‘iron circle.’ Beloved, as *Àjé*, is *aláàwò méjì* (one of two colors). As a spirit, she kneels beside Sethe in white, the hue of ancestral transmigration, and arrives physically at 124 Bluestone Road clothed in black” (181). Furthermore, Morrison herself explains in an interview with Marsha Darling that Beloved is a multifaceted entity that both separates and blends the historical experiences of the community with the personal, specifically through language:

She is a spirit on one hand, literally she is what Sethe thinks she is, her child returned to her from the dead. And she must function like that in the text. She is also another kind of dead that is not spiritual but flesh, which is, a survivor from the true, factual slave ship. She speaks the

language, a traumatized language, of her own experience, which blends beautifully in her questions and answers, her preoccupations, with the desires of Denver and Sethe. . . . She tells them what [it] was like being where she was on that ship as a child. Both things are possible, and there's evidence in the text so that both things could be approached, because the language of both experiences—death and the Middle Passage—is the same. (247)

After quoting a section of this same passage in her essay, Washington concurs:

Beloved is each of these three things, and being a confluence of all, she is infinitely more (180).

There is indeed a multiplicity within Beloved. She is not only the repository of history but also, as a sort of subset, of the players within that history, also evident in the conception of the archive. And the fleshly and spiritual functions that she maintains in the text are made manifest through language—she is the document that binds together all of the stories. “The archontic principle of the archive is also a principle of consignment, that is of gathering together” (Derrida, *Archive Fever* 3). Derrida means here by “archontic” the sheltering and concealing aspect of the archive. He further means that within this shelter is a multiplicity of signs “in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration” (3). Beloved’s flesh, her “remembering” as a body, represents this sheltering of signs, the gathering together of homogeneity which does not allow separation or partition. However, Beloved’s fear that she will “find herself in pieces” (Morrison, *Beloved* 133) reminds the reader of the danger inherent in the sheltered archive, that it could indeed be completely obliterated

without a trace, a fate that would threaten the process of narrative that must happen in order to keep the archive in its proper place, neither “stirring up disorder in the present” (Mbembe 22) nor completely destroyed. The danger of the archive is the coming apart of significance, of the loss of meaning through multiplicity. The promise of the archive is the acceptance of competing significances and the maintenance of meaning in all its possibilities.

Morrison’s novel is a political statement that arises from a conscious decision to reanimate the dead and fill in the gaps in order to pass on a story that she paradoxically calls a story “not to pass on” (274). She guides her readers into her novel as she guides them into the metaphorical archive at 124, an architecture that is enclosed and static and entraps Sethe in a re-circulating past apart from her own community. Morrison moves from the gothic concept of a ghost and haunting to a more philosophical one when that memory becomes a body in the form of Beloved. To evoke the full spectrum of history, Morrison cannot narrate only the individual, certain story of Sethe and her actions. She cannot leave Sethe in a private relationship with her private story but has Beloved appear to animate the debris of 300 years or more and 60 million or more. The baby-ghost is Sethe’s constant reminder, but she is literally and figuratively too small to make the point that Morrison wants to make as a storyteller, that historically significant stories are both dangerous and liberating to tell. Morrison must move from the private to the public both in her plot and also in her work. She makes Beloved and *Beloved* appear out of the archival space to rupture it.

Because 124, the structuring element of the novel and Sethe’s story, is so closely associated with Beloved’s existence and is also Sethe and Denver’s home, her

survival is intimately tied to keeping them entrapped in that space. The danger of destroying Beloved is a danger that threatens the inhabitants of 124 if they have no communal or narrative ties beyond that space. Without that private, sacred space, they too are threatened with annihilation. The house, in the end, sits abandoned by all with Sethe waiting to die in the bed where Baby Suggs contemplated color. Paul D enters the house: “In the place where once a shaft of sad red light had bathed him, locking him where he stood, is nothing. A bleak and minus nothing. More like absence, but an absence he had to get through with the same determination he had when he trusted Sethe and stepped through the pulsing light” (270). Paul D gets through this absence by recalling his trust of Sethe, that it was safe to enter although this turns out to be ultimately untrue. In other words, a haunted house is just as threatening when it is marked by the absence that recalls that very haunting. Both are dangerous, but “confronting” it is the only way to rupture it—from the inside.

But “Down by the stream in back of 124 her footprints come and go, come and go. They are so familiar” (275). Using the term “familiar” instead of “understood” or “known” or “remembered” about the footprints illustrates their ghostlike quality. They are somehow close to consciousness but never quite solidified there. It is only a type of memory, but a memory that becomes material and sensory. It is a body, and it is B/beloved. It is this necessary interaction with the traces of the past which provides the proof that Beloved and her story existed, that those who place themselves into the story will be able to use it to imagine a way out. That is the process that Morrison imagines through the interaction of Sethe, Paul D and Denver with Beloved. Only

through the community does this rupture eventually occur, and the past can be once again consigned there.

CHAPTER FIVE

Reading *Beloved*'s Body

The Past is never dead. It's not even past.

☞ W. Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*

Beloved is structured around a constant unfolding of memory as the structure of departure and return suggests. From the beginning of the novel, a pattern of departures and returns is present. Howard and Buglar leave. Baby Suggs dies. Paul D. arrives, and so does *Beloved* in the flesh. Chapters digress and progress following the current and past situations of the characters. For example, the reality of Halle's experience is not revealed to the reader even though the reader is told that Paul D. knows part of the story. They are all forced, like the reader, to piece together the chronology of events that have shaped their lives. But Sethe is not ready for the knowledge of that past until its bodily form forces her to confront it. After *Beloved* arrives, there is little hope of keeping anything past in the past. As Sethe thinks to herself, "Nothing better than that to start the day's serious work of beating back the past" (Morrison, *Beloved* 73). Morrison's accomplishment is to narrate the piecing together of personal experience and memory not only by a handful of people at a certain time and certain place, but the piecing together of an entire history from the perspectives of those whose voices have been violently and systematically suppressed. The challenge for all of Morrison's characters is to escape the dead time of the archive by narrating their own stories. Their interactions with *Beloved*, the body as archive

which holds a multitude of unnarrated traces of history, determines their path out and ultimately forward.

Beloved does not exist and was not created to be dynamic in and of herself since the encounters with other characters are the locus of an archival character's function. Archival characters exercise their powers by influencing others through their embodiment of the material traces of memory and history, or they are used as primary sources for reconstructing the identity of the reader. Danger is inherent in this dynamic. The archive can support the exercise of power of the hegemonic culture to dictate identity or maintain the stasis of dead time resulting in continuous recycling. On the contrary, other characters can use the archival character to reconstruct identity and refigure narratives to allow an escape from the continuous recycling. The archival character then consists of the historical debris, protecting and defending it against complete destruction, and this debris can be used to impose hegemonic definitions, and ultimately master narratives, or it can be used to create alternative historical narratives as acts of resistance to the narratives of the master.

Beloved and Sethe

Beloved literally embodies this archival space where the narrative process of piecing together the multiple voices of the past can begin. She is the visible intersection between the sacred memory of a people and the profane experience of their daily lives, the space of the archive. Her position allows a coming together of strands of Certain history, like the stories that Denver weaves, a history that has been suppressed and unconstructed, partially forgotten but still present nevertheless. She is possibility and she is danger as much as she is in danger of destruction. Beloved

berates Sethe for actions Sethe did not take which resulted in Beloved's creation.

"Beloved accused her of leaving her behind. [. . .] She said when she cried there was no one. That dead men lay on top of her. That she had nothing to eat. Ghosts without skin stuck their fingers in her and said beloved in the dark and bitch in the light"

(241). These "rememories" are not Beloved's alone; they are slave memories from the Middle Passage, so she embodies not only her own personal memories but the memories of a multitude. Because Beloved's body represents an archival space, she is not narrative, and she cannot sort through or arrange the images she re-remembers; and so, as a character, she attributes all the pain and humiliation and fear to her mother. The desire inherent in us to find origins to create our own stories is circumvented for her as well because her mother should be the origin. However, the maternal connection is missing for Beloved because of Sethe's actions and because of the violent dissolution of family ties that occurred as a result of slavery. So Sethe is haunted not only by the ghosts/memories of her real daughter but also by the ghosts/rememories of her entire racial history and the narratives told about that history from within and without.

The most telling and cogent understanding of Beloved comes through the chapters in which Morrison gives Beloved an unfiltered voice, thus allowing for the multiplicity of experience and voice to come through. Beloved's soliloquy chapters spiral from one time to the next in her disjointed memory as if it were the first encounter with the debris within the archive before the narrative structure has been added. The style that Morrison has given to the chapter reveals one of its goals—to show Beloved's repetitive and associative thought process, presented in free indirect

discourse, unfettered by the need to make herself clear to any audience. In this first Beloved chapter, her words and thoughts exist but are not displayed for anyone, and no clear chronology is given. The splayed, fundamentally un-narrativized form of the chapter illustrates the timelessness of the archived space, full of memory without a temporal nexus. This changes somewhat in the second Beloved chapter when Morrison introduces some real-world novelistic conventions that are helpful for the reader, such as paragraphs. But this relatively subtle structure does not completely explain the psychological movements contained within the two chapters; and much like the jumble of information contained with archival documents, these small bits of information must be reassembled and interpreted by the reader based on what is included and what is not included as a choice of the author. Morrison invites the reader into the archival space to help construct the narrative, so that the reader is part of the narrative process.

The first chapter in Beloved's voice is much more chaotic and dissonant than the second. It contains only one punctuation mark, for example, at the end of the first sentence: "I am Beloved and she is mine" (210), yet there are paragraph breaks and capital letters. Its repetitive phrasing and syntax mimic the endless return and recycling of information that exists within the archival space. The tense of the phrases is overwhelmingly present, with only a few referencing "what I lost" and "the face that is going to smile at me," reinforcing the summary phrase "All of it is now" which appears in both chapters. In the second chapter, it is clear that whatever events unravel and whatever time passes, there is no erasure of this experience; and although it is an "easier read," the experience(s) has been solidified and placed outside the

realm of any time: “All of it is now it is always now there will never be a time when I am not crouching and watching others who are crouching too” (210). This implies, then, that any reading of any other event or place that Beloved is involved in or part of remains coterminous with her experiencing of the events described within this section of the novel. The “now” is automatically transferred into “always”; it is never confined to the immediate context. This consideration is crucial in establishing Beloved’s existence as an archival character because it illustrates clearly the connection between time and place and the ability to paradoxically have the material (her body and her mimetic experiences) *be* the memorial (her meaning and her diegetic interpretations and implications).

When Sethe comes to the conclusion that Beloved is the incarnate crawling already? child, she begs for forgiveness for the murder and asks for appreciation for what she did do before the murder. Sethe is basing her communication upon her own experiences; and in her interaction with Beloved, confusion arises. Beloved’s voice and memories reflect separate and multiple histories which have become co-mingled within her, and because Beloved lacks the ability to narrativize these experiences, her responses are not coherent. Beloved is angry for something else—being left behind and not being treated well, not being smiled at. These are two different memories trying to resolve themselves in each other when they do not match. One, however, envelops the other. Beloved does not hear Sethe’s apologies: “Sethe pleaded for forgiveness, counting, listing again and again her reasons; that Beloved was more important, meant more to her than her own life” (241-242) and nothing is enough for her because her pain is bigger than Sethe’s sin. “Beloved wasn’t interested. She said

when she cried there was no one. That dead men lay on top of her. That she had nothing to eat. Ghosts without skin stuck their fingers in her and said beloved in the dark and bitch in the light” (241). Significantly, this passage reveals the word “beloved” in the sense of her role and not her name—she is “Beloved” to Sethe, but ironically “beloved” of those who enslaved her people. She is beloved for her price and her body, not her *self*. In this rather simple capitalization distinction is the proof of Beloved’s polysemous role, the re-presentation of the debris of history.

Beloved is first articulated only as a word, indeed a word carved in stone. This writing upon the stone is for Sethe a material part of her story, a recording that was difficult to achieve, but because it is inscribed, becomes a material record of her story. This achievement cannot be overstated since the power of documentation is simply not possible for slaves who have no ability to write or access to political channels into the archival system.⁷⁶ The double-edged sword of the archive and the documents which it contains is evident in the two records for which Sethe is personally responsible, the gravestone and the ink. Sethe as slave has no power to document her own story. In fact, she is used to document her master’s narrative when she makes the ink with which schoolteacher records the slaves’ physical characteristics. But she is able to

⁷⁶ Morrison’s characters, placed in the early- to mid-nineteenth-century, one generation removed from slavery and literacy, have greater access to their community memorials, but access to the archive is still not enough to still the desires of the dead. In *Sula*, when Nel visits the “colored part of the cemetery,” she sees the names of the Peace family carved into the stones: “Together they read like a chant: PEACE 1895-1921, PEACE 1890-1923, PEACE 1910-1940, PEACE 1892-1959. They were not dead people. They were words. Not even words. Wishes, longings” (146). Derrida’s notion of the future anterior is at play here. As we read Morrison, we are placed in the position of “what will have been” when we read the “chant” of the archival inscriptions. (The use of “chant” further establishes the communal and sacred nature of the archival inscriptions.) Nel is still, however, in the dead space of the archive along with the gravestones, the “what might have been.”

achieve a type of documentation with the gravestone, nonetheless, although it comes at a price. Because the word Beloved on the stone is not a specific name but a general relation, she is able to mark her experience in relation to the greater community. Sethe becomes an archivist for the community, creating an inscribed document to attest to the larger context of her personal story and personal experience; and she exhibits a certain kind of power in managing to create this record, a power that is derived from the use of her female body.

Her power is limited, however, because of her position in relation to both the community of slaves and ex-slaves and to the culture at large, a condition shared by Profane in *V*. She is “pro fana” in two ways. First, according to her immediate community, she is a mother who has committed infanticide, thus positioning her as inhuman. This opinion of Sethe from within the slave community is driven home by a conversation she has with ex-slave Paul D.:

“Your love is too thick,” he said . . .

“Too thick . . . Love is or it ain’t. Thin love ain’t love at all.”

“Yeah. It didn’t work, did it? Did it work?” he asked

“It worked,” she said.

“How? Your boys gone you don’t know where. One girl dead, the other wont’ leave the yard. How did it work?”

“They ain’t at Sweet Home. Schoolteacher ain’t got em.”

“Maybe there’s worse.”

“It ain’t my job to know what’s worse. It’s my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that.”

“What you did was wrong, Sethe.”

“I should have gone on back there? Taken my babies back there?”

“There could have been a way. Some other way.”

“What way?”

“You got two feet, Sethe, not four,” he said, and right then a forest sprang up between them; trackless and quiet. (164-165)

Morrison evokes the image of a forest springing up between Paul D. and Sethe, a symbolic indication of not only a fundamental and expansive but also natural separation between Sethe’s and Paul D’s world views. Sethe’s focus was on protecting her children from the horrors of Sweet Home, a rather specific, personal concern. Paul D insists that her actions were “wrong,” indicating a position held based on cultural norms. Barthes argues that myth “transforms history into nature” (129), so the world view of Paul D. is based upon his community’s belief that mothers do not kill children if they love them in the acceptable way, thus the pejorative “too thick” description of her love. Because Sethe’s actions do not abide by this world view, Paul D must place her outside of the community and into another category which he easily constructs as animalistic. The forest that springs up between them reinforces the association of wild(er)ness where animals exist in their natural state.

In a seemingly ironic turn, Morrison sets up Sethe’s decision in instinctually animalistic terms: “So Stamp Paid did not tell him how she *flew*, snatching up her children like a *hawk* on the wing; how her face *beaked*, how her hands worked like *claws*, how she collected them every which way . . .” (157 italics mine). This description is given from Stamp Paid’s perspective, another member of the slave

community whose loyalty to community narratives deemed true by the local community of ex-slaves is therefore at odds with Sethe's Certain story based on her personal experience. Furthermore, the more distant narrator implies another animalistic aspect when he/she relates what goes on in Sethe's head when she realizes that schoolteacher is coming to reclaim his lost property also:

. . . the truth was simple, not a long drawn-out record of flowered shifts, tree cages, selfishness, ankle ropes and wells. Simple: she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thought anything, it was No. no. Nonono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe. And the hummingbird wings beat on. (163)

This description of Sethe's perspective reveals her subjective and personal worldview. The animal here is not Sethe but the forces which are driving her to commit the actions deemed inhuman by the society at large. The opening line ". . . the truth was simple," where truth is defined in Sethe's terms, inaugurates a description which privileges immediate sensory perception and her body, not the traces of history that she fights against daily, the "long drawn out record." Her concern is focused on saving "all the parts of her" that "she had made" since her body is the poet/creator of

meaning, her children, the parts of her that were taken for so much machinery by the master. Sethe's fragmentation ties her directly to Beloved and ultimately to the Pynchon characters of V. and Profane as well. She instinctively wants to move them from the profane world to the sacred space that is "through the veil," outside of this place and thus outside of the torment of a recycled time directed and controlled by the master. This is a dramatic claiming of her body at the same time that her body is being figuratively accosted by the seemingly inconsequential hummingbird, which is actually Morrison's way to show the coming "resurrection" of the past in Sethe's actions, as the hummingbird is traditionally associated with both resurrection and the past.

Virginia Heumann Kearney, explicating the use of bird imagery⁷⁷ in *Beloved*, states that

Like the madness they dramatize, these bird images are used to depict a nightmare Stamp Paid and Sethe have no normal words to describe. The contrast of Stamp Paid's image of Sethe as a ruthless murdering hawk and Sethe's own description of her torment by needle pricks of delicately winged hummingbirds dramatically reveals the impossibility, the insanity of the choice Sethe must make: to become the mad murderer of her child or else madly to allow herself and her children to be returned to slavery. Using the smallest of all birds to torment Sethe,

⁷⁷ Birds are often used in Morrison to signal coming violence or destruction and fear. In *Sula*, Eva Peace is likened to a "giant heron" just before she kills her son, Plum, by setting him on fire (46). In *Paradise*, the women of the Convent are referred to as "hawks" by Sweetie (129).

Morrison ludicrously exacerbates the enormity of her horrible position.

(48)

Sethe and Stamp use the vocabulary born from metaphorical constructions because they have no “normal” words to describe the feeling that Sethe has and the event that Stamp witnesses. Following Vico’s argument, language has become so sophisticated that although the original connection remains, the knowledge of it has not. Sethe’s and Stamp’s narratives of the event are therefore structured by their already-established conceptions. Language is the most direct historical link to that which was originally True and Certain at the same time. As time passed, the True and the Certain began to separate in our consciousness and thus in our language choices and methods of communication. Stories, therefore, are the portal through which we can pass to evaluate the teller’s Certainty and its relation to what purports to be the universal Truth. To seek for knowledge, then, one must go through this portal of language. Language should be recognized, according to Vico, as the place where both individual experience and universal fact meet.

From Sethe’s perspective, the “other” is the animal, driving her to her actions. For Stamp, the event is only comprehensible if he places Sethe in the category of animal since his category for humans does not allow such an event to make sense. In this way, Kearney’s description of Stamp’s vision of a “ruthless murdering Hawk” fails to fully explain the event since animals are not ruthless or capable of murder in the sense that we understand those words. The juxtaposition of the images is the startling aspect: Stamp’s wild, vicious bird versus Sethe’s directed, driven choice.

The various definitions of “mother” and “slave” and “animal” and the related metaphorical constructions that form these various identities are forced onto Sethe because, as Barthes shows in his schema, the larger society creates and reinforces the “stories” that define the individual and reify them into what is “natural.” But the mythic system of codes and meanings produced from the master narrative of the hegemonic society are, in turn, used to justify the stories that the hegemonic society tells about itself and how it defines its ideals, attitudes and values. This alchemy takes place in the space where Meaning turns into Form, an abstraction that can be cycled back into Meaning again. So Sethe falls outside the boundaries of a natural mother or human, according to her own community.

Second, Sethe is also “pro fana” because she is a slave who has become “useless” as an owned object to her former master: “Right off it was clear, to schoolteacher especially, that there was nothing there to claim. . . . she’d gone wild, due to mishandling of the nephew who’d overbeat her and made her cut and run” (Morrison, *Beloved* 149). The cause of the confusion which this set of circumstances creates is linked directly to the problematic positioning of Sethe from the “outside” position.

For example, one of schoolteacher’s nephews cannot assimilate the scene before him in the woodshed:

The nephew, the one who had nursed her while his brother held her down, didn’t know he was shaking. His uncle had warned him against that kind of confusion, but the warning didn’t seem to be taking. What she go and do that for? On account of a beating? Hell, he’d been beat

a million times and he was white. . . . But no beating ever made him . . .

I mean no way he could have . . . What she go and do that for? (150)

This nephew had been taught by means of schoolteacher's use of data and documentation to believe that Sethe, and all Black people, were not human. His understanding was a direct result of the documentation process of his uncle and the justification that such documentation provided. When telling Paul D about the beating, her memory focuses not on the pain of the beating or even the injustice of the beating itself, as the nephew might have, but on something more important to her, her ability to feed her baby:

“They used cowhide on you?

“And they took my milk.”

“They beat you and you was pregnant?”

“And they took my milk!” (17)

As a slave, her humanity and thus any traditionally human conception of motherhood is doubtful to begin with given the hegemonic culture's worldview. Tellingly, however, the nephew's inability to deal with the scene he witnesses is contrary to his treatment of her in the beating scene. He is party to milking her as if she were simply an animal, a body to serve his needs. In this way, Morrison reveals Sethe's horrible position: according to her own community, she ought to be mother first, but when she chooses to kill to save her children, they position her outside; according to the master/slave system to which she also belongs, she is at most partly human and thus must be treated so as to maintain her quality as an owned, productive beast. Her actions, however, reveal the necessary fault in such a world view. She is capable of

making a conscious decision to deny her body and its production value to her master, a decision an animal cannot make.

Sethe's actions consistently reflect this precarious position in which no decision she makes is acceptable from either of the larger communities to which she belongs while she is forced into making the decisions in the first place based on belonging to the communities. Her "characteristics" are documented by schoolteacher, thus establishing her identity according to the master/slave community. These documents regarding Sethe and the other slaves provide one example within the novel of the threat of the archive in defining those within the community. His records of Sethe and the other slaves are typical of record keeping which would have included documents such as inventories, slave deeds, plantation logs, birth/death records, correspondence, and bills of sale. Morrison complicates the history of these documents by making it clear that Sethe herself was responsible for producing the ink used in recording data about the slaves and making a direct link from Sethe to schoolteacher via the substance of ink. As bell hooks argues in "Postmodern Blackness," "black identity has been specifically constituted in the experience of exile and struggle." Within this space characterized by both inclusion and exile the forces of documentation and community collide to force an identity upon Sethe. She therefore feels victimized and responsible at the same time.

The historical context of slave narratives themselves also provide documentary, archival evidence underscoring the impossible, imposed position of the slave. According to Cynthia S. Hamilton, ante-bellum slave narratives focus primarily on the "discourse of victimization" (432) of the slaves, most notably the 1839 work by

Theodore Weld, *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*. This work “helped to shape both the discourse of abolition and the perception of the realities of slavery for a sympathetic audience. In Weld’s account, slavery is primarily defined by its effects on the slave, who is conceived as pure victim” (432). In order to tell a story that had meaning for the audience, a slave or ex-slave must accommodate the expectations of the audience, which in the case of abolition, was an audience that desired or needed radical examples of treatment in order to justify their political position. Therefore, the narrator cannot relate a story from a solely personal perspective. The story must be filtered through the hegemonic class’ cultural and political expectations. To tell a story in such a way not only undermines the personal experience but transfers part of the burden of the unjust system onto the narrator herself.

Sethe feels this responsibility because of her specific contribution in creating the documentation that positions her and attempts to provide the raw material for a story that defines her. “I made the ink, Paul D. He couldn’t have done it if I hadn’t made the ink” (Morrison, *Beloved* 271). She is literally the producer of the material substance that makes the record of her “animal characteristics” possible, although her contribution was coerced as a result of the system within which she functions. Cynthia Dobbs mentions the use of ink in relation to the problems associated with focusing on “black bodies in a culture that equates blackness and body, denying such bodies intellect and emotion” (565). She warns that “One risks falling into the dangerous trap of retracing schoolteacher's writings—ink reducing African-American

individuals to their bodies and coolly delineating these bodies' capacities to withstand deprivation and violence” (565).

Dobbs ties the ink production to the contribution of Sethe’s “black body.” But the feeling of responsibility emanates from something completely unrelated to any physical aspect. Sethe takes pride in producing the ink, an all-too-human trait: “He liked the ink I made. It was her recipe, but he preferred how I mixed it and it was important to him because at night he sat down to write in his book. It was a book about us but we didn’t know that right away” (Morrison, *Beloved* 37). However, Sethe did not fully grasp the consequences of the ink’s use in her documentation. Again, her position is untenable as a member of communities in which she is defined by them and then forced outside of them. Eventually she recognizes the power that the oppressor has over the oppressed, using his/her own body to justify the oppression. She literally produced the materials he needed to inscribe her identity upon a document. The archive teaches us that it is always possible to re-present in a skewed manner the identity of others even with material evidence. It all depends upon the story that links the pieces. And the story can be produced by the members of the powerful classes for justification or by the members of the marginalized communities for identity.

Mae G. Henderson argues that schoolteacher functions as one who “dismembers” the bodies that he owns and that rememory is a strategy against such dismemberment. “If dismemberment deconstitutes and fragments the whole, then rememory functions to re-collect, re-assemble, and organize the various discrete and heterogeneous parts into a meaningful sequential whole through the process of

narrativization . . .” (89). This argument is based upon a curious misunderstanding of rememory, an understanding that privileges “wholeness,” a modernist reading of the novel which does not jibe with the call to multiplicity that Morrison herself seems to privilege in the voices of the subaltern contra hegemonic forces which themselves privilege the written record. Sethe’s rememory entraps her into a circular narrative.

When schoolteacher arrives to claim her and her children, she denies him their bodies in direct opposition to this inscribing feature: “And no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter’s characteristics on the animal side of the paper. No. Oh no” (Morrison, *Beloved* 251). Morrison underlines the parallel consciousness of this decision with the same diction that runs through her head the moment she sees schoolteacher: “Oh no no no” (163). When she tells Paul D that “he couldn’t have done it” (271), referring to schoolteacher’s use of the ink, the “it” to which she is referring is specifically the act of inscription that schoolteacher undertakes. Without her oppressed body, there is no definition of the oppressor. Furthermore, the feeling of the hummingbird attack was foreshadowed in the scene in which she discovers schoolteacher teaching his pupils how to list her animal characteristics: When I bumped up against a tree my scalp was prickly . . . My head itched like the devil. Like somebody was sticking fine needles in my scalp” (193). A direct link is therefore established between the inscription of Sethe’s identity and her refusal to be thus identified or written. She will write her own narrative, and destroys the parts of herself, the most precious parts, so that they cannot be used against her and against them further.

Morrison notes this power of inscription as an author in how she constructs her narrative process. She states

So if I'm looking to find and expose a truth about the interior life of people who didn't write it (which doesn't mean that they didn't have it); if I'm trying to fill in the blanks that the slave narratives left—to part the veil that was so frequently drawn, to implement the stories that I heard—then the approach that's most productive and most trustworthy for me is the recollection that moves from the image to the text. Not from the text to the image. (“What Moves at the Margin” 72)

Morrison uses the term “recollection” instead of “representation.” To “gather” together the pieces and provide the temporal nexus which creates a story, the author can create another type of documenting in fiction of the individual certainties of those who had previously been robbed of their control over and access to Truth.

Beloved and Paul D

Beloved's body is constituted by the debris of history, and the characters that interact with her are able to form narratives based on physical interaction with her. Her body is the locus of struggle for Paul D as well as for Sethe and Denver. The three of them are in a struggle against Beloved's archival position as recycled, never-ending past of fixed definitions and unending alterity. The knowledge that Paul D gains from her comes directly from touching her, from the encounter with her body. Paul D is using Beloved as a way into the past to find his own story, and this desire necessitates using Beloved's body as prosthetic memory, discovering the material of

the past in order to reconstruct it into a personal narrative. According to Mbembe, in the tactile relationship with an archive is its power most evident.

The material nature of the archive . . . means that it is inscribed in the universe of the senses: a tactile universe because the document can be touched, a visual universe because it can be seen, a cognitive universe because it can be read and decoded. Consequently, because of its being there, the archive becomes something that does away with doubt, exerting a debilitating power over such doubt. It then acquires the status of proof. It is proof that a life truly existed, that something actually happened, an account of which can be put together. The final destination of the archive is therefore always situated outside its own materiality, in the story that it makes possible. (Mbembe 20-21)

Because he touches her, Paul D's story is made possible. Paul D could not have encountered the past if it were still immaterial, if Morrison had relied on the ghost in the house to be the representation of the past, for example. In the tactile body, Paul D finds his story. When he gives in to his physical desire, he receives knowledge that "life truly existed," as Mbembe puts it, and therefore that an account "can be put together," a story can be assembled and told. Because Beloved's body represents the archive, the gathering together of multiple histories, Paul D's experience of her body gives him access to the material traces of the past that he had so long tried to evade. Paul D himself has archived a part of his past within the tobacco tin; he has sealed himself against "putting together" an account of his own history, but the physical

release he experiences with Beloved's body signals his emotional and psychological release, allowing a way out of recycled, dead time.

Morrison is also careful to set up the scene outside of 124 in order to establish a possible separation between the power of the architecture of the archive and the spectral aspect of the archive that Beloved represents. Paul D's relationship with Beloved begins in conjunction with his physical presence inside 124, where he has begun to introduce time again by forming a possible future with Sethe. For example, Sethe states that in Paul D's presence "things became what they were; drabness looked drab; heat was hot. Windows had view" (Morrison, *Beloved* 39). In other words, no image or rememory is attached to them; they are simply things or qualities of things with no story behind them and no meaning attached to a past, a quality of color that Baby Suggs appreciated after too much tragedy in her life. And the windows were simply to look through, to the outside, no longer simply a part of the house but a way to see outside of the house, to escape it.

Therefore, Paul D's relationship to the house and to Beloved is structurally antagonistic because he threatens to introduce a future into the timelessness that has come to rest there. In the cold house he is eventually confronted by Beloved, a space outside of the archive within 124. Within the cold house, a certain kind of knowledge is achieved, a knowledge that allows Paul D to reconstruct his identity through his own narrative and use Beloved's body to escape the timelessness of recycled narratives. While Beloved cannot maintain her "dead-time" status as archive within the house if Paul D is in the same space, neither can Paul D move into the future with plans for a life with Sethe. Paul D has found himself moved into the cold house from

the warmth and intimacy of Sethe's bed. He had not realized that he was being moved until he had reached the destination he was intended to reach by the mysterious outside force. "Then it was the cold house and it was out there, separated from the main part of 124, curled on top of two croaker sacks full of sweet potatoes, staring at the sides of a lard can, that he realized the moving was involuntary. He wasn't being nervous; he was being prevented" (116). This moving to a separate place is necessary to maintain the stasis within the house, to prevent Paul D from introducing time into the space.

Once he realizes that he was being physically moved and prevented from blocking Beloved's function, he understands that the force is Beloved: "So he waited. Visited Sethe in the morning; slept in the cold room at night and waited. She came, and he wanted to knock her down" (116). Paul D is confused by this odd combination of being overpowered by, angry with, and ultimately seduced by Beloved. His confusion is partially a result of the deictic disorientation which interacting with the archive always creates, an inability to identify one's interlocutor within the speech situation, in this case, due to *both* multiplicity and absence. He literally cannot accomplish this identification because of the multiplicity in her name, beloved/Beloved, and the absence of her presence: "She took a step he could not hear" (116). The narrator uses the expression "could not hear" and not "did not hear" as if it were an accident of acoustics. Hearing Beloved's physical presence is not possible in this sense because the very absence of history, indicated by an absence of her physical body, is paradoxically filling the space.

He also cannot orient the situation according to his own position because his identity has been consistently challenged and obliterated by his experiences. His natural human and male desires have been scrambled and misplaced by his experience of slavery and imprisonment; and, most notably, his identity as human, male and protector have been challenged and undermined during these experiences. Paul D's existence as less than human is established most notably by his epiphany at seeing the rooster Mister:

Mister, he looked so . . . free. Better than me. Stronger, tougher. Son a bitch couldn't even get out the shell by hisself but he was still king and I was . . . [. . .] Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn't allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him you'd be cooking a rooster named Mister. But wasn't no way I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead. Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub. (72)

Morrison establishes these challenges to Paul D's sense of identity when he was faced with his own erasure by the comparison he sees between his own situation and that of a rooster, as well as when he was bothered by Sethe's ability to escape without his help (8). Therefore, his reaction to Beloved's body is a reaction of a *mal d'origine*, or a sick desire toward a sense of identity and to find origins.

Both Paul D and Beloved, then, are searching for something. Paul D's need to reconstruct his shattered identity is similar to Beloved's since he is one of the multitude of voices that inhabit her. Beloved, in this multiplicity, is looking for an

identity, too, one that will move her from the multiplicity to wholeness. She tells Paul D to “call me my name” (117). This very “present” joining that Beloved longs for and Paul D is powerless to resist gives Beloved temporal and spatial permanence—she can emerge from the unseen and mysterious into the desired material flesh of a woman with a name, from the legion that makes up her parts to a whole being. He names her “Beloved,” which is also an adjective: she is wholly constituted by the story of his past, the story of slavery itself. “What? A grown man fixed by a girl? But what if the girl was not a girl, but something in disguise? A lowdown something that looked like a sweet young girl and fucking her or not was not the point, it was not being able to stay or go where he wished in 124, and the danger was in losing Sethe because he was not man enough to break out” (127). He has no power over her, and he is confined by her presence because she is the very thing that reduced him to less than an animal and keeps him controlled. He wants to tell Sethe “I am not a man” (128) because he cannot control his actions against Beloved’s will. He is less than a rooster; he lacks a beating heart, replaced with an empty tobacco tin; it is a prosthetic replacement for what should be there.

Deborah Ayer Sitter claims that his tobacco tin is a symbol of his “repressed feelings of compassion and tenderness” (25); but he feels no compassion or tenderness for Beloved, and the flakes begin to fall away from the tin when he copulates with her. So the tin’s flakes falling away must be read as the emergence of his knowledge of his own identity within a world that has begun to allow him to define it for himself. “His tobacco tin, blown open, spilled contents that floated freely and made him their play and prey” (218). This knowledge is difficult to assimilate because there has been no

community of humanity around him, no story to help him define himself. Copulating with Beloved's body, he is interacting for the first time with the traces of the past in an intimate way.

Within the archive, and thus within Beloved, exist only the multiple pasts in the form of un-narrated traces where one can find a sense of survival. This sense of survival, however, is instantly circumvented by the very nature of the debris. Beloved's body, for example, finds an analogue in the tobacco tin within Paul D's own body—they are both containers, and he can hear neither of them as their movements indicate an “opening” and a “giving”: “She moved closer with a footfall he didn't hear and he didn't hear the whisper that the flakes of rust made either as they fell away from the seams of his tobacco tin. So when the lid gave he didn't know it” (117). Coupling with Beloved simultaneously provides Paul D a way to narrate his experiences by escaping the hypomnesic aspects of the archive represented by the tobacco tin and introduces the risk of entrapment in the disjointed and un-narrated space of the archive represented by Beloved's body. The material manifestation of immaterial memory found both in Beloved's body and in his tobacco tin provides the architectural place of the archive, both danger and possibility.

The scene takes place outside of the timelessness of 124 and in the *time-fulness* of changing seasons where Morrison can accentuate the relationship between Beloved and death. Nature signals the forward motion of time toward death that Paul D will encounter with Beloved, as opposed to the forward movement of time toward a life that his relationship with Sethe might achieve. Morrison's description reflects this mood of death: “When Paul D had been forced out of 124 into a shed behind it,

summer had been hooted offstage and autumn with its bottles of blood and gold had everybody's attention. Even at night, when there should have been a restful intermission, there was none because the voices of a dying landscape were insistent and loud" (116). This dying time is described with the unconventional but telling images of staged spectacle: summer is derided as a bad actor and forced off stage; the "hooting" is a reference to the audience but also to owls, harbingers of death and night; then night arrives, preventing an intermission between acts. "Bottles of blood and gold" are the props autumn uses to gain everyone's attention, resulting in the death of the landscape, thus underscoring the duality of destruction (blood) and desire (gold) inherent in the Eliotian reference. Morrison has purposefully rendered the meeting of Paul D and Beloved in the sense of a stage show that will tell a story.

This mythic and ominous setting for Paul D's seduction disassociates the sexual acts between Paul D and Beloved from intimacy, affection, or life-affirming procreation and instead focuses on it as performance toward some sort of an end, or beginning as the case may be. Doing so emphasizes the consequences of the union, not the union itself. What will the consequences be? Will there be some sort of narrative arc introduced into the dying landscape, a chance of redemption and/or resurrection? The consequences are of the utmost importance to Paul D, and that is why he is both enticed and afraid of the joining with Beloved.

The narrator's voice interrupts the scene by pointing out Paul D's confusion over Beloved's identity and, by implication, his own: "As long as his eyes were locked on the silver of the lard can he was safe. If he trembled like Lot's wife and felt some womanish need to see the nature of the sin behind him; feel a sympathy,

perhaps, for the cursing cursed, or want to hold it in his arms out of respect for the connection between them, he too would be lost” (117). Paul D is literally afraid not of Beloved herself but of what he might feel about the “connection between them”; he wants to be safe from feeling connections to humans again, from the pain connected to the members of the past who are gathered within Beloved. His suffering has led him to create his own archive, a catalogue of the events of his past, locked away one by one from himself by himself in order to avoid feeling them: “It was some time before he could put Alfred, Georgia, Sixo, schoolteacher, Halle, his brothers, Sethe, Mister, the taste of iron, the sight of butter, the smell of hickory, notebook paper, one by one, into the tobacco tin lodged in his chest. By the time he got to 124 nothing in this world could pry it open” (113).

He also fears a connection with her—she is “sin” and “cursed”—but this fear is not of something truly evil, like a menacing phantom, but just something too overpowering to behold, his own place within a narrative of pain that he wishes to remain forever locked away in a safe place. If he does not look at her, then he will not have to face his own relationship to sin and the cursed. He had thought earlier how much he wanted to “knock her down” because of how much he detests her disruptive presence in his newfound household, a violent reaction. Now he feels as if he actually might want to hold “it.” Steedman explains that warnings are made about archives to students of history: “they are warned about the seductions of the archive, the ‘entrancing stories’ that they contain, which do the work of the seducer. They are sternly told that an entrancing story is a quite different thing from the historical analysis that deploys it” (x). Entrancing stories, from a factual perspective, are

something to be avoided. But when a story is the only avenue to self-actualization, to freedom, it is far superior to the True aspects of analysis. Paul D must reclaim the Certainty of personal knowledge within the gathered together history that Beloved is.

In the end, Paul D surrenders to Beloved's seduction after she tells him she will go if he calls her name. The text shows, however, that she stays despite his uttering her name:

She moved closer with a footfall he didn't hear and he didn't hear the whisper that the flakes of rust made either as they fell away from the seams of his tobacco tin. So when the lid gave he didn't know it. What he knew was that when he reached the inside part he was saying, 'Red heart. Red heart,' over and over again. Softly and then so loud it woke Denver, then Paul D himself. 'Red Heart. Red Heart. Red Heart.'"

(Morrison, *Beloved* 113)

In saying her name, he simultaneously beckons her and dismisses her, so something stays and something goes. The ghostly aspect of Beloved is highlighted in this text—Paul D does not hear her footsteps or breathing. It is as if her body is not even present or implicated in the scene. It is her meaning that is important, the corporeal rememory that is both death in its repetition and life in its acceptance. Paul D's utterance of "Beloved" is a speech act because in saying her name, Paul D does something—he calls her as history and thus her power as this "instituting imaginary" into being. However, she does not go away as she promised because the name he calls is not a name of a human being but a designation of events and a people. He cannot call her name. She is a nameless body: "Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody

anywhere knew her name” (274). Beloved’s need for unity, for a wholeness that will keep her from flying apart, is circumvented because the traces within the archive are not pieces of the past to be reassembled into a complete and finished whole. To know what something is called is to know a fact, something perceived as True. To know someone’s given name is to know a story, a human that was born, was given an identity, that lived, that had a lifetime. This can only be the Certain. Beloved cannot be a given name but only a word that designates objects, the debris.

Furthermore, the tin box is a replacement for Paul D’s human heart, a prosthesis, directly implicating the absence of humanity and memory and yet holding them both because it is also a container. It is technically “inside” of Paul D’s body, but it is purposefully figured as an inanimate container that is anything but flesh. The dramatic transfiguration into a beating, red heart underscores this distinction. Paul D has attempted to create his own archive, placing the events of his past away from his flesh, to make it “dead,” so that it cannot affect his present any longer. The rusted-tight lid he thinks is enough is linked to two other images of containment in the novel, one psychological and one physical.

The headstone is a psychological image of containment because it announces the word that Sethe thought would be enough to satisfy the memory of her crime, to justify it psychologically for her, for her child, for her community. After all, the inscribed word identifies the real reason behind her actions. The child was beloved, not hated. The image of a coffin is a physical image of containment brought up in the final chapter that demonstrates the idea of containing a dead body and locking it away: “a latch latched and lichen attached its apple green bloom to the metal. What made

her think her fingernails could open locks the rain rained on?" (275) These three concordant images of containment correspond to the structure of the archive.

According to Derrida,

Freud's contribution consists in saying that the psyche is structured in a way that there are many places in which traces are kept which means that within the psyche there is an inside and an outside. . . . So, since the archive does not consist simply in remembering, in living memory, in anamnesis; but in consigning, in inscribing a trace in some external location—there is no archive without some location, that is some space outside. Archive is not living memory. . . . ("Archive Fever in South Africa" 40)

The trace is figured sometimes as writing, as is the case with the headstone, sometimes as physical, the coffin, and sometimes as emotional, as in the tobacco tin. Derrida rightly points out that these traces are "kept" outside of the flesh and outside of time and therefore outside of life. And yet the traces still exist. Morrison shows with these images that they are never fully gone and always threaten to open up again and reenter through what Sethe terms rememory.⁷⁸

Toward the end of the novel, the narrator describes Paul D's experience with Beloved in the cold house:

In daylight he can't imagine it in darkness with moonlight seeping through the cracks. Nor the desire that drowned him there and forced him to struggle up, up into that girl like she was the clear air at the top

⁷⁸ See Phillip Page's "Traces of Derrida in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*" for a discussion of the concept of the trace in Morrison's 1992 Novel.

of the sea. Coupling with her wasn't even fun. It was more like a brainless urge to stay alive. Each time she came, pulled up her skirts, a life hunger overwhelmed him and he had no more control over it than over his lungs. And afterward, beached and gobbling air, in the midst of repulsion and personal shame, he was thankful too for having been escorted to some ocean-deep place he once belonged to. (Morrison, *Beloved* 264)

Paul D has difficulty fathoming the reason for his actions in the cold house with Beloved. The natural reason for having sex is pleasure or fun, as Paul D terms it, but this aspect of sex was completely missing from his experience with Beloved. There was indeed a driving desire to merge with Beloved, but it came from the instinct for survival. And his emotional reaction after the fact was not in direct relation to the activity itself—he felt “repulsion” and “shame” even though the urge was not of lust or betrayal but of survival, an instinct that does not usually elicit negative feelings. The dissonance between the reason for his actions and the feelings about them offers another parallel with the concept of the archive and the process of gaining knowledge. The archive in the form of Beloved's body is a source of information in material form, of knowledge through interpretation. “To know” is all that occurs in this scene. He “knows” Beloved, and in that moment, knowing is paramount to surviving, but it is also linked inextricably with shame and repulsion.

Because Paul D allows Beloved to lure him into a physical relationship, the larger, communal archive that she represents is therefore joined with his personal history. Mbembe references this “co-ownership:”

Death to the extent that the archived document par excellence is, generally, a document whose author is dead and which, obviously has been closed for the required period before it can be accessed. The test represented by this closure, this extension of the period of time and the resulting distance from the immediate present, adds to the archive content of the document. . . . it is only at the end of this period of closure that the archived document is as if woken from sleep and returned to life. It can, from then on, be “consulted”. The term “consulted” shows clearly that we are not longer talking about just any document, but of this particular document, which has the power, because of a legal designation, to enlighten those who are engaged in an “inquiry” into time inherited in co-ownership. (Mbembe 21)

The aspects of Truth that Beloved could represent along with the Certain experiences of Paul D allow him to become an active participant again in narrating his story—the archive of personal experience opens without his knowledge. “Knowledge” of a woman is often construed as sexual knowledge; so when he “reached the inside part,”—in other words, when his experiences, his pain, his memories long archived were met with the story that Beloved is—the cycling between the Certain and the True can become narrated, as Barthes’ turnstile metaphor suggests. The archival character has no meaning outside its interaction with other characters, and the reader, exactly like a literal archive “has no meaning outside the subjective experience of those individuals who, at a given moment, come to use them” (Mbembe 23). In this sense, Paul D is using Beloved’s body. Once the narration can begin, the piecing together of

the personal stories, then the humanity can be restored. The “red heart” can beat again as flesh, and the prosthetic “absence” is full again. Finally, as we will see at the end of the scene, Paul D’s repetition of those words wake Denver, the one character who is fully established as learning to live in real time, moving forward and charmed, verifying that this narration process is indeed connected to a crossing over, a leaving behind, a moving forward.

When Paul D “reached the inside part,” he recognizes his own humanity again—his red heart, the beating acknowledged with the repetition of his words: “Red heart. Red heart. Red heart” (Morrison, *Beloved* 117). When the narrator states that this repetition woke Denver, this is the signal of knowledge—to become awake to something. Judith Butler writes that “construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible” (*Gender Trouble* 147). Paul D, too, is awakened to his own volition and agency even amidst the control that *Beloved* wields. This volition comes to him through the acknowledgement of his humanity in interacting with the story of the past and parsing out his own place within it, to revising his own narrative into one that can have a future if connected with Sethe: “He wants to put his story next to hers” (Morrison, *Beloved* 273). It is confusing and difficult to acknowledge his place within the construction of slavery, especially when it means acknowledging his position in reference to the rooster, Mister; but there is a connection which allows him to find his place and therefore have the knowledge necessary to move away from it, as he does when he attempts to let Sethe into his world by telling her about *Beloved*.

Deictic levels overlap here. Paul D is operating in a world of rememory when he is interacting with Beloved, just as every other character is when they interact with her, not on the level of normal human relationships that he has with Sethe where time passes and space is not restricted. When he finds his humanity within the realm of rememory, he can move out from it into the relationship with Sethe. He goes to her to tell her about Beloved so as to escape that realm of rememory. This move is difficult for him, however, because it implies asking a woman for help, and in his social understanding of his role, he is not comfortable. He wants to tell her that “I am not a man” in order to release himself of that burden to be a man in the sense that he feels he must, but immediately he announces that he wants Sethe pregnant in order to establish his manhood.

This announcement reveals two things. First, he is allowing rememory to seep into the present—he wants to avoid copulating with Beloved (who eventually will appear pregnant in the text, and on one level Paul D appears to be the father) by replacing Beloved’s body with Sethe’s. Second, he wants to assert his humanity he has found by impregnating Sethe, a wholly future-centered plan. He thinks to himself that getting Sethe pregnant solves his problem: “And suddenly it was a solution; a way to hold on to her, document his manhood and break out of the girl’s spell—all in one” (128). To “break out of the girl’s spell” is to free himself from the seductive powers of the dead archive, to move into a future. He starts to gain this future with Sethe—they have a time of joy and real human interaction after this discussion as they walk home, playing and holding hands, and a feeling of mercy as the snow begins to fall around them. “And it seemed to Paul D that it was—a little

mercy—something given to them on purpose to mark what they were feeling so they would remember it later on when they needed to” (129). The reference to “when they needed to” remember is significant. In other words, chronological time has usurped the dead time of the archive and made it possible to use memory instead of the inverse, memory using them, as Beloved attempts to do. They had these moments they could use until “floating toward them, barely visible in the snow, was a figure” (131). The figure is Beloved. She interrupts the normal interaction between them with a spectral intrusion. And Sethe gravitates away from Paul D and into mothering Beloved, indicating that the power of the archive to enclose those who encounter it into a dead time and a seduction toward endless repetition still holds sway over Sethe.

When Paul D returns to 124 after Beloved’s disappearance or destruction, he enters the cold room:

Sifting daylight dissolves the memory, turns it into dust motes floating in light. Paul D shuts the door. He looks toward the house and, surprisingly, it does not look back at him. Unloaded, 124 is just another weathered house needing repair. Quiet, just as Stamp Paid said. “Used to be voices all around that place. Quiet now, ‘ Stamp said.

‘I been past it a few times and I can’t hear a thing. . . .’ ” (264).

The scenes between Paul D and Beloved took place during the night when Beloved’s body was the locus of memory in material form. Here in the daylight, he can see only the traces of memory floating through the air. The contrast underscores Beloved’s spectral quality—she exists only in the darker recesses of history. The house is referred to as “unloaded” and “quiet” because it no longer bears the burden of the

multiplicities of stories which were bound there during the dying time. Paul D can therefore “shut the door,” metaphorically closing himself off to the traces at the same time that he opens himself up to the exterior world where time is possible. After this moment of closure, he finds Sethe in her bed within the house where he finds “an absence he had to get through with the same determination he had when he trusted Sethe and stepped through the pulsing light” (270). In the end, Paul D’s story is one he must write/tell with Sethe, and only by marking and getting through the absence of the multiple stories can he do so.

Beloved and Denver

The characterization of Denver (and I use this phrase purposefully—the act of creating Denver, of writing her and making her function in a certain way, not simply the existence of the character) is a political act on the part of Morrison. There are numerous thematic and practical reasons for the existence of Denver, but none are fundamental for Sethe’s own personal story to be told; there need not be a second daughter. Of course, her existence is helpful in some plot points. For example, she is the one who goes outside the house and eventually calls forth the women of the community to come save her mother.

The job she started out with, protecting Beloved from Sethe, changed to protecting her mother from Beloved. Now it was obvious that her mother could die and leave them both and what would Beloved do then? Whatever was happening, it only worked with three—not two—and since neither Beloved nor Sethe seemed to care what the next day might bring (Sethe happy when Beloved was; Beloved lapping

devotion like cream), Denver knew it was on her. She would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help. (243)

However, Paul D. or Stamp Paid or even Ella could just as easily have accomplished this without interrupting the logic of the narrative. This is probably the reason that many critical readings of the text gloss over Denver's role. She is apart from the beginning, interwoven with her mother's story, but always contrasted with or set in relief because she is the character that represents the way out of rememory, the escape from the dead-time of the archive.

For many years, Denver had drawn sustenance from the baby ghost. Denver, in full knowledge of the actions of her mother in killing her sister and trying to kill her, was afraid that "the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again" (205). And against this fear, she had only the "secret company" (205) of her sister's ghost until Paul D arrived and sent the ghost away. Within Denver is a void, a void of safety and knowledge. She dreams that her mother will cut off her head; she is inexperienced and naïve concerning the world outside, leaving the house only twice since she was 10 years old; she specifically states that she "never leave[s] this house" (205). To fill this void, she turns to the baby ghost, and then when the ghost disappears, she finds another way to ease her hunger, Beloved. ". . .when we came back I thought the house would still be empty from when he threw my sister's ghost out. But no. When I came back to 124, there she was. Beloved. Waiting for me. Tired from her long journey back. Ready to be taken care of; ready for me to protect her" (205-206). Denver is for a time caught up in the same dead time

within 124 that almost claims Sethe's life. But because Denver has been drawn as a future-oriented character from the beginning, she is not fully subsumed by Beloved's archival seduction and she can choose to escape.

The majority of the critical articles on *Beloved* spend much less time on the character of Denver than on Sethe, Beloved, and even Paul D. She is seen as a secondary character, perhaps a foil for her mother and Beloved, who functions only to reveal the aspects of these other characters. But her role in the text is intrinsic to the establishment of the function of narrative in relation to the archive. The main event that establishes Denver's relationship to the archive is the circumstance of her birth.

Denver is the child Sethe is carrying when she escapes from Sweet Home, the child that is not yet born when Sethe manages to become "free." Denver is born in a boat as Sethe is crossing into that freedom, over the Ohio. The doubling of symbolism of both the boat and the river reinforces the message that Denver is special; she is different from and removed from her mother because both symbols are indicative of a passage—a womb which itself is simultaneously crossing a border between death/non-existence and life/existence. So as Sethe passes from death into life, Denver passes into existence during the passage across the river. She is born free, in fact within the act of becoming free. She is never a slave; therefore, she is never subjected to the immediate experience of slavery.

When Denver recounts the details that she knows of the story, she is confused by her mixed emotions. "This was the part of the story she loved. She was coming to it now, and she loved it because it was all about herself; but she hated it too because it made her feel like a bill was owing somewhere and she, Denver had to pay it. But

who she owed or what to pay with eluded her” (77). Denver loved the story because it was her story, and it was an affirmative one—her birth, her mother’s long sought-after freedom and so her birth-right freedom. The hatred is complex. Denver’s position as the first freeborn member of her family means that she is no longer subjugated to the slavery of her ancestors. However, the implication is that she will still owe a major part of her identity to that cultural memory—not only her self-constructed identity, but the identity she will find in the community of free Blacks, and Whites as well, in the community at large. Her debt is not settled because she is free. She must pay for the right to possess her own story. She, like the numerous generations after her, are burdened with the weight of the hundreds of years of slavery which forcefully stripped, in the most savage way possible, the personal and community identity, the family relationships and the humanity from her people. Possessing the story is simultaneously necessary and repugnant.

The burden of her position is that she owes a debt she never incurred. She owes this debt to herself—in reconstructing her own subjectivity in relation to the history of the community and in reconstructing the subjectivity of her community since she is a part of it. Denver eventually achieves this; she eventually starts the “repayment” process, but it is forced upon her by the actions of Beloved. Denver’s position outside the dead time of the archive, the present/future position which depends upon the past at the same time it is separate from it, requires her to carry historical guilt. As Nietzsche has explained, debt is descended from guilt (“Second Essay” 43). Her guilt is akin to survivor guilt because she escaped the experience of physical slavery and the resultant psychological scars. But she still bears the guilt.

This guilt has kept her entrapped within 124 and glued to her mother, unwilling to face the community that she can never really be a part of. The story of Denver's birth in the boat while crossing the Ohio into freedom is a story gathered together from many bits and pieces Sethe had provided. And the story would be a way to keep Beloved because it might be a way to repay the debt that the present/future owes her.

Denver feels this debt most literally when Beloved fixes her intense gaze upon her:

At such times it seemed to be Beloved also needed something—wanted something. Deep down in her wide black eyes, back behind the expressionlessness, was a palm held out for a penny which Denver would gladly give her, if only she knew how or knew enough about her, a knowledge not to be had by the answers to the questions Sethe occasionally put to her: “You disremember everything? I never knew my mother neither, but I saw her a couple of times. Did you never see yours? What kind of whites was they? You don't remember none?” (Morrison, *Beloved* 118).

Denver does not possess the knowledge necessary to make her “payment.” She needs more comprehensive, historical knowledge “not to be had” by the specific personal questions to which Sethe needs answers. The irony is that the storytelling that Beloved feeds upon, that “downright craving to know” (77), drains Sethe of her life but is the same process that brings memory to actuality for Denver and gives her a history, a place to fill within her community at large.

. . . Denver began to see what she was saying and not just to hear it; there is this nineteen-year-old slave girl—a year older than herself—walking through the dark woods to get to her children who are far away. She is tired, scared maybe, and maybe even lost. Most of all she is by herself and inside her is another baby she has to think about too. Behind her dogs, perhaps; guns probably; and certainly mossy teeth. She is not so afraid at night because she is the color of it, but in the day every sound is a shot or a tracker’s quiet step.

Denver was seeing it now and feeling it—through Beloved. Seeing how it must have looked. And the more fine points she made, the more detail she provided, the more Beloved liked it. So she anticipated the question by giving blood to the scraps her mother and grandmother had told her—and a heartbeat. (78)

Beloved is teaching Denver how to tell a story, how to make it flesh. Fleshing out the story is possible because Beloved is composed of the pieces of that story. Gaining that history, forcing skin and bones on the skeleton of memory, structuring it through narrative, allows Denver to fully own a past she had been deprived of, a deprivation that made her hungry even though her hunger was not the “original one” of her mother or of her life before Beloved’s appearance. The reconstruction of her mother’s story aided by Beloved allows Denver to escape her insulation inside 124 Bluestone Road. As she explains things and talks to Beloved about “people Denver knew once or had seen,” she gives them “more life than life had” (120), thus being the storyteller. Denver plots and manipulates to manage and encourage this process to escape the

rememory, unlike Sethe who tries to keep it at bay only to be entrapped in the rememory.

Denver's significance in relation to the archive is her consistent position outside of it and her propensity toward narrative. In other words, Denver is never trapped within the archive without choice. She chooses to stay and chooses to leave. The particulars of Denver's birth and her consistent juxtaposition with story telling and writing throughout the text—from the “die-witch! stories” she told along with her brothers, to the stories told to her by Baby Suggs, to her own writing lessons at Lady Jones' where she learns the letter “i”—identify her with narrative. Contrary to Sethe's fight against memory, Denver longingly remembers life before her brothers ran away and the death of Baby Suggs. “[S]he remembered how it was before; the pleasure they had sitting clustered on the white stairs—she between the knees of Howard or Buglar—while they made up die-witch! stories with proven ways of killing her dead. And Baby Suggs telling her things in the keeping room. She smelled like bark in the day and leaves at night, for Denver would not sleep in her old room after her brothers ran away” (19). Denver's memories in this moment are filled with instances of storytelling, not only explicitly mentioned, “die-witch! stories” and “telling her things,” but also the implied stories of the others around her.

Denver somehow instinctively knows that if she can “construct . . . a net” out of her birth story, it will somehow enable her to “hold” Beloved, to contain her. Denver's narrative introduces Amy Denver to the reader.⁷⁹ The birth of Denver would

⁷⁹ See Nicole M. Coonradt's article “To Be Loved: Amy Denver and Human Need—Bridges to Understanding in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*” for a discussion of Amy Denver's role in *Beloved*. Coonradt argues that the character has been overlooked and

not have been possible without Amy Denver, the white girl Sethe says Denver “pulled . . . out of a hill” (42), noting an odd circularity between Amy and Denver since Sethe’s comment means that Amy was “pulled” out of the earth just as Denver was pulled out of Sethe with Amy’s help. Amy’s name is particularly significant, especially since her role in the narrative is so brief, for the weight that it carries in reference to Denver’s position relative to community history and personal memory. Amy is not a present character but a remembered one only. The story about Amy emerges from Denver’s memory of Sethe’s re-telling of the story over and over again to help Denver construct herself. “She swallowed twice to prepare for the telling, to construct out of strings she had heard all her life a net to hold Beloved” (76). This is Denver’s desire, to be able to “join” the community that Beloved represents.

The connections revealed through Morrison’s creation of her characters’ names support the assertion that these characters are connected in complicated, over-lapping, and intermingling ways. One must also take into account that naming is a simple narrative tool sometimes easily wielded and arbitrarily interpreted. However, with this skeptical caveat in place, it is also important to note that the process of naming real humans is religiously and culturally held to endow personality and identity, and in literature, the naming of the conceptual character mimics that function.⁸⁰ Finding

dismissed by critics in general and is actually a major factor in the development of the novel’s themes. “In a novel about the evils of slavery where it would seem easy enough—and perhaps entirely logical—to draw a line of demarcation between black and white as between protagonist and antagonist, reader take care: in Morrison’s artistic hands, nothing is ever quite what it appears at first glance” (169).

⁸⁰ Morrison often underscores the importance of naming, its power to inscribe a trace, tell a story and shape perception in her novels by having characters change names of or give nicknames to themselves or other characters. A few examples: Milkman in *Song of Solomon*, Tar Baby, Teapots’s Momma, the Deweys in *Sula*, Stamp Paid and

significance in names can feed into a clichéd and superficial discourse, but it can also reveal the very connection between the ideal and the material because it is the manifest evidence of the intersection between word (name) and flesh (person). In this respect, Morrison has instituted a trace within her name, itself an archive of associations and historical meanings, which links Denver to a history in which she did not participate.

Denver's name both establishes her nature and position in the narrative and provides a linking mechanism for Beloved and Denver. First, "Denver comes from two Old English words, *dene* and *fær*, meaning 'Ford or passage used by the Danes'" (Mills 111). And, as pointed out by Douglas Harper, the original meaning would have been linked to "fare" which now means "money paid to go somewhere" but would have meant then something more similar to "passage, way over or across," close to the German *fahren*.⁸¹ Therefore, etymologically speaking, Denver's name underscores her transitional nature as well as implying a sense of debt for the ability and chance to move from slavery to freedom. Second, the name "Amy" is derived from the Old French and means, quite literally, "beloved," a connecting point which should be fairly obvious. In other words, a white woman, whose name could be literally read as "the beloved," makes Denver's entrance into freedom possible. In this way, both Beloved and Denver bear the same name as Amy. Therefore, the name "Amy Denver," if

Baby Suggs in *Beloved*. In *Sula*, the title-character laments that she never even knew her lover's name, Albert Jacks, always assuming it was Ajax. Morrison associates this lack of knowledge of a name with the inability to know anything (117).

⁸¹ The OED confirms the etymologies of "*fær/fare*" and "*dene/Dane*" but does not make the connection to "Denver," the proper name, in its entry.

translated using its etymological roots, means “the beloved who crossed over at a price.”

Since Denver is born as Sethe crosses the river into freedom, her identity is confirmed as one who is transformational. She cannot in any way be identified with slavery or enslavement—she was born in freedom and named for that movement into freedom and thus completely severed from any ties to slavery; yet she carries with her the debt that is descended from guilt, as Nietzsche argues, to those who made her freedom possible. Amy Denver, white, poor, and indentured, serves as a transitional figure upon whose identity Denver’s can be projected. Amy is indentured but illegally so; thus, her status is precariously positioned between free and bond just as Denver’s could be, being the daughter of a slave but born in a free state.⁸²

There is a debt that Denver feels she owes Beloved, but she is not sure how to pay it, and it is in fact ultimately unpayable. The eventual loss of Beloved, which is prefigured later in this scene, attests to the limits of re-paying this specific debt—“a palm held out for a penny which Denver would gladly give her” (Morrison, *Beloved* 118). The repayment of the debt is, therefore, equivalent to knowledge of how to repay or the knowledge of Beloved’s past, the clues to her true identity, a knowledge that both feel necessary to have in order to feel secure in their own place. Since Denver’s name is an obvious reference to moving forward, this issue of debt also signals the debt that the present and future owe to the past. Sethe herself also alludes to a payment: “I took one journey and I paid for the ticket, but let me tell you

⁸² The tricky issue of fugitive status hinged upon whether or not a slave was free when within a slave state. If Sethe were considered free in Ohio, then the daughter born of her would also be considered free (Yanuck).

something, Paul D Garner; it cost too much! Do you hear me? It cost too much” (15).

Ironically, the questions that Sethe asks Beloved are, in a sense, incredulous, already acknowledging the antagonistic elements that Beloved’s later behavior will make clear. These questions show clearly that Sethe sees Beloved as her child only, but Denver sees her as something else entirely. For example, Sethe doesn’t ask “You don’t remember anything” which would be a question about her lack of ability to remember. She instead asks about “disremembering.” The prefix “dis” can mean “to do the opposite of,” thus implying a willful act of not remembering. It is also a play on the individual word “member” as in a member of the body. Beloved’s body is the creation of “members” prosthetic in function; therefore, the question also accuses Beloved about her own physical presence, about Beloved’s body being made up of pieces of memory. Sethe is subtly accusing Beloved of hiding the very thing that would lay out a true story, from her origins (her mother) to her experiences as a slave (the relation she would have had with the masters). Sethe needs to establish Beloved’s place in her own life’s history—is she her flesh and blood like Denver? Or is she simply a member of the community of slaves and ex-slaves, the only two categories relevant to Sethe’s experience? Or is she something else altogether, as both Denver and Paul D eventually suspect?

But Denver does understand that the answers Beloved might give (although does not give whether willing or not) would not give her the knowledge she needs to repay the debt. Sethe’s questions are personal, questions that apply only to Beloved as the individual, but Denver’s relationship with Beloved is not the relationship of

siblings. Beloved does not relate to Denver as her sister but as the representative of memory, a memory that Denver cannot know even if she hears the answers to Sethe's questions. Because the character of Denver is drawn to represent the present and future, not the past, she is incapable of *joining* Beloved. She is capable, however, of feeling that she owes Beloved something.

When Denver feels this debt, she also feels "pulled into view" by Beloved. She feels examined and caressed and admired within Beloved's sight: "Denver's skin dissolved under that gaze and became soft and bright like the lisle dress that had its arm around her mother's waist. She floated near but outside her own body, feeling vague and intense at the same time. Needing nothing. Being what there was" (118). The context for Denver's feelings, however, is given in the first line of the chapter: "To go back to the original hunger was impossible" (118). Denver has been alone and hungry for connection to something for a long time. "Denver's imagination produced its own hunger and its own food, which she badly needed because loneliness wore her out. *Wore her out*" (28-29, italics in original). Denver's feelings here arise from her perspective only, her imagination. Beloved does not encourage or insinuate any of these feelings. Denver needs to make these connections and feel this comfort because she has been hungry for it for so long.

According to Morrison, "The past, until you confront it, until you live through it, keeps coming back in other forms. The shapes redesign themselves in other constellations, until you get a chance to play it over again" (Caldwell 241). At first, these words seem a bit cliché. Morrison uses the trite expressions "until you confront it," "until you live through it," and "until you . . . play it over again." Morrison might

simply be saying “Replay the past; go through it again. This will prevent the coming back and the new constellations.” But in reality, her words point out the danger inherent in that replay: “You get a chance to play it over again” is not how one escapes because that playing it over again simply forces the past to change shape into other scattered constellations. The confronting and *living through* the past stops the reshaping and reforming of the past from the outside. The important point here is the stress upon what happens “until” one confronts the past. During the “until” time, the past continually recycles. Morrison’s comment stresses the word “until”—the past continues to come back “until” you confront it and can wrest back control over it. The confrontation and the simultaneous living through are revealed through the characters of Sethe, Paul D, and Denver. The debris must be re-imagined, and that re-imagining has been done in *Beloved* through Beloved, assembled and then scattered into traces too vague to harm anymore or to have significance—until, of course, they are reassembled again.

CHAPTER SIX

V. v. Beloved

The facts are history, and only men have histories.

∞ Thomas Pynchon, *V.*

Morrison and Pynchon are arrangers/re-imaginings of the historical record/memory. They employ methods such as polysemy to indicate disconnection from an original event and fragmentation of an unobtainable whole. They incorporate themes such as history centered in the body, the body thus fragmented and separable, to serve their intentions both in the artistic and the political realm. These similarities do not, however, guide them on a similar path or provide the same answers to their central questions of who can access collective memory and how to *interact* with the past without allowing it to deny individual and community agency. Morrison is able to imagine a way out of the closed system of memory return through the redemptive rupture of narrative, whereas Pynchon imagines only a heat death within the closed archive.

Both Morrison and Pynchon use the female body in relation to history. In an interview with Gloria Naylor during the writing of *Beloved*, Morrison explains that her impulse to write the novel came not only from the story of Margaret Garner but also from the story of a woman who delayed revealing that she had been shot by her lover so that he could have time to escape.

I had about fifteen or twenty questions that occurred to me with those two stories in terms of what it is that really compels a good woman to displace the self, her self. So what I started doing and thinking about for a year was to project the self not into the way we say “yourself,” but to put a space between those words, as though the self were really a twin or a thirst or a friend or something that sits right next to you and watches you, which is what I was talking about when I said “the dead girl.” So I had just projected her out into the earth. . . . So I just imagined the life of a dead girl which was the girl that Margaret Garner killed, the baby girl that she killed . . . I just imagined her remembering what happened to her, being someplace else and returning, knowing what happened to her. And I call her Beloved so that I can filter all these confrontations and questions that she has in that situation, which is 1851, and then to extend her life, you know, her search, her quest, all the way through as long as I care to go, into the twenties where it switches to this other girl. . . . She will be the mirror, so to speak. (“A Conversation” 208)

Pynchon uses the character V. in the same manner. He “projects” V. out into the landscape of his fictional world, a conglomeration of stories just as Morrison used these archived bits to create Beloved. These projected entities become mirrors, in V. most clearly articulated in the stories about Mélanie l’Heuremaudit and Vera Meroving, through which to re-imagine a larger history from the perspective of one singular story. Just as Beloved becomes the filter through which Morrison can explore

the general, overarching history of slavery and its consequences on the individual and the personal experience of the slave and the family, V. is the filter through which Pynchon can explore the general, overarching history of international conflict and the personal experience of the everyday individuals caught in its blind sweep.

For the reader, the driving question in the novel *Beloved* is, who is she/it and what does she/it mean? In V., the driving question is the same—who or what is V. and what does she/it mean? Once the actions of Sethe are slowly revealed bit by bit, scene by scene to the reader through particles of memories, the central question that makes the narrative significant politically becomes whether Sethe's act—the murder of her child to save her from slavery and its dire consequences for her own humanity—was justified. As the reader begins to piece together the significance of V. and to understand that she is diffused throughout the narrative, never located in one place and in one time, the significance of her body as a corporeal manifestation of historical oppression and its dire consequences on humanity at large becomes more evident.

Personal history, in the sweep of the monumental history, can change and in so changing can serve as a challenge to monumental history. Morrison turns usual wisdom on its head, as she often does, concerning our influence on time and human activity: "I know I can't change the future but I can change the past. It is the past, not the future, which is infinite. Our past was appropriated. I am one of the people who has to reappropriate it" (Taylor-Guthrie xiii-xiv). The central plot question in Pynchon's novel is "What or who is V.?" This question drives the character of Stencil, at least. In *Beloved*, a similar question is necessary. But a more fundamental

question in both novels and in both accompanying histories is also “what happened?” What were the sets of historical circumstances that created these situations for the characters? What movements in history have created and sustained these entities, and do they in fact answer any of our questions about why things happen, or is history just a random ordering and reordering of events? Ultimately, when Sethe replays the events, she moves forward into the past to reclaim it and shape it and move towards the reappropriation that Morrison mentions. When Stencil delves into stories about the past, he is only moving towards the past without reclaiming or reshaping it, only amassing more and more information that may or may not be connected. Some of the information he acquires is material evidence, like the dentures he steals from Eigenvalue’s office; and some are already in the form of stories, like Fausto’s journal. However, he remains unable to integrate those elements into a personal story that would enable him to form an unfractured identity. Charles E. Winquist writes,

The inability to tell a story leaves an unintelligible residue in our lives that is too large. There are too many feelings that lie fallow because we are not able to connect them with the reality of the self. The story can be viewed as an integrating structure that organizes our feelings and forms a sense of continuous identity. To live without a story is to be disconnected from our past and our future. Without a story we are bound to the immediacy of the moment, and we are forever losing our grip on the reality of our own identity with the passage of discrete moments. We are unable to speak of primordial or eschatological time.

Perhaps a more urgent consideration is that we have no way of seeing beyond immediate moments of crisis. (103)

Stencil is in such a position to be unable to see “beyond immediate moments of crisis.” Indeed, being “born in 1901 . . . Stencil was in time to be the century’s child” (Pynchon, *V.* 48), a direct association between Stencil’s life period and the century’s moments of crisis, namely the aftermath of world-scale oppression and colonialization which helped set the stage for the serious conflicts of the twentieth century. Because the story he would like to construct for himself is dependent upon his preconceived purpose of finding V.’s body, he places himself outside of the possibility of story construction because he is not satisfied with the immaterial story since it is not hard evidence. In fact, he only “gather[s] useless memorabilia,” (57) useless material evidence, because he does not connect them in any coherent narrative. His desire for material evidence of a past, which is temporally and spatially distant, blocks his ability to be integrated into a storytelling structure since storytelling itself is immaterial. Storytelling involves metaphorical construction of events, and Stencil is not in a position to metaphorize since he desires only literal evidence as is found in archival spaces.

V.’s is a country of coincidence, ruled by a ministry of myth. Whose emissaries haunt this century’s streets. Porcépic, Mondaugen, Stencil père, this Maijstral, Stencil fils. Could any of them create a coincidence? Only Providence creates. If the coincidences are real then Stencil has never encountered history at all, but something far more appalling. (485)

Stencil identifies V.'s domain as one that is outside of the current time and place where real life events are under the power of storytelling from the moment of their occurrence. The emissaries, all the characters he mentions, even himself, are the representatives of that other place and time who bring the past into the architecture of the current time. He asks if these characters, himself included, could "create a coincidence," or make things/events "go together," but he then automatically denies that possibility with "Only Providence creates." He is trying desperately to undermine the imaginative, ordering narrative of the individual that would allow for singular and multiple histories. If the individual can narrate from the material of the archive, then there is indeed no "real" history, something he therefore could not have encountered. Stencil finds this possibility "appalling."

In finding V., Stencil thinks he will uncover the link that connects all the random events of history and prove the existence of an order because the horror that he cannot face is such randomness, that history is simply a chaotic, unordered, random movement of time. If history is random, then it is meaningless, and Stencil cannot accept that.

Furthermore, placing Stencil in a double bind, Stencil does not metaphorize V. because she is metaphor already, and he is looking for a fleshed body. He is actually attempting to move her from concept to material, the inverse of narration. In *Beloved*, those who surround her see her first as flesh and then subsequently move her into the concept that they need, creating a narrative for themselves and for the community. Although V. appears in various fleshed forms, she never is in the flesh with Stencil and thus she is always meaning, or the multiplicities of meaning, to be filled in. For

Stencil, V. is a “symptom” only, not the thing itself, whereas Morrison creates *Beloved* to be both flesh and concept at the same time. Therefore, Barthes’ cycling, the movement from meaning to form and then back to meaning, functions with *Beloved* but not with V.

While Stencil is hard at work chasing a past he will never be able to actually “collect” and show as ordered, Sethe is often forced into a metaphorical relationship with the past which also undermines her own needs: speaking of Sweet Home, Sethe tells Paul D, “But it’s where we were . . . comes back whether we want it to or not” (Morrison, *Beloved* 14). And Sethe cannot forgive herself for what Kristen Boudreau calls a romanticized version of the past: “Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her—remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that” (Morrison, *Beloved* 6). Sethe’s memory, however, is not necessarily romanticized but both inclusive, incorporating a more general picture of the past with its many diverse aspects, and exclusive, since the memories tend to focus less on the more painful aspects in favor of the harmless, even beautiful, ones. Boudreau also points out that Sethe characterizes the “ugly clump of scars” on her own back as a “chokecherry tree” in an effort to beautify pain that the text will then undercut with Paul D’s vision of the same scar, allowing multiple views to interact and be simultaneously valid. However, the impulse to “beautify” pain is not the intent in either passage. Morrison is employing the literary techniques of comparison and metaphor to narrate the untellable and in the process allowing Sethe the power to do so as well. It is not

possible either in theory or in practice to be present again with the events of the past—we re-present them because they are impossible to approach.

In order to have an individual, certain experience with the true event of pain and degradation and dehumanization that these memories and the scar represent, they must be shaped by narration; metaphor is one way to do that. In allowing Sethe access to the untellable and created possible reformations of the past, Morrison can make the memory somehow cathartic for Sethe's character and, by extension, for the reader. The very ability to take the past and reshape it into a metaphor to make it even close to comprehensible in the present is a power that animates. Halle, for example, with butter smeared on his face, could not do that. He could not or did not take his experience and shape it into a story. His voice is absent from Morrison's text, not because he was not recorded but because he did not speak at all. His experiences muted him, and Morrison shows the consequences of the inability to narrate: Halle loses his mind and stops living, Morrison's version of moving into the inanimate. Stencil and Profane share this fate. They both trend towards becoming inanimate.

This ability or inability to narrate is the dominant theme in both novels. The dominant metaphor which provides the location for this struggle is the architectural placement of the archive in the characters' physical bodies. This reification of the archival elements in a *place* that is a *body* manifests itself not only in those characters themselves but in the characters who surround their bodies, interacting with them, reading them and narrating from the pieces of which they are made. Furthermore, corporeal dissolution, referred to in the two novels in various ways as a coming apart, a breaking into pieces, a becoming a piece of inanimate debris, or a melting away, is

prominent in both novels. This fear of dissolution is always inherent in an archive because of its hypomnemic function, as Derrida points out. Storing the bits and pieces of history *in a place* is inherently dangerous because the threat of deliberate, collateral, or accidental destruction is ever present. The characters are built to make this threat manifest. Stencil, Profane, V., Sethe and Beloved all feel as if they are in danger of being broken down into a type of inanimate debris never to be reconstituted. In the economy of the metaphor, this reconstitution is tantamount to narrative. The threatening/threatened decadence can only be forestalled or perhaps even overcome through narrative because narrative is the piecing back together again, the giving of flesh to the bone of history.

Beloved and *V.* were written by distinctive authors and seem radically divergent in both subject and tone. However, they are actually concerned with the same questions concerning the workings of memory—both personal and collective—through storytelling in relation to identity formation and/or continuance. How does a group and its individual members become fully human subjects with agency when their history, their past, has conspired only to destroy them?

In their construction, there is a strong link between the two novels. First, the bodies of *V.* and *Beloved* both demonstrate this assemblage of memory from the archival space and, in the process, reveal similar concerns about personal agency and the consequences of narratives in both defining and defending identity. Second, both authors have used a corporeal model, an embodied entity, to function as the hypomnesic space for memory, although *Beloved* is available to the other characters when *V.* is not. Therefore, these archival characters, both title characters, are

surrounded by casts that need to appropriate their bodies to create narratives when they strive to return to the bodies to find the pieces of the past. Third, the interrelations of the characters of Stencil, Profane, and V. and Denver, Sethe, and Beloved further underscore the role of community in memory and storytelling. These two groups exhibit common functions across the narrative scopes of the two novels, and their interactions reveal the promise and the danger of the archive. The archive can be used by the community of oppressed as a means to escape a past and thus allow the use of the preterite. Or the archive can be used by those who control it and its contents to forever entrap the Other within memory and a static, entrapped identity. This identity would then be determined by the “it will have been” of the future anterior which precludes the possibility of multiple histories.

The Individual and the Community

It is easy to grasp the practical truth that the community is impossible without the individual, but it is somewhat difficult to grasp the truism that the individual is impossible without the community. The linguistic act of storytelling is one of the primary ways through which this symbiotic relationship is discernible, indicative of that the relationship between the individual and the community is one of reciprocity and mutual creation and validation. Clifford Geertz emphatically states in his groundbreaking *The Interpretation of Cultures* that “there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture” (49). In other words, what makes one human, an individual with significance as such, is community. Only through being a part of a community can the individual exist as an autonomous identity. The community creates the conditions of individual agency because the community itself provides the

parameters of expression that the community will accept and value, its culture. In turn, the individual formulates his or her position within that community. Again, according to Geertz, “Becoming human is becoming individual, and we become individual under the guidance of cultural patterns, historically created systems of meaning in terms of which we give form, order, point, and direction to our lives” (52). The community is created through the individuals’ mutual agreement on meaning, not as the True but as the acceptable Certain.⁸³

⁸³ Language in the form of the story is the conduit through which the Certain is generated and diffused within the community. The dependence of the individual upon the linguistic community for the establishment/expression of its individuality is now widely accepted in traditions as diverse as Viconian studies and Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Summarizing Saul Kripke’s argument concerning Ludwig Wittgenstein, Antonio Negri states

If one considers the fact that the individual forms part of a community, the situation changes. In fact it is the community (the rules of language) that establishes the controls that are necessary so that assertions related to concepts and mental states may be effective in their interrelation. This solution does not demonstrate the truth of assertions, nor does it furnish the conditions under which assertions may be true; the success of actions linked to concepts and mental states depends purely and simply on the empirical fact that, in our responses, we agree with one another (357).

Kripke establishes that we have indirect access to the intentions of those who have spoken or acted in the past. “[A]ny present intention could be interpreted so as to accord with anything we may choose to do. So there can be neither accord, nor conflict” (55), so interpretation cannot be assumed as valid, and, indeed, this assertion aligns rather well with the state of the archive. Materials within the archive can never be taken as pure intended meaning given that the origin of those materials is always removed from the moment and place of interpretation. Meaning can only be ascribed to them based on either a set of proscribed rules concerning storage, categorization, and retrieval or through reconstruction based on the present and future understanding of a context that has past.

Therefore, the storytelling function that enters is fundamental to meaning for the present and future individual and community because they are encountering a collection of materials that have never been constructed in just that way before. The individual storyteller is tasked with reconstruction in line with the community’s needs, and the community validates the storyteller’s enunciations based on those needs. Geertz explains that “We live, as one writer has neatly put it, in an ‘information gap.’

Bodies as Archive

An event occurs that is at its moment and place of occurrence free from representation. This is Truth. Subsequent to the moment of the event, immediate fragmentation of that event into its material debris over time and space occurs, never to return to a state of Truth. The culturally constructed archive exemplifies the desire to retain the True. This debris is appraised for its relationship to the original event, catalogued according to its relation to other appraised debris, presented in the form of records or spectacle within a physical archive which is, in turn, given its importance in the community via its architecture and imposed order. Then the debris is available for reconstruction/reassembly into narrative by those that have access to the debris. These reconstructions are just that—re-constructions—and can only acquire the status of Certainty regardless of the storyteller that uses the debris. However, the danger within the archive is that the narrative reconstructed by the powerful is purposefully

Between what our body tells us and what we have to know in order to function, there is a vacuum we must fill ourselves, and we fill it with information (or misinformation) provided by our culture” (Geertz 50). If humans are simply separate physical bodies, we cannot exist with other bodies in any coherent way since our individual ways of knowing and therefore acting would be bound and centered only on our physical perception. The information gap is ever present; it is the gap between the original True event and the time and place in which we encounter that event in its material debris. In the reconstruction through storytelling, the gap is bridged through the individual storyteller for the needs of the community, which in turn is organized to support the storyteller’s individual expression. The most elemental aspect of this mutual agreement occurs through language. “The expression of a mental state was recognized as the linguistic exhibition of a real experience, and considered as the site of mediation of a collective expression” (Negri 355). The private experience is given context and, therefore, meaning by the agreed-upon collective expression, or, again, as Negri states: “it is a matter of linguistic production as the production of subjectivity in *common*” (Negri 354). The individual can only exist as a member of a community that has agreed upon its system of communication, its stories.

construed as the legitimate narrative, the one that actually is true, ignoring or making impossible other possible reconstructions.

Unfortunately, the True events that have created the archive of the modern era are full of associations with evil and represent a sickness. Derrida's designation that the archive *contains* what is "mal" and does not just inspire the need to destroy it is expressly mentioned in the insert with the heading "Prière d'insérer" ("Please insert") to the French edition of *Mal d'Archive*:

Les désastres qui marquent cette fin de millénaire, ce sont aussi des *archives du mal*: dissimulées ou détruites, interdites, détournées, "refoulées." Leur traitement est à la fois massif et raffiné au cours de guerres civiles ou internationales, de manipulations privées ou secrètes.

These disasters that mark the end of the millennium are also *archives of evil*: dissimulated or destroyed, forbidden, distorted, "repressed." Their treatment is at once general and refined in the course of civil or international wars and private or secret manipulation. (translation mine)

Derrida is deconstructing the use of the archive to impose certain narratives on the masses. He is also metonymically establishing that the events themselves, the disasters, *are* archives. They are and will be saved in collective memory through the physical evidence related to the events that occur. Then the prosthetic function of storytelling begins; and either justifications in the form of master narratives arise that in turn allow more destruction (Sethe's demise and the elder Stencil's disappearance are evidence of that process), or multiple narratives of community stories are allowed to reconstruct

the experiences of the individual. The only way out of the cycle is to allow the communities whose stories make up the debris of the archive access to that debris to construct their own narratives. Then the archival space is ruptured. It is a battle between those in the communities, who must use the debris to form their own stories, and the institutions, which seek to arrange the stories for them. These evil moments in history that made definitive turns in the fortunes of the world and, most tragically, in the communities of the dispossessed are made corporeal in *Beloved* and *V.*

Pynchon's scope of traumatic events is certainly much broader than Morrison's. He wants to investigate the broad movements of colonialism and world conflict and how these have created our postmodern society and defined the lives of the particular individuals and their communities in relation to those sweeping historical movements. Morrison's concern is with one particular sweeping historical disaster, the enslavement of Africans, and the effects of that on the particular individuals and their communities. Pynchon and Morrison have each created archival characters, prosthetic bodies that physically express the past, to show how the space of the archive *could* be escaped through narrative.⁸⁴

The communities in tension with the power-and-Truth imbued archives must meet that power with their own narratives. If they do not, the narratives that can arise from the dust of the archive gain the strength of irrefutable truth, a self-referential

⁸⁴ Contrary to the prosthetic bodies of *V.* and *Beloved*, Eva Peace, in Morrison's *Sula*, is missing a part of her body that she does not replace. She has an "empty place on her left side" (27) which she supplements with a cart and crutches, but she never uses a prosthesis. She wears short skirts to show her "one glamorous leg" which only serves to accentuate the "long fall of space below her left thigh." The missing leg and what happened were the topics of stories around town and by Eva herself, thus establishing the principle that in the lack of the body, there is enough to create the desire for narrative. The very lack is material and speaks.

cycling that has led to what Stencil calls “the Situation,” the evil in *Beloved*, and the sickness coupled with desire that Derrida points out. The representations of archival construction out of the movements of history, *V.*, and *Beloved* are representative of this sickness of the archive and must be undone in order to allow construction by those outside, or *pro fana*.

Both texts first establish that the bodies of *V.* and *Beloved* are pieced together, and fragmentation is a constant threat. This sense of dissolution or decadence occurs in both novels, and there is practically no difference in the use of this metaphor. The difference in the two novels, however, concerns the narrative act and how it is or is not accomplished. When Morrison states that one cannot change the future, she literally means that one can change the past because the only knowledge, the only certainty humans have of the past, are the stories that we tell about it. Change the story—rearrange it—and you change the past.

When Denver thinks *Beloved* has disappeared in the dark of the cold house, she too feels as if she has come apart, a telling metaphor for the loss of one’s own community and individual history. This scene reveals the corporeal changes of melting and disappearing that Denver feels for lack of *Beloved*.

If she stumbles, she is not aware of it because she does not know where her body stops, which part of her is an arm, a foot or a knee. She feels like an ice cake torn away from the solid surface of the stream, floating on darkness, thick and crashing against the edges of things around it. Breakable, meltable and cold. . . . Now she is crying because she has no self. Death is a skipped meal compared to this. She can feel her

thickness thinning, dissolving into nothing. She grabs the hair at her temples to get enough to uproot it and halt the melting for a while. Teeth clamped shut, Denver brakes her sobs. She doesn't move to open the door because there is no world out there. She decides to stay in the cold house and let the dark swallow her like the minnows of light above. She won't put up with another leaving, another trick. . . . And when she got around to worrying about what would be the case if Sethe died or Paul D took her away, a dream-come-true comes true just to leave her on a pile of newspaper in the dark. (Morrison, *Beloved* 122-123)

She herself is becoming "worse than death," which is a state of inanimateness. Tellingly, she is situated on a pile of newspaper in the dark, another piece of the historical record stored behind closed doors awaiting the reanimation of narrative. The narrative would have to be constituted by joining, not leaving, the community, not by the individual.

Likewise, when Profane attempts to narrate, he only feels himself falling apart. Ironically, only beneath the architecture of the street, in the belly of the city where the sewer water flows, can he find any hint of escape. The flow of water is both spatially and temporally under the architecture of the street/Street, therefore avoiding any boundaries. This lack of boundaries ceases when he reemerges into the street. Profane inhabits a dreamlike world in the sewers; and above ground, he dreams of falling apart. This dream of falling apart is immediately connected to a "story" that he knows, which is, more precisely, a joke. This discrepancy between story and joke is in essence

a fitting allusion to the irony of Profane's position; the story that haunts him is a story which is of its very nature supposed to undercut expectations and keep the listener off-balance. The joke is not of Pynchon's creation but is a well-known one, its many permutations found with a simple Google search which also illustrates the principle that Profane's story might be both mythic and archival. Pynchon's version is as follows:

Somehow it was all tied up with a story he'd heard once, about a boy born with a golden screw where his navel should have been. For twenty years he consults doctors and specialists all over the world, trying to get rid of this screw, and having no success. Finally, in Haiti, he runs into a voodoo doctor who gives him a foul-smelling potion. He drinks it, goes to sleep and has a dream. In this dream he finds himself on a street, lit by green lamps. Following the witch-man's instructions, he takes two rights and a left from his point of origin, finds a tree growing by the seventh street light, hung all over with colored balloons. On the fourth limb from the top there is a red balloon; he breaks it and inside is a screwdriver with a yellow plastic handle. With the screwdriver he removes the screw from his stomach, and as soon as this happens he wakes from the dream. It is morning. He looks down toward his navel, the screw is gone. That twenty years' curse is lifted at last. Delirious with joy, he leaps up out of bed, and his ass falls off. (V. 34)

Pynchon's narrator goes through the motions of relaying a joke with immediately irrelevant details, highlighting the story-telling aspect of the passage. Pynchon

provides his own inter-textual analysis of Profane's dream, almost as an anthropological academic exercise in identifying and constructing a record of Profane and the community of the dispossessed that he represents.

To Profane, alone in the street, it would always seem maybe he was looking for something too to make the fact of his own disassembly plausible as that of any machine. It was always at this point that the fear started: here that it would turn into a nightmare. Because now, if he kept going down that street, not only his ass but also his arms, legs, sponge brain and clock of a heart must be left behind to litter the pavement, be scattered among manhole covers. (35)

The allusion to manhole covers directly connects this passage to the experience that Profane has when he passes, whole, through those manhole covers into the sewers to hunt alligators. Profane finds himself most active, slaying monsters, where the possibility of narrative is closest, below the street, where the sewer waters flow to the sea. He does actually manage to turn these adventures into stories that he tells. The problem is, however, that they are employed only to serve his physical needs.

As he hunts alligators in the sewers, a place where he can hear "no sound except the dull wash of water" (125), he approaches the former sewer-dwelling of the priest Fairing where the narrator signals the progressive nature of his descent with the water's depth:

The water began to get a little deeper. They were entering Fairing's Parish, named after a priest who'd lived topside years ago. During the Depression of the '30's, in an hour of apocalyptic well-being, he had

decided that the rats were going to take over after New York died. Lasting eighteen hours a day, his beat had covered the breadlines and missions, where he gave comfort, stitched up raggedy souls. He foresaw nothing but a city of starved corpses, covering the sidewalks and the grass of the parks, lying belly up in the fountains, hanging wrynecked from the streetlamps. The city—maybe America, his horizons didn't extend that far—would belong to the rats before the year was out. (120)

The reference to Profane's descent into the subterranean connects directly to Fairing's paranoia about the future and the death that will come to the city streets above, the purely architectural, archival space that Profane inhabits and from which he does not escape even when he goes below it. This lack of escape is more pronounced in that Profane's experience in the sewers affords him a rare opportunity to narrate, but he is unable to tether his narration to anything that involves the community or the reshaping of the past. He is immersed only in the present and his own selfish, corporeal interests. "I tell tall stories to girls I want to screw, Profane thought" (146). His "tall stories" are not created on the story-sustaining combination of real history and imagination; they do not constitute lasting myth.

He told her about the alligators; Angel, who had a fertile imagination too, added detail, color. Together on the stoop they hammered together a myth. Because it wasn't born from fear of thunder, dreams, astonishment at how the crops kept dying after harvest and coming up again every spring, or anything else very permanent, only a temporary

interest, a spur-of-the-moment tumescence, it was a myth rickety and transient as the bandstands and the sausage-pepper of Mulberry Street.

(146)

Trudging through the waters, Profane plays out his own grotesque version of the hero who enters the bowels of the earth to defeat the monsters and return to a renewed landscape. He is able only to create a “transient myth” which applies directly to his own selfish pursuits. Here is Profane’s specific failure. He does not succeed in creating a narrative that will sustain his own identity or his community’s or explain their significance in relation to each other or the world or their history. Therefore, he will only stay entrapped within his “schlemihl” life and become less and less vital until he becomes inanimate. There is no possibility to escape the archive with a “hammered together,” “rickety” narrative that is based not on the construction of archival debris but on added color and detail that did not even originally exist. His story is not even a copy or a construction based on an unreachable True; it is a depthless, foundationless spectacle with only one purpose—selfish satisfaction.

Profane does, in the mythic sense, enter into the underworld full of monsters when he descends into the sewers. The sewer is a strange hybrid space. It is architecturally tied to the street, but its subterranean position and its eventual meeting/reunion with the sea makes it both archival and mythic, a juncture of possible rupture if you follow it far enough. So the sewers are the conduits under the streets where the water flows within man-made constructions but that simultaneously erase the architectural boundaries of the streets above. In this space, the traditional narratives might gain power for the community. The imposed architecture of the

Street/street above can be avoided in the sewers, and it is possible for individuals to define their place within their own community and thus their own identity outside of/under these rigid and oppressive master narratives. Furthermore, one must descend into the earth to reach the sewers, a movement that hints at passing into a previous time although the street above exists coterminously. However, the narrator points out that the impetus for the story is not an historical one but a transient one that leaves no trace and no questions to be answered, thus circumventing the connection to any materials from the past. In neither architectural space is Profane able to establish any effect that results from his own agency—above, he is caught within the architecture of the Street/street; below, he is completely removed from any historically important materials with which to construct a narrative which would align him with a community. Ironically, the community he has above is powerless due to their inability to communicate within that architecture. In the space in which narrative could be meaningful, he is alone.

In the pivotal scene in which Profane realizes that the alligators actually want him to kill them, he is thus rendered at the service of the monsters and not as a hero who overcomes them. Therefore, the narrator once again connects the surface with the sewers through water and its flow: “From time to time his quarry would half-turn, coy, enticing. A little sad. Up above it must have been raining. A continual thin drool sounded behind them at the last sewer opening” (113). Profane hunts alligators that willingly die. The elements surrounding him set the scene for his story, and his actions or attempts at ordering them are too weak to last because they do not attempt to structure a narrative chronology that connects the past to the future. There is a

“curious loss of time” (115) among those who are “bums” like Profane and his fellow alligator hunters, as Pynchon names them, because they have no community and no stories with the power to reappropriate their own past. Their stories are told by others, the institutions who have the authority to create archives and imagine the master narratives, or more specifically, the narratives of the masters. Profane implicitly acknowledges who these “Others” are when he considers the drivers of history on “the bench behind the Library” (226) where he acknowledges that “history unfolds according to economic forces.” In other words, history is created to serve the economic interests of the powerful, and allowing the voices of the dispossessed and repressed to gain an audience would undermine the ability to amass fortune and stay in power. They are the ones who have structured the archival space that is apparent in the Street/street. But even when Profane delves below that space, his lack of community renders him unable to perform any narrative construction.

Stencil’s attempts at narrative are undermined as well, but the reasons are different. It is not because he lacks access to historical debris but that there is too much for him to sort through and create meaningful connections. Without a community to help him, his position within the archive is thus overwhelming. Furthermore, the one stark contrast to be found between V. and Beloved is that Stencil is indeed searching for V., but this question is still an apt one: how could Stencil find her without a name? Her name and thus her identity has multiplied and scattered her into separate parts resulting in too many possibilities. Again, the individual has disintegrated and has been swept into the dusty corners of history. Stencil cannot reassemble V. or his own story although Pynchon’s text underscores Stencil’s

attempts. The text even purposefully places Stencil outside of the text itself, his speech always in third person, serving to further remove him from any position of power since he is not even a part of his own lived experience but only a reporter of it, a stencil of Stencil.

Bringing her together again into a sensible narrative, however, proves impossible for Stencil because in the process of trying to narrate her, he also comes apart, a fate that is possible for Sethe as well until her community and then Paul D step in. The narrator explains Stencil's attempts at narration and his subsequent disintegration:

V. in Spain, V. on Crete: V. crippled in Corfu, a partisan in Asia Minor. Giving tango lessons in Rotterdam she had commanded the rain to stop; it had. Dressed in tights adorned with two Chinese dragons she handed swords, balloons and colored handkerchiefs to Ugo Medichevole, a minor magician, for one lustless summer in the Roman Campagna. . . . It went on like this, all the way up into the 70's, this progress-of-four; Stencil caught up in a compulsive yarning, the others listening with interest. It wasn't that Third Avenue was any kind of drunk's confessional. Did Stencil like his father suffer some private leeriness about Valletta - foresee some submersion, against his will, in a history too old for him, or at least of a different order from what he'd known? Probably not; only that he was on the verge of a major farewell. If it hadn't been Profane and the two bums it would have been

somebody: cop, barkeep, girl. Stencil that way had left pieces of himself—and V.—all over the western world.

V. by this time was a remarkably scattered concept. (418)

The “yarning” that Stencil is caught up in results in his own fragmentation and inability to connect with Profane or “somebody;” likewise, Profane’s attempts at story-telling further alienate him from any connection to others in his community. This fragmentation is also possibly “foreseen” as a result of “submersion” within history although he almost immediately discounts that possibility. The idea of submersion, complicated by the associated metaphors of water and flooding, is parallel with fragmentation. Stencil is metaphorically submerged in a flood of information which renders his connections too fluid and ever-changing.

Beloved and V. both lay claim to the histories with which they are coterminous. V. is considered a “symptom” of the history: ““Not even as if she were any cause, any agent. She was only there. But being there was enough, even as a symptom” (Pynchon, *V.* 416). V. is a result of the political and social upheavals of monolithic ideologies like colonialism and fascism. Beloved, too, is a result of the monolithic socio-economic movement of slavery.⁸⁵ Narrating, re-corporealizing their

⁸⁵ I mean to highlight the universal versus the specific here in terms of the archive and the control that the powerful have over history via the archive and how it can only be ruptured by the community/individual's story. The universal is the global/massive/indeed monolithic/all-encompassing socio-economic historical fact of slavery, an inhuman treatment of people as objects, really a machine of production which cared nothing for the human consequences of its mechanisms. The specific would be the human beings and their individual emotional, physical, spiritual, and psychological trauma/destruction as a result of the inhuman logistics of the slave system. Slavery, instigated by the master class for purely economic reasons, in essence, attempted to obliterate entire swaths of peoples both literally and metaphorically along with their cultures/languages/religions/traditions, and this

stories both reanimates the *archive du mal* and serves to confront it. This is what accessing archives of the “true” past can do for the individual and the community. The individual and communal voice or certainty within the confines of the archival space allows the storyteller to break out of it, to burst it open, both eliminating its power and substantiating its necessity because the debris from which to reconstruct the story exists within the architectural structure of the archive. This rupture allows for the production of narrative which simultaneously allows for its destruction—narration is both a way to remember and to forget. The submersion metaphor also indicates and underscores this memory/destruction dualism. So neither Stencil nor Profane can destroy the archive and will be forever trapped within its architecture.

Disassembling the Archive

Two distinct communities are involved in the literal disassembly and dispersal of *V.* and in the dissolution and dispersal of *Beloved*. *V.*'s disassembly is accomplished by the children, whereas *Beloved*'s is accomplished by the women of the community. In the end, Stencil and Profane do not literally come apart, and neither do Sethe, Denver or Paul D. The archival characters, however, do. *V.* does, both literally in body and metaphorically by remaining a “remarkably scattered concept.” *Beloved*, too, literally seems to dissipate into pieces before the eyes of the community and yet remains “Like an unpleasant dream during a troubling sleep” (Morrison, *Beloved* 275), appearing scattered among the “rustle of a skirt” and “the knuckles brushing a cheek in sleep” and when “Sometimes the photograph of a close

massive alteration in the basic lives of African peoples is reflected in the singular individual's story.

friend or relative . . . shifts, and something more familiar than the dear face itself moves there.”

Ella is responsible for gathering together the women of the community to rescue Sethe. In fact, Ella’s consciousness reflects the general consciousness of the community. She faults Sethe neither for her “rage,” which she understands, nor for her “reaction to it” which “Ella thought was prideful, misdirected, and Sethe herself too complicated. When she got out of jail and made no gesture toward anybody, and lived as though she were alone, Ella junked her and wouldn’t give her the time of day” (256). Ella has not been able to forgive Sethe’s rejection of communion with others. “Sethe’s crime was staggering and her pride outstripped even that; but she could not countenance the possibility of sin moving on in the house, unleashed and sassy. Daily life took as much as she had. The future was sunset; the past something to leave behind. And if it didn’t stay behind, well, you might have to stomp it out” (256). The image of stomping out the evil evokes Derrida’s image of the desire that burns to destroy the archive, the archive fever which is as much about forgetting the past as narrating it, making it inaccessible so that the evil events of the past do not continue and have consequences in the present. The “sin” that Ella ascribes to Beloved is made equivalent to “the past” and must be faced, showing clearly that the sin could not be faced as an acceptable entity “unleashed” “in the house.” The sin, the past must be faced in order to be “stomped out” like a fire, again the recalling of the past in order to destroy it. Ella here represents the need to destroy the evidence of the past by *facing* it down, literally turning towards the past instead of the past being injected into the present.

Therefore, this establishes the basic premise that only the community can act to rupture the archive through its own narrative agency. The individual acts as storyteller, but his or her position in relation to the community enables reconstruction of identity through storytelling to function. The desire to rupture dissipates the archive, however, and does not result in its utter destruction, as Derrida warns. She understands that if Sethe had emerged from her experience and accepted the judgment and consolation from the community, she would have been reintegrated; in turn, this reintegration would have provided her with a way out of the cycle of rememory. Through the community, Ella believes, Sethe could have found redemption. But Sethe's removal of herself from the larger communal "truth" and subsequent withdrawal into the archival space of 124 entrapped her in the timeless space where she could only recycle memory and never escape it. Destruction of the archive is Ella's plan, and not until the women of the community aid in the destruction of Beloved can Sethe escape the rememory cycle through the rupture of the archive.

The women of Sethe's community come face to face with memory when they decide to save Sethe from Beloved: "When they caught up with each other, all thirty, and arrived at 124, the first thing they saw was not Denver sitting on the steps, but themselves. Younger, stronger, even as little girls lying in the grass asleep" (258). To come to 124 is to enter into the time of the archive, the future anterior space where the women can look back upon their own innocence as Derrida looked back on the photograph understanding what might have been. The trajectory implicit in the photograph encounters the personal Certain knowledge of what has been, the True. The women are arriving at 124 not to continue the narration that Sethe seeks—the

story that might have been, that she as storyteller has tried to create from the disintegration of her self. They are trying to dismember the destructive body of Beloved, thus rupturing the archive and allowing the community to construct a narrative that represents their Certain experience.

Sethe had been trying to re-member the body of her lost child through the body of Beloved—the corporeal manifestation of that child’s memory, the certain experience of Sethe as mother and crawling-already? child—not the memory of the beloved. The women see her destructive power whereas Sethe only sees that Beloved wants the join that will heal both her and the lost-to-history child. “When I explain it she’ll understand, because she understands everything already. I’ll tend her as no mother ever tended a child, a daughter” (200). Sethe had been seeking a way to personal redemption, which is not possible without the community. The women understand the danger of being trapped in the space of memory, whereas Sethe as a sole individual is apart and blind to the danger. As a group, they seek communal redemption which will encompass Sethe’s need because it will incorporate her personal story into the story of the community, giving it context and paradigmatic structure so it will not fall apart.

When Sethe interprets the coming of Edward Bodwin to 124 as the return of schoolteacher, she gathers up all her “parts” (163), her children, the beloved offspring produced from her body. But in the economy of slavery, those parts were simply more machinery; thus, being taken from her for such use psychologically fragments the human mother. Then, later, when Beloved is with Sethe, Beloved grows more dominant in the relationship and Sethe grows weaker until she is close to death.

The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became; the brighter Beloved's eyes, the more those eyes that used never to look away became slits of sleeplessness. Sethe no longer combed her hair or splashed her face with water. She sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur.

(250)

Beloved, seen as the singular unconnected story with no community context, will destroy Sethe because without "what Baby Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what Stamp saw and what made Paul D tremble" (251) there is no redemption possible for Sethe's actions. Sethe's actions, judged without the context of the experience of oppression in the form of slavery, are barbaric at best. Therefore, Sethe will be and deserves to be "chastised" for the act of murder *if* Beloved is indeed the representative of the monumental history that is responsible for her un-joined body. Beloved's body, threatening always to come apart, is representative of a history that possesses no communal creation, and her consumption of Sethe reveals the power of the oppressors to create stories that subjugate the powerless. Beloved is made up of the monumental history that ignores the silenced individual and the communities of the oppressed and therefore cannot stay intact if the communities rise against her with their own voices. Her body is, therefore, the Master Narrative that justifies treating Sethe and her "kind" as simply animals, an idea that Paul D considers when he learns she killed her child.

The other community, the children,⁸⁶ are also responsible for the fragmentation and ultimate demise of the Bad Priest, identified by Maijstral as another V. candidate. The children of Malta run a parallel course to the women who rescue Sethe. They, too, participate in the dismantling of “evil” and allow the possibility to escape the confines of the archive. They, too, are subsumed into the archival space through the disassembly of V.

Stencil, asking Maijstral for left-over physical evidence of V.: Stencil brightened after a while and changed course. "A token. Comb, shoe, glass eye. The children."

"I wasn't watching the children. I was watching your V. What I did see of the children—I recognized none of the faces. No. They may have died before the war ended or emigrated after it. Try Australia. Try the pawnbrokers and curio shops. But as for placing a notice in the agony column: 'Anyone participating in the disassembly of a priest -'"
"Please."

Next day, and for days after, he investigated the inventories of curio merchants, pawnbrokers, ragmen. (Pynchon, *V.* 480-481)

⁸⁶ In Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, children represent a kind of alternate community which has ties to the mysteries Oedipa cannot figure out, making her the outsider. She comes across a group of children participating in a dream-like game: "In Golden Gate Park she came on a circle of children in their nightclothes, who told her they were dreaming the gathering. . . . The night was empty of all terror for them, they had inside their circle an imaginary fire, and needed nothing but their own unpenetrated sense of community" (96). When Oedipa sees a resemblance between a line in their song to her quest, they respond that they "never heard it that way" and "went on warming their hands at an invisible fire. Oedipa, to retaliate, stopped believing in them" (96).

The children are listed, along with other artifacts that prove V.'s existence, as if they are no more than a comb, a shoe, or a glass eye. They were not a literal part of her body, but here they are associated closely with it. The association is directly related to the fact that they are responsible for her disassembly. Furthermore, they become scattered around the world in bodily form as evidence of the past, or their traces may be found in the dusty spaces of curio shops, pawnshops or trash heaps.

The children of Malta, like the women in *Beloved*, understand the struggle inherent in memory between retaining it and destroying it because they are the living, animate element of Malta.

But if their idea of the struggle [between good and evil] could be described graphically it would not be as two equal-sized vectors head-to-head—their heads making an X of unknown quantity; rather as a point, dimensionless—good—surrounded by any number of radial arrows—vectors of evil—pointing inward. Good, i.e., at bay. The Virgin assailed. The winged mother protective. The woman passive. Malta in siege. (364)

The graph that Pynchon imagines here is one of constant attack on the dimensionless good from the forces that radiate toward it from the outside, the dimensional bad. The Roman Catholic children are described as having an “unconscious identification of one's own mother with the Virgin” (364). And Priests, according to Fausto, on Malta “are second only to mothers in order of prestige” (334) and “Priests, like mothers were to be venerated” (365). So the Bad Priest had access to the children of the Malta: “the Bad Priest had been known to gather about him a small knot of children in the street

and give them sermons” but “The children were not, of course, having any,” meaning that they did not take the Bad Priest’s sermons seriously. Fausto describes the Bad Priest:

No one knows his name or his parish. There is only superstitious rumour; excommunicated, confederates with the Dark One. He lives in an old villa past Sliema, near the sea. Found E. one night alone in the street. Perhaps he'd been out prowling for souls. A sinister figure, she said, but with the mouth of a Christ. The eyes were shadowed by a wide-brimmed hat; all she could see were soft cheeks, even teeth. (334)

The passage in *Beloved* reads “nobody anywhere knew her name” (274) just as the Bad Priest has no real name. This Bad Priest, who is eventually taken apart by the children, is also considered “evil” by the children just as Beloved is considered evil by the women of Sethe’s community. Since both characters are archival, the danger they represent to the communities is that they threaten the community’s own understanding of itself, its own narratives which establish and maintain their individual and collective identities, and they wish not to be subsumed by the archival space which will prevent them from escaping a past that could consume them.

As Jeanna Fuston-White explains, the “parts” of the archive must come to some sort of agency—not as victims of history as symbolized by the passive rock of Malta or Sethe’s physical scars but through active construction of the multiple narratives possible which can arise from the debris left from the past, rejecting its forceful construction of one singular, whole master narrative that defines the body of the community and the individual.

Thus, each of Morrison's survivors comes to subjectivity, but by different paths and with different experiences. Morrison is careful not to essentialize the black experience, acknowledging the pain implicit therein, but not breaking down Enlightenment reason and truth only to replace it with an equally constrictive interpretation of universal knowledge. She does not simply generate a coherent subject who is of African descent, but she dismisses the integrated whole in favor of the fragmented self, most eloquently illustrated in her narrative style. Postmodern theory accepts that the view of the human psyche as an integrated whole is a misconception; more accurately, the subject can be described as incoherent, fragmentary, or decentered. Morrison's text, like the African griot, is developed as a series of fragments of the past that unfold throughout the novel. Pieces that have been "disremembered" and suppressed rise to the surface and must be integrated into text and into the characters' experiences. However, this integration is never complete. Holes remain; pieces of the story remain unexplained . . . In the novel, the pieces must be gathered and put in some order. Like the characters, the reader must translate and order the fragments for him/herself. In this ordering, subjectivity coexists with plurality. (Fuston-White 470-471)

Therefore, a need for redemption is apparent in both novels. Sethe wants redemption for her act; Denver needs redemption from the history she never experienced; Stencil wants redemption for the Situation; Profane wants redemption from his own body.

Reconstruction, Rupture, and Redemption

The archive holds the physical traces of memory for a community at large, both giving structure to the community and determining inclusion and exclusion of members of the community. The form that the archive takes and the powers that create it and maintain it impart a physical presence to history that validates it and makes it available, thus providing a structure to memory which can be both advantageous and restrictive, just as Stencil is restricted to story creation in relation to V., and Sethe is forced back into memory in relation to Beloved. The act of imagination challenges the archive but can only do so in the sense that imagination can play within the confines of the physical archive, within the rules of narrative construction. In *V.*, Stencil's imagination is confined to the body of V. and its manifestations. In her coming apart, his story loses power and simply must end. The archive that she is reaches its ultimate stasis of being inanimate and cannot be revived again. In *Beloved*, Beloved's coming apart is the catalyst for Sethe's escape. The narrative movement ruptures the enclosed system and allows a continuous give and take of narrative possibilities. There are parallel passages in the novels that clearly illustrate this difference.

In the epilogue to *Beloved*, Morrison writes one of the most telling passages concerning the central point of the novel, the reanimation of lost bodies through narrative. She pulls back from the specific descriptions of the fleshed Beloved and describes a nameless entity in a curious mix of simple past, continuous present, and simple present.

Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name? Although she has claim, she is not claimed. In the place where long grass opens, the girl who waited to be loved and cry shame erupts into her separate parts, to make it easy for the chewing laughter to swallow her all away. (274)

In describing the knowledge of others about Beloved's identity, Morrison uses simple past and refers to those other than Beloved. Using the simple past reflects the grammatical concept that this knowledge about Beloved is a fixed fact, that it is accomplished and will not change because it is a part of the historical record. To allow this knowledge to remain fixed as a version of the True, however, would undercut the power of storytelling that allows the re-imagining of events, the manifestation of the Certain. As Morrison has pointed out, the past can be changed. Morrison accomplishes this goal in *Beloved* by opening up the archive and rearranging the elements into possibilities of rupture. Underscoring this principle in this particular passage, she pivots into the present, "be," "call," and "know," and the present progressive, "is looking." She continues in present tense with "she has claim," "she is not claimed," and "grass opens." Finally, she mixes past description of "the girl"—"who waited"—with the present "erupts." These shifts all clearly illustrate the temporal/historical confusion of Beloved's position as an archival composite and her construction or assembly out of the debris by a storyteller, as well as revealing the

archival elements that have created her and her historically True and personally
Certain meaning in the text.

Morrison makes a specific distinction between the expressions “to be called” and the fact of a name. The records of an archive would also need to make this distinction. To have a name is personal and emanates from the individual that can be accepted or rejected at will by the person in his/her pronouncements: “This is my name” or the more common “I am” followed by the name, thus establishing personal identity. “To be called,” however, is a construction that emanates from the position of the Other, thus its passive form. Within the space of the archive, deictic confusion is common for procedural and practical reasons but can be extended into a narrative through the manipulation of name, as Pynchon and Morrison’s choices for their title characters/title both illustrate. This confusion often exists for researchers in archives when they find aliases, name changes, misspellings or alternate spellings, etc. The records of the past are really only as reliable as the recordings of the names of the personages involved. If there is even a simple typographical error, historical events and people could be misunderstood, misattributed, or simply missed. Morrison uses this distinction to further establish the multifaceted aspects of “Beloved,” that she is both Beloved and beloved, a name that refers to a body and person as well as a concept that indicates a broader community.

Morrison also uses the terms “disremembered” and “unaccounted for” to underscore the disintegration or absence of any archival record of these human beings, the beloved. It is not an issue of being “lost” because in order to be lost, one must be recognized by an Other. It is an issue of being absent. And, furthermore, if *she* or *it* is

absent, without a name, no literal record is possible. A researcher cannot find an individual in an archive with no name to attach to the debris that exists. A researcher can generalize, can group characteristics; but without a name, there is no individual body, only a collection of inanimate debris that cannot be revived. The “claim” that Morrison interjects is specifically related to the debt that is owed. Through Sethe the child Beloved is “paid”: Sethe refers to her prostituting herself as “buying” Beloved’s name (204). The girl, and the group that the girl represents, has a claim to what she is owed. That debt cannot be paid if she is not “claimed.” The irony is that in order to be included within the archive, she must be recognized by the Other. In order to be recognized, her story must be told. Within the economy of the archive, she is doubly caught in absence because she has claim but she cannot be paid what she is owed if she does not exist. She cannot exist without a story, and she cannot be recovered if she has no name.

The children in *Beloved*, too, are associated with the female body, as they are in *V*. But the association rests in the natural world as opposed to Pynchon’s artificial or mechanical one. Morrison specifically associates the female body with corn in the scene when Sethe and Halle make love for the first time: “As soon as one strip of husk was down, the rest obeyed and the ear yielded up to him its shy rows, exposed at last. How loose the silk. How quick the jailed-up flavor ran free” (27). Barbara Christian also utilizes the age-old association of the female body with nature/earth, which allows a new understanding to the passage concerning the place where “the long grass opens.” Barbara Christian expands this link to the separation of millions of Africans from their Motherland—referring to the Middle Passage, she states, “It is the four-

hundred-year holocaust that wrenched tens of millions of Africans from their Mother, their biological mothers as well as their Motherland, in a disorganized and unimaginably monstrous fashion” (7). One could read the “grass opens” passage as an allusion to the birth of children from the body of the mother and therefore a direct allusion to the mother/child relationship and the danger represented by children because they simultaneously promise a temporal and physical presence but arise from a temporally and physically separate space, paradoxically *linked* to a past that is *separate*. This is why Denver needs the story of her birth so desperately—it is the only way to make her birth count because the story is the only thing that makes it real. Furthermore, to underscore the importance of community, Morrison reminds the reader that those children that were not wanted were often thrown aside, their stories also denied, because they were violently sired by white masters, and thus were not recognized by either community. But Denver was wanted; she counted.

In V., the Maltese also have a cultural metaphor linking their homeland to the mother’s body. The natural environment of the island engenders this metaphor within the community, producing a mythic narrative within the Maltese culture. The association between the female body and the natural world is clearly expressed: Maijstral points out in his journal, “Fausto II, for instance, was that sort of confused Maltese youth who finds island-love and mother-love impossible to separate” (340). The traumatized children of Malta are also separated from their “mother” because they have by the droves immigrated to Australia or the US as a result of the conflicts the island has endured. This intervention of the human destructive force results in its fragmentation for Pynchon. As Sethe’s body is abused and scarred first by the slave

masters and then by the memory of that history through *Beloved*, so is the island of Malta by other more powerful nations.

Malta is a noun feminine and proper. Italians have indeed been attempting her defloration since the 8th of June. She lies on her back in the sea, sullen; an immemorial woman. Spread to the explosive orgasms of Mussolini bombs. But her soul hasn't been touched; cannot be. Her soul is the Maltese people, who wait - only wait - down in her clefts and catacombs alive and with a numb strength, filled with faith in God His Church. How can her flesh matter? It is vulnerable, a victim. But as the Ark was to Noah so is the inviolable womb of our Maltese rock to her children. Something given us in return for being filial and constant, children also of God.

Womb of rock. What subterranean confessions we wandered into! (Pynchon, *V*. 341)

Malta, like *Sethe*, was “under siege” by an evil force. Malta is the mother figure to the Maltese, aligned with the Virgin of their religious tradition and their own fleshly mothers. Malta’s history is one of almost constant occupation from the Romans to the Normans to the French to the British and many other powers. The narrator asks “Did he feel trapped? Having escaped lucky from one womb, now forced into the oubliette of another not so happily starred?” (341). The elder Stencil’s existence then is one of moving from the body of his mother into the construction of an oubliette, a “forgotten room,” the archive comprised of the pieces of history fragmented by events of destruction.

Many of the main points of the lines from *Beloved*, including the deictic confusion created by her character's attributes in the text and for the other characters, could be easily transplanted into a section about the feminine entity represented in *V.*: Everybody calls her *V.*, but her real name is unknown. Victoria could be her name, or Vera or Veronica. Even Vhiessu and Valletta could qualify. She is indeed "dis(re)membere," for example, by the children who literally dismember her and then by Stencil who attempts to re-member her in the form of narrative. The next descriptive term of "she," both *Beloved* and *V.*, is "unaccounted for," a telling use of language for both Morrison and Pynchon.

This precise term is to be found in the following passage of *V.* In this passage, history is transferred into documentation. Material evidence in the form of documents can avoid the reality of lived experience, thus rendering lived experience inanimate through the process of decay. Sydney Stencil has just arrived in rainy Valletta where he notices a lack of "holiday" as he had seen in the other capitals of Europe. Although the Armistice had been signed in November of 1918, the political and economic consequences of the war were still very real in Malta.

It must be shock, fine: even Stencil could feel shock. Ten million dead and twice that wounded if nothing else. "But we reach a point," he'd thought of telling Carruthers-Pillow, "we old campaigners, when the habits of the past become too strong. Where we can say, and believe, that this abattoir, but lately bankrupt, was fundamentally no different from the Franco-Prussian conflict, the Sudanese wars, even the Crimea. It is perhaps a delusion—say a convenience—necessary to our line of

work. But more honorable surely than this loathsome weakness of retreat into dreams: pastel visions of disarmament, a League, a universal law. Ten million dead. Gas. Passchendaele. Let that be now a large figure, now a chemical formula, now an historical account. But dear lord, not the Nameless Horror, the sudden prodigy sprung on a world unaware. We all saw it. There was no innovation, no special breach of nature, or suspension of familiar principles. If it came as any surprise to the public then their own blindness is the Great Tragedy, hardly the war itself." (496)

World War I had resulted in millions dead and wounded, both military and civilian. But this *abattoir* becomes commonplace, or as the elder Stencil terms it, "habit." He lists off other wars and conflicts that are "fundamentally no different." And all of these grand sweeping movements of history encompass references to the lived experience, "ten million dead," one of the horrible agents of death, "gas," and one of the places of massive and pointless death, "Passchendaele."⁸⁷

Then Stencil most importantly summarizes this movement of lived experience into a document thus: "a large figure, *now* a chemical formula, *now* an historical account" (italics mine). There is an emphatic temporal element in the repetition of the word "now." In other words, the lived experience which took place in the past has

⁸⁷ Passchendaele is a town in Belgium and was the site of The Third Battle of Ypres, a months-long battle during WWI in 1917 that Nigel Steel and Peter Hart describe as follows: it "was a life and death struggle involving millions of armed men trained to kill or maim their enemies. Each soldier was a painfully vulnerable individual who suffered in awful conditions while waiting with heavy foreboding to discover his fate. Hundreds of thousands of men lost their lives, their limbs or their sanity in this vortex of despair. It was an experience most survivors never forgot until death or the confusions of extreme old age brought down the curtain on their minds" (9).

been transformed into dead numbers and inanimate documentation, temporally and spatially removed from the True event which originally produced the dead and inanimate debris. The “delusion” and the “convenience” which he refers to as “honorable” encompass the impulse to categorize, summarize, and relativize these horrific lived experiences by means of the document and the numbers. However, as a direct result of the transfer of lived experience into dead documents, the Great Tragedy (a play on the more common expression Great War) for Stencil is not the war itself but the surprise at its occurrence. Stencil is arguing here that it should not be a surprise, but the tragedy is that it is a surprise to most people, that it is a “Nameless Horror.” He asserts that “We all saw it.” He makes a specific distinction between himself as a part of the government and the public, later stating “This is how the public, you know, see the late war. As a new and rare disease which has now been cured [sic] and conquered for ever” (498). In other words, Stencil, as a member of the government, is not *pro fana* and therefore has unmitigated access to the archive. The public are without and are not necessarily privy to the historical record and, being thus positioned, can “retreat into dreams.”

Stencil’s judgment reflects the danger of the archive, a space where the past is made material and thus can re-inscribe itself into master narratives that support and justify the powerful. In Stencil’s worldview, he believes that “There was no innovation, no special breach of nature, or suspension of familiar principles” as if it is the most natural thing in the world to understand that disaster follows disaster, an unavoidable descent into decadence. The story that teaches the community how to live in a world, how to retain one’s bearings and interact with a world, is useless since it

cannot deal with this occurrence, thus “Great Tragedy.” It is outside of the possibility of the story. The old myths no longer serve to center the individual or the community and help them make sense of these events. The “Nameless Horror” is the absence of that kind of story, thus its inability to be communicated, “Nameless.” There is no relation to the “Nameless Horror,” another term for the decadence that is inevitable, the heat death that will bring everything to the realm of the inanimate.

We arrive then at the term “account” in Pynchon’s narrative. The significance of the two passages’ implications merge most markedly here. To “account” implies “counting” in the sense of both “having significance” and “being numbered among.” Furthermore, it can also mean “to narrate” as in “to give an account.” In the Morrison passage, both meanings are rendered plausible because the unnamed girl neither counted nor has been previously narrated. Indeed, she *cannot* be narrated because she has not first been counted—she does not appear as a “figure” (a body, a mark) in the records. She was caught in the sweep of events, and she was discounted. In the epilogue, Sydney Stencil laments the negation of catastrophic real historical events into mere records, the “historical account”: V. is also “unaccounted for,” just as Beloved is, a vague personage that has been lost to history’s sweep, as a piece of debris is swept aside into the corner.

Returning to the Morrison passage, the narrator shifts focus to the specific girl who “erupts.” This eruption into her separate parts is, here in the last chapter, a reference to Beloved’s mystical disappearance at the end of the novel; but it must simultaneously be a reference to all the separate living bodies that existed in Africa before they became the inanimate, unaccounted for debris that littered the ocean. The

long grass, as Deborah Horvitz points out, is an allusion to the savannas of Africa where the ancestors lived. The adverbial introductory phrase means that she erupts *there* in the place where the long grass opens, not in Ohio or during the Middle Passage, an important distinction since it allows Morrison to move the rupture back into the past before any of the events that caused the rupture actually happened. In so doing, Morrison expresses two trajectories for history. The first is one in which the girl is loved because she is counted by her community, remaining in her homeland and continuing to live a life without the disruption of the oppression of slavery. The second trajectory is the one in which she cries shame, a fitting judgment on the slave traders and masters. In Africa, she erupts into her separate parts because the separation from her motherland necessitates fragmentation since it removes the elements that enable a stable identity, environment and community.

To disintegrate is to “make it easy for chewing laughter to swallow her all away” (274). Horvitz points out that on the slave ships, Beloved had heard “chewing and swallowing and laughter” (212), and Horvitz attributes this activity to those on the ship who “swallowed” her. However, Horvitz ignores the suggestion of the very next lines: “it belongs to me she is the laugh I am the laughter” (212) as well as the following section of the chapter:

she is chewing and swallowing I have to have my face I go in
the grass opens she opens it . . . I am looking for the join . . . I reach
for her chewing and swallowing she touches me she knows I want
the join she chews and swallows me I am gone now I am her

face my own face has left me I see me swim away a hot thing . . .
I am alone I want to be the two of us I want the join
I come out of the blue water . . . I am not dead I am not there is a
house there is what she whispered to me I am where she told me
I am not dead. (Morrison, *Beloved* 213)

Attributing the “chewing and swallowing and laughter” to the white men on the boat who savagely treat their human cargo does not follow the implications of the text here. It seems more logical to associate the chewing and swallowing and laughter to the need that Beloved has to be absorbed by “she,” the mother who goes into the sea during the Middle Passage, and by association Sethe, particularly, who becomes the mother figure to the fleshed Beloved. This transfer of identification is clearly established in the second Beloved chapter: “Sethe is the one that picked flowers, yellow flowers in the place before the crouching” and “Sethe went into the sea” (214). Beloved collapses Africa, the person in the “long grass” who was with Beloved before the Middle Passage, the woman on the ship, and ultimately Sethe all into one entity. Albeit a psychologically painful process at first, the chewing and swallowing results in what she desires: the join, to reincorporate one body into another. This is the reverse process of birth since in giving birth, a woman’s body is literally taken apart when the child emerges and is separated from her body. The voice from the ship, which could have arisen from any young girl on that ship, wants the woman who has been thrown into the sea, the one of many who were pushed or jumped overboard; but she is forever separated from her. When she finds Sethe, she transfers this desire onto Sethe,

and the desire for “the join” is focused solely upon her. In this way, the burden of the multitude to be saved is transferred onto the one figure that is Sethe.

The redeemer undertones are strong here. In the most reductive terms, the slaves were commodities sold, so redemption would literally mean to “buy back” the bodies since “to redeem” comes from the Latin “*redimere*” which does indeed mean “to buy back” (OED). Since this is not the possible meaning, a literal buying back, the only redemption that can occur is to pay the debt, one that Denver explicitly feels she owes as the free progeny of those historical personages. The only way to recuperate is to figuratively re-member the bodies by giving them a story, by narrating them, which is to reassemble the debris into an imaginative figure that will then finally be accounted for. Beloved thinks “she whispers to me” and then “there is what she whispered to me” and “I am where she told me,” indicating the creation of a place through her mother’s/Sethe’s words. Then she immediately states the consequence of the whispers: “I am not dead.” In other words: *Tell my story to give me a place, to not let me die, to not let me disappear. My story will pay the debt owed.* In the next chapter, this connection is stated even more plainly: “I found the house she whispered to me” (214). Two simultaneous events are occurring; Beloved is moving from the universal to the particular—from the embodiment of all the lost slaves who were transported away from Africa to the experience of the singular individual—and back again from her particular experience to the universal.

Therefore, Morrison’s characters see redemption as possible through a certain kind of “join,” a reassembly of the past not in physical terms (as represented through Beloved’s body and a reconnection with the “mother” that she lost, that has died, or

that is never recoverable). Since this is indeed impossible, given her historical situation, there is only one possible way for that join to occur—a figurative join through language in the form of narrative which will create the conditions of communal relationships. Cynthia Dobbs discusses narration and the reclaiming of identity in relation to the trauma of “slave bodies in pain” rather than through the more healing re-membering of bodies. She does, however, concede that

Beloved offers a redemptive possibility of ‘remembering,’ of refiguring histories and identities. For by revealing the forces behind and the process of the unraveling of selves, bodies, and communities, Morrison uncovers what is fundamental to the creation of personal and communal identities: the freedom to desire, to imagine, and to live narratives not of coherence, necessarily, but of continuity (572).

Conversely, Pynchon’s characters mock the concept of redemption, and this is precisely why narrative cannot be ruptured in *V*. Profane is identified as a type of redeemer. His name automatically calls that status into question but does not deny its tenability since the redemption possible through Profane is indeed not one that will result in any kind of “join” or reconnection with the past.

That night between them they established at least that the world was screwed up. English Marines, Commandos and sailors who came by—going nowhere also—helped them believe it. . . . It made him sadder: as if all his homes were temporary and even they, inanimate, still wandering as he: for motion is relative, and hadn't he, now, really stood there still on the sea like a schlemihl Redeemer while that enormous

malingering city and its one livable inner space and one unconnable (therefore hi-value) girl had all slid away from him over a great horizon's curve comprising, from this vantage, at once, at least one century's worth of wavelets? (Pynchon, V. 488-489)

Profane's identity as "schlemihl Redeemer" is tied directly to his position "still on the sea," a metaphor encompassing his motionlessness and ineffectiveness, an inanimate piece of the larger machinery of war, conflict and international interests (as are the Marines, Commandos and sailors mentioned in the passage). Furthermore, his position as an ineffectual redeemer, given the adjectival addition of schlemihl, reveals that he himself is awaiting redemption that will never come as he "wanders," in the tradition of the Wandering Jew⁸⁸ who, from a specifically Christian perspective, never finds rest because he is punished for his treatment of the sacred figure of Christ.⁸⁹ The "malingering city," Valletta or New York or any constructed space of "mal," has

⁸⁸ See *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution* for an historical contextualizing and tracing of the legend.

⁸⁹ The "Wandering Jew" is also tied to the concept of "homelessness" as a kind of sacred alterity. Sander L. Gilman in discussing a "Diaspora identity," quotes an inscription at the entrance of the Museum of the Diaspora in Israel: "Remember where you stand. Only the Land around you is real. The rest is not. If you come from a Diaspora of the present, know that sooner than you think, your community too will be part of our past, a room in our museum" (Gilman 2). He then explains that "It is the imagined center that defines me as being on the periphery. Israel, the lost Garden of Eden, the City on the Hill, is the center; all the rest of Jewish experience is on the periphery" (2). The very experience of being away from the center defines the Jewish identity and the lack of a home is a necessary human condition and a sign of the Jews' election. He then argues that identity rests squarely in textual creation: "The links between questions of identity, identification and history, and historiography rest on the construction of organizational categories by authors and the readers of texts. We inscribe who we believe ourselves to be and where we believe we came from in these texts we call history. Identity is what you imagine yourself and the other to be; history and historiography is the writing of the narratives of that difference" (3) This approach to Profane merits further inquiry.

escaped him, too, and he is forever shut out of the sacred space of the archive where he would be able to construct a home that does not simply shift and move.⁹⁰ He stands, *pro fana*, as the tiny waves of time pass him by and all is lost to him including any lasting home and any lasting relationship to another human. He has no access to the debris from which he could construct these ties. He therefore is in fact no redeemer, and no redemption is possible.

Co-Metaphors

Earlier, the idea of submersion and the symbolic role of water were noted in passing and deserve more attention for the insight they provide in conjunction with the archival metaphor. Water is a noteworthy symbol that courses through both novels. It is another link between the two novels that allows the act of imagination to be more central to the notion of archive in its ability to play within the interstices inherent in the archival space. The imagination reveals the metaphor that the mind uses to comprehend and categorize the events that take place in the present and that did take place in the past. This play of imagination upon memory is best understood metaphorically by the relationship between the outsiders, Sethe and Profane, and the use of water as a symbol within both novels in relation to how they remember and their narrative ability or lack thereof. This counter or alternative metaphor does not negate the archive metaphor; but it stands in a dialectical relationship with it, illuminating the ways in which archival metaphors are tied directly to man-made constructions, whereas the water metaphor allows an organic and naturalistic idea to inhabit concepts of memory and story-telling, thus creating the dialectic between fixity

⁹⁰ The city in *The Crying of Lot 49* where Oedipa searches for meaning behind the mysterious post horn symbol is called “the infected city” (94).

and fluidity in space and time. The water, as in the sewer passage and in the sea, demonstrates both containment and freedom whether within the man-made constructions or free from them. But it also illustrates the cycle between the two is an inevitable one, from the rain to the sewers to the sea and back again, as Barthes' turnstile metaphor demonstrates in the constant recycling between meaning and form.

Water in its many forms—rain, ocean, river, puddle, flood, etc.—is used in both novels in traditionally symbolic and mood-setting ways but also in complicated associations with memory and time and demonstrates the cycle more clearly. Those who travel water are those who cross over boundaries both in space and, metaphorically, in time, and bodies of water themselves are also boundaries between spaces and times. The medium of water is also traditionally associated with the creation and sustainment of life. These notions are also complicated by the constant threat of the danger in traveling these waters and the destructive potential of water, or rather of too much water in relation to what it contacts. The notion of the archive presents similar contradictory impulses—both memory and forgetfulness; both sacred as a memorial and profane as in physical debris; both promising for its narrative possibilities and threatening for its narrative justifications. Derrida states that the archive itself does not remember, but Morrison stresses that water does. The archive is manipulated by its creators and users in order to validate its own existence; water can be channeled and used as well to change the environment, but it can also act outside of the control of humanity. Water, then, is a metaphor that does not necessarily account for outside manipulation but for natural occurrence—a medium of Truth

because it acts without agenda—whereas the archive can only make the Certain possible since it springs from the mind and imagination of humankind.

The dissolution in Pynchon is tied directly to the process of decadence and decay as exemplified through entropy.⁹¹ Memory that circulates without end is also entropic. But water, for Morrison, is not necessarily destructive. Water makes things new and facilitates memory:

. . . no matter how “fictional” the account of these writers, or how much it was a product of invention, the act of imagination is bound up with memory. You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. “Floods” is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that; remember where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory—what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our “flooding.”

⁹¹ In his 2009 novel, *Inherent Vice*, Pynchon sets up a similar relationship between documents and stories, aligning the flow of water with the knowledge of the stories that the documents simply cannot retain alone. Referring to an aunt of the main character who runs a real estate business and who predicts a future when computers will retain all the information needed about properties, Pynchon writes: “Till then, in the real non-sci-fi world, there was Aunt Reet’s bordering-on-the-supernatural sense of the land, the stories that seldom appeared in deeds or contracts, especially matrimonial, the generations of family hatreds big and small, the way the water flowed, or used to” (7). Pynchon cannot resist the urge, however, to signal the decline of the possibility of stories by stating that the water no longer flows as it used to.

Along with personal recollection, the matrix of the work I do is the wish to extend, fill in and complement slave autobiographical narratives. But only the matrix. What comes of all that is dictated by other concerns, not least among them the novel's own integrity. Still, like water, I remember where I was before I was "straightened out."
(Morrison, "The Site of Memory" 76-77)

Metaphorically speaking, although water does not work in the sense of flooding buildings and streets, it shows the force of uncontrolled nature compared to neatly indexed boxes and files, a natural power that could overwhelm any careful human memorial constructions. Water's innate power balances out the archive's applied power. The apparent distinctions between the archive and water as metaphor can illuminate the aspects of both. Water is figuratively a natural and mindless substance devoid of the intent for malice or good. It is a way to remember that flows and fills in. We have seen that streets and buildings, these man-made spaces that are constructed out of inflexible, hard material, contain what is hard material—the debris of concrete things. These concrete things are not memory because memory is, as Morrison imagines, flexible, fluid, flowing—a thing that can fill in the hard matrix of the archive. Therefore, the water metaphor allows for another image of reestablishing suppressed or ignored stories through community memory.

The point here is not to say that water is the secret code to understanding the books and their meaning but to show the relationship between the use of debris versus imagination—water flows. Vico's conception of imagination is the same—it fills in the gaps and pulls the universal narrative down into the particular experience. The

imagination of the storyteller is the narrative that is ever-changing but ever Certain. To forget this relationship is to allow master narratives to control and remain. They are fixed—never fluid—and fixed by the Other. As the street for Stencil and the house for Sethe serve as boundaries that allow them to access memory only as they wish or to avoid it altogether, water interrupts this partitioned memory. It is a boundary, too, when it flows as directed; but when its power is unleashed, it serves to flood and destroy. It can carry, it can drown. It gives life and takes it. It is birth for Sethe and death for Sidney Stencil.

Beloved is thoroughly identified with water and, most specifically, the sea. When she is first introduced, she is constantly thirsty and drinks copious amounts of water. After the scene in which she mysteriously disappears, a little boy “put it out how he had been looking for bait back of 124, down by the stream, and saw, cutting through the woods, a naked woman with fish for hair” (267). The little boy would have reported what he saw from the perspective of a little boy; and Beloved’s hair, braided in “vines all over her head” (261), can resemble scaled, elongated bodies of fish. Washington further identifies Beloved’s connection to water:

Describing her journey through the Middle Passage, Beloved is the walking recollection of atrocities too horrible to remember, and she is the Mother who saved her descendants so that they would have the luxury to forget. The Mother whom enslaved Africans first thanked for their safe landings, no matter how vile the journey or the arrival, was Yemoja: the Mother of Waters, the Mother of Fishes. (181)

Likewise, Profane is a former sailor and thus connected to the waters of the sea in the past, but the present of the novel connects him most forcefully with the waters that flow beneath the streets of New York. The waters of the sea and any sewer are eventually connected, but Pynchon makes the following distinction: “Sea water shines in the dark sometimes; in the wake of a ship you see the same uncomfortable radiance. But not here” (125). His contrast between sea water and sewer water, although essentially a connected body of water, specifically reveals his lack of narrative ability because he is in the sewer and not in the sea. The sewer is water encased by architecture, by pipes and pumps, while the sea is the shapeless force that dissolves human structures/shapes. Therefore his inability to use the archive in a productive way to reshape the past and emerge from its influence is further established.

Furthermore, Profane’s circle of friends, The Whole Sick Crew, represent alienated, isolated humanity at large, each unable to make meaning through their personal imaginations because they do not integrate their personal stories with that of the community. They are “a crowd of disaffected which someone had labeled The Whole Sick Crew. They lived half their time in a bar on the lower West Side called the Rusty Spoon. He [Profane] thought of the Sailor's Grave and could not see much difference” (29). There is indeed no difference because the Rusty Spoon is a space for the powerless Crew just as the Sailor’s Grave is for the “helpless” (5) child-like sailors. This association could be multiplied outward with all other communities of the powerless who gather together to commiserate, like the women in *Beloved* and the children of Malta. The groups on Malta are also defined as “disaffected”: “Malta being, after all, a Roman Catholic island, the Father was in a position to come by

enough information outside the confessional to clarify (at least) their picture of every disaffected group on the island. Though Stencil was less than happy over the quality of these reports, quantity was no problem” (519). But unlike those communities, The Whole Sick crew is both “sick” and presented as a “crowd,” not as a community like the women in *Beloved* and the children of Malta. Before attempting a suicide as a result of this “sickness” that will not be successful, Winsome, a member of the Whole Sick Crew, shares his evaluation of the Crew:

"Listen friends," Winsome said, "there is a word for all our crew and it is sick. Some of us cannot keep our flies zipped, others remain faithful to one mate till menopause or the Grand Climacteric steps in. But randy or monogamous, on one side of the night or the other, on or off the Street, there is no one of us you can point to and call well.

"Fergus Mixolydian the Irish Armenian Jew takes money from a Foundation named after a man who spent millions trying to prove thirteen rabbis rule the world. Fergus sees nothing wrong there.

"Esther Harvitz pays to get the body she was born with altered and then falls deeply in love with the man who mutilated her. Esther sees nothing wrong either.

"Raoul the television writer can produce drama devious enough to slip by any sponsor's roadblock and still tell the staring fans what's wrong with them and what they're watching. But he's happy with westerns and detective stories.

"Slab the painter, whose eyes are open, has technical skill and if you will 'soul.' But is committed to cheese Danishes.

"Melvin the folk-singer has no talent. Ironically he does more social commenting than the rest of the Crew put together. He accomplishes nothing.

"Mafia Winsome is smart enough to create a world but too stupid not to live in it. Finding the real world never jibing with her fancy she spends all kinds of energy - sexual, emotional - trying to make it conform, never succeeding.

"And on it goes. Anybody who continues to live in a subculture so demonstrably sick has no right to call himself well. The only well thing to do is what I am going to do now, namely, jump out this window."

So speaking Winsome straightened his tie and prepared to defenestrate.

"I say," said Pig Bodine, who'd been out in the kitchen listening.

"Don't you know life is the most precious possession you have?" (387-388)

Winsome's remarks highlight the futility of each member of the Whole Sick Crew in constructing any cogent effect. He says that none of them are well and then gives examples of why. Their sickness is that *mal* that infects the archive, the lack of narrative that leads to entropic death within the closed space. Each one of them is invested in a person or a place that leads nowhere. Fergus invests in a foundation that

can prove nothing since it is based on paranoia. Esther desires only what physically destroys her. Raoul does not use his talent to tell meaningful stories that would rupture the internal structure of the archive but repeats the same conventional structures of Westerns and Detective stories, both genres that traditionally tend to re-inscribe cultural master narratives to make them palatable to an undiscriminating, unquestioning, really inanimate audience for mass-consumption. Slab, the soulful painter diminishes his soul through art that can communicate nothing. Melvin is a talentless singer whose lack of soul makes his communication ineffective. Mafia wants to engage in imaginative construction but cannot make it work when she actually inhabits her imagination. Winsome has diagnosed the disease; but instead of trying to heal, he decides to die. This decision, to join the inanimate, synthesizes the sickness into one fatal symptom: the inability to construct a narrative leads to death, whether it be literal or metaphorical.

The archive can and does hold a type of power that can and is used to control, marginalize, and define those outside the sacred space of it. However, storytellers, the artists of the word, are able to interact with the archive and use it to give voice to those normally not given access—those “disremembered and unaccounted for” (Morrison, *Beloved* 274)—and engage in the production of what is Certain for their communities. The power available to the storyteller is through the archive in the context of the community where he/she can imagine stories that re-construct from the material of the archive in such a way as to open the possibility for other voices. Storytellers have a power that undercuts the master narratives—a power to resurrect a past that has been forgotten, to chase and face the monsters and ghosts and undead things that inhabit the

subterranean spaces of our well-kept architecture or that have passed like the weather or have flowed beyond to the sea and been drowned there beyond man-made boundaries and neatly archived records. The traces are still there, and the artist can lift them from the subterranean past and fabricate stories again.

Finding out what/who Beloved really is, or what/who V. really is, is never accomplished because, in the end, it does not matter to the more fundamental question. The specific answer would be true only for those individuals and would neglect the more universal communal truth that might be available in telling their individual stories in conglomerate. The larger or more important question ultimately depends upon what makes one human in relationship to oneself and one's community. Where do we find those answers? The answer is always in the act of storytelling. The stories we tell attempt to solve the puzzle one story at a time; but the circumstances—the history of each—changes, and we have to make the decisions over and over again. They offer only provisional, temporary answers as opposed to definitive ones because definitive knowledge is impossible, deferred by time and space and the manipulation of the greater powers. This is why we go back to the archive again and again to attempt to get as close to the True as is possible through the evidence there. This is why the puzzle of history and fortune will never be solved because the number of permutations is impossibly large, almost infinite. The individual story intercepts the grand arc of history. The randomness of life, of events, of history can only be understood or *used* among the individuals who make up and are made by their communities.

This process is eventually successful in *Beloved*. The female community manifests itself according to identity formation as well. As there is a blending of identities among Stencil, Profane, and V., Teresa N. Washington shows that Morrison purposefully created a blurred or imprecise mother/daughter distinction between Sethe, the woman, and Beloved, the entity that functions as the metaphorical archive in this novel. "Morrison has explained the doubling at work between Sethe and Beloved as what occurs when a 'good woman' displaces 'the self, her self'" (183). Washington also shows how the three women, Sethe and Beloved as well as Denver, are interdependent based on a mutual need to possess the other in order to complete the self. The possession of the archive within the community is of nominal importance since the act of claiming the debris is tantamount to establishing the validity of the story that one can construct. In other words, an archive that is established and owned by the community about which it is concerned has the greater power to impose its own stories into the collective consciousness.

Sethe and Denver harness all their power to re-member Beloved, and with the latter's physical-spiritual reality, the three women become a trinity of Mother, Daughter, and Daughter-Divinity But rather than the shared signifying "I," a possessive "mine" flows among the women: "Beloved, she my daughter. She mine"; "Beloved is my sister"; "I am Beloved and she [Sethe] is mine" (200, 205, 211). Rather than the customary narrative style, to accommodate the space and the unspoken

language of love of this trinity of Aje⁹², Morrison uses open-ended lyric free verse: You are my face; I am you. Why did you leave me who am you? I will never leave you again Don't ever leave me again You will never leave me again You went in the water I drank your blood I brought your milk You forgot to smile I loved you You hurt me You came back to me You left me I waited for you You are mine You are mine You are mine (216-17). (184)

Beloved is able to accommodate all the various stories of both her immediate experience as the possible reincarnation of the murdered child and, simultaneously, the more encompassing story of the community of slaves because she metaphorically possesses all the various pieces of scattered and dissimulated debris of those past events. The future anterior of the archive depends upon this ownership—to hold the thing in one's hand that links you to the past. The past still exists—it is what would have been although the past lies only in the preterit.

Beloved disappears when she is no longer a “story to pass on.” If we take the ending of the novel in that respect, then forgetting Beloved is easy; if she no longer exists in the records, there is no way to reassemble her into a created entity. V. is nothing without Stencil's desire for her, as is Beloved nothing without the desire for her by the community, by Denver or by Sethe. Kristin Boudreau sums up as follows:

Beloved, I would argue, is a model for all selves: if she is ghostly and ephemeral, she only literalizes what occurs to all other characters in

⁹² “Àjé is a Yoruba word and concept that describes a spiritual force that is thought to be inherent in Africana women; additionally, spiritually empowered humans are called Àjé” (Washington 171).

Morrison's novel. They, like *Beloved*, exist at the pleasure of other selves. Once one takes the word away, selfhood inevitably vanishes. The definers are not simply slaveholders and schoolteachers, but anyone who threatens individual autonomy by including the individual in his or her language and gaze. And to revoke name and gaze, further, is to abolish the self. (463-464)

The community and the individual self in relation to language is paradoxical: the individual needs others in order to exist, but others also colonize/control the self. Only through a community in which the members establish stories can the individual maintain a certain autonomy within the community. Without language, the story arises from the rearranging of memory. Morrison “literalizes” (makes into a story) the experience of the others. Without her story, their selves and our selves as readers are diminished or made fuzzy. Without stating as much, Boudreau is assuming a position based on the archive—including the traces of *Beloved*’s existence is a choice of the definers, those who can at will decide what is worthy of remembrance and what is not.

What is worthy of remembrance is often the definition of History. Morrison’s ability to find a way out of the closed system of the archive is her reliance on personal memory and how those narratives makes the future possible. Pynchon’s characters want to find evidence and direct cause and effect, to have History make sense and then fit themselves into it. But the resolutions are never found and thus, this desire is unfulfilled. The difference between the two novels comes down to the distinctions between History as monumental and memory as communal. Both authors use history but distrust it, relying more on imagination and alternate histories to reach a truth that

runs deeper and actually “remembers” the past, like the water that remembers and flows in the spaces that materially existed when it was “in the place” before. There have only recently been broadly accepted attempts at embracing alternative histories and allowing for marginal voices to enter the mainstream. Morrison’s success and entrance into the canon is one example of this positive flow towards a more honest representation of history and memory.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

*There is no political power without control
of the archive, if not of memory.*

☞ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*

This study is based upon a metaphor—the archive. Characters are figured as archives. Bodies are composed like archives. Streets are constructed to contain archives. These spaces are filled up with or made up of the chosen debris of the past which connect the True to the Certain, history becomes story, reanimating the dead past through the chronological aspect of narrative. Language is the method of gathering and ordering the debris. Yet language itself is mainly metaphorical. The novel participates in this gathering and ordering, using language to move the archival space into time. This process is never-ending since the authors of novels tell stories from a particular perspective, choosing the details (the material and immaterial debris from the past) to create yet another text which is both material and immaterial and then becomes part of the written record itself. Barthes' turnstile provides a metaphor for this continuous process.

The danger of the archive is coupled with its promise. It can give the specters which haunt it a voice and place their lives into memory, thus avoiding the need for destructive rememory because it will have meaning. Or it can co-opt the debris into merely form and nostalgia. As evidence, we see memorials everywhere—Oklahoma City, The Vietnam War Memorial, Ground Zero, museums, historical markers, and

novels.⁹³ Pynchon and Morrison have tried to create worlds in which documents of the past appear in corporealized forms, not in manufactured spectacles that are only reified versions of the archive itself. Both *Beloved* and *V.* are bodies straining at the divide between lived experience and the master narratives that tend to co-opt those experiences in order to justify power and oppression. In merging these two strains of narrative, one from within the community/individual nexus and one from the powers-that-be, the struggle for control of one's own history is made most explicit.

Any written text, be it document or fiction, contains within it the traces of the material and immaterial past; and any interaction with that created archive must be approached with a measure of understanding that the interaction needs to occur in a space which recognizes the distinction between Vico's True and Certain. It is in the discovering of the interaction and the codependence among these elements of knowledge that we can see how the communities structure themselves through language and then understand themselves through the stories the storyteller tells. The framework provided by Vico's thought opens up both a chronological and spatial matrix within which the same set of material debris presents, creates, or engenders competing realities. These competing realities thus legitimate the story and the storyteller, allowing the storyteller a measure of unquestioned subjectivity and thus

⁹³ Archivists recognize that these expressions of collective memory are equivalent to archives themselves: "Historians in a postmodernist milieu are now studying very carefully the processes over time that have determined what was worth remembering and, as important, what was forgotten, deliberately or accidentally. Such collective "remembering"—and "forgetting"—occurs through galleries, museums, libraries, historic sites, historic monuments, public commemorations, and archives—perhaps most especially through archives" (Cook, "What is Past" 18).

practical freedom for the subject and political power for the community and a constant avenue for self-identity.

The act of creation which occurs in “real life” through the imagination of the story-teller and the doubling of that imaginative element in the actions of the imagined characters compels me to argue that if there is one who can imagine, then there is still an intact subject. Furthermore, this subject is granted agency by community membership and linguistic participation and is therefore capable of creation, the capacity which confirms one’s humanity and ultimately one’s ability to act creatively, socially, and, finally, politically. Storytelling has consequences within the real world itself. Art in general, and story-telling in particular, exists because the subject is still intact, and story-tellers continuously validate themselves as empowered subjects who recreate the act of creation within their texts. The reserve of language is powerful in its creative abilities, and within that reserve lies the affirmation of the subject.

The last chapter of *Beloved* repeats this hauntingly reminiscent phrase three times: “It was not a story to pass on.” Stories are fundamentally painful—the History that hurts, (88) as Jameson puts it—and they are not to pass on to the next generation. But simultaneously, they are not to be ignored either. They must be read, must be listened to, in order to find what will have been.

We as readers share in the process as well. We find ourselves caught or, less pejoratively, positioned within the framework of this historical process and all the classic stories with all the classic themes. As readers we question and interpret the characters’ actions, and as critics we do the same with Morrison’s and Pynchon’s. The *dramatis personae* involved are many, and they are situated at every level of

story-telling, history-making, and truth/certainty finding. There are therefore three planes of writing, reading and interpreting which intersect at various points in fragmented pieces, thus creating at first glance a confused but ultimately coherent assembly of original pieces of “true” story that become “certain” to the individual reader through his/her interpretative persistence.

The stories that we tell and read are both true and certain, enfolding one upon the other, a “circulating relation to subjectivities and objectivities” (Druitt) which produces a constantly shifting locus of identity which in turn both allows the storyteller to relate meaning in the story, the characters to resolve their conflicts in one way or another, and the community to interpret her own Certain relationship with the text.

The quest is to “de-subject” the subject from the outside as being defined by some master narrative and then allow the subject to define himself or herself within the larger community narrative based on the personal narrative. Vico’s distinction between the True and the Certain allows this defining process to function. It is not a dichotomy between History and history or Master narrative and personal narrative but the continuous interaction of the two. As Lyotard explains, “One is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass. No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent” (15). Through the subject’s location, all sorts of discourses interact. The focus in a novel which mimics the archive is the individual experience within the taken-for-granted “master narratives” which swirl around the characters, threatening to fling them all into oblivion. The

presence of the True represented in the form of cultural archive in conjunction with the Certain represented as the story of the community anchors them and gives them the power to maintain subjectivity.

Since Derrida has identified dealing with the “archive” as a type of desire or even sickness, where is the satiation or the healing? Thomas Pynchon’s novel is the desire and the diagnosis. Morrison’s novel is an attempt to satisfy the desire and to aid in healing. The moment in which Sethe extricates herself from Beloved is ironically the moment when she moves backwards in time in order to protect Beloved again.

Standing alone on the porch, Beloved is smiling. But now her hand is empty. Sethe is running away from her, running, and she feels the emptiness in the hand Sethe has been holding. Now she is running into the faces of the people out there, joining them and leaving Beloved behind. Alone. Again. Then Denver, running too. Away from her to the pile of people out there. They make a hill. A hill of black people, falling. And above them all, rising from his place with a whip in his hand, the man without skin, looking. He is looking at her. (Morrison, *Beloved* 260)

The allusions here to the experience upon the slave ships during the middle passage are clear—hills of black people being lorded over by a white man with a whip. Sethe is running towards the white man with the whip in order to save her child, the crawling-already? baby that she believes is Beloved. Beloved, however, is exhibiting thoughts here that identify her as the embodiment of the Middle Passage memory. She sees Sethe and Denver “joining” others and not her. This has happened before—

“Alone. Again.” In this moment, the two pasts which have been in tension for the whole novel are unbound and begin to cycle. The personal, certain history that Sethe has lived and the communal, true history that Beloved has become separate within the cycle.

There is a difference in attitude towards the past. The urge to find V. is to apply order to disorder, to rearrange the historical debris that lies latent and force it into some sort of narrative chronological order. Sidney Stencil, towards the end of his life and just before the June Disturbances in Malta which predate the beginning of WWI, meets often with Veronica Manganese, another V. embodiment with whom he had a short fling twenty years earlier and who is directly tied to the inanimate through her last name. In the denouement of the novel, Stencil begins to feel that “the disease” or the dehumanization of the world is progressing and that death is imminent. He asks Veronica, “Why should we continue to live?” (530). The narrator continues his thought: “Why should any of us” (530). This statement, formed as a question, does not end with a question mark. It is a repetition of a state of mind, a question that is really a statement and therefore requires no answer. Sidney Stencil recognizes that his individual existence, his individual story matters not in the chaos that has passed and the chaos to come.

With or without him the June Assembly would become what it would: blood bath or calm negotiation, who could tell or shape events that closely? There were no more princes. Henceforth politics would become progressively more democratized, more thrown into the hands of amateurs. The disease would progress. (Pynchon, V. 530)

The narrator had indeed summed up the disease: “It could only be age’s worst side-effect: nostalgia. A tilt toward the past so violent he found it increasingly more difficult to live in the real present he believed to be so politically crucial” (529).

The archive will be the victim of entropy if it is never narrativized. Pynchon’s novel becomes the evidence of this process. The novels show that both futures are possible: “It was not a story to pass on.” Morrison emphasizes telling stories. Pynchon emphasizes what occurs when the story is not told. One cannot pass over, ignore, the story. One must face it as Ella and the community finally do.

What Lies Beneath

The two passages which end the novels *V.* and *Beloved* are eerily similar. First, the overwhelming theme is lack, a lack that *exists*, that is *there* in a *place*. In *Beloved*, there is no way to see the traces continuously, but they return if they are engaged by the body, the feet of an adult or child. The traces will reappear. In *V.*, the traces have also disappeared from human view or interaction, and their return is impossible although they still exist.

Here is the last paragraph in *Beloved*:

Down by the stream in back of 124 her footprints come and go, come and go. They are so familiar. Should a child, an adult place his feet in them, they will fit. Take them out and they disappear again as though nobody ever walked there. By and by all trace is gone, and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water too and what is down there. The rest is weather. Not the breath of the disremembered and

unaccounted for, but wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather. Certainly no clamor for a kiss. Beloved. (275)

Here is the last paragraph in *V*:

Draw a line from Malta to Lampedusa. Call it a radius. Somewhere in that circle, on the evening of the tenth, a waterspout appeared and lasted fifteen minutes. Long enough to lift the zebec fifty feet, whirling and creaking, Astarte's throat naked to the cloudless weather, and slam it down again into a piece of the Mediterranean whose subsequent surface phenomena—whitecaps, kelp islands, any of a million flatnesses which should catch thereafter part of the brute sun's spectrum—showed nothing at all of what came to lie beneath, that quiet June day.

V (533)⁹⁴

The emphasis is on location and water in both descriptions—“down by the stream in back of 124” and “somewhere in that circle” referring to the Mediterranean Sea. Water in both descriptions serves to hide and facilitate forgetfulness and destruction but also the promise of return. In *Beloved*, the water is the medium from which Beloved arises and, in the end, the medium to which she returns, a creature with “fish for hair” (267). The first time the reader is introduced to Sethe, the washing of

⁹⁴ At the risk of appearing overzealous in my close reading, I would like to point out the odd omission of the period after the letter *V* at the end of the novel. To my knowledge, all editions of the book end without adding the period which is present not only in the title but also throughout the novel. I venture to reason that no period here means that this *V* does not refer to the entity *V*. but to a more universal notion of time and space which the shape denotes. It might also mean to leave the ending open without a “full stop” which underscores the ambiguity of the tale just read. It has no ending.

chamomile from her legs triggers memory. The first place that Profane visits is the Sailor's Grave, a euphemism for the sea as a hiding place, because he was feeling nostalgic.

This idea of the constitution of memory, of the past, of history is re-presented in the archive, the material presence of the past which self-legitimizes based on its very materiality. Very simply, its very existence and placement within an archive is proof or validation of its importance and ultimately its "truth" as a basis of our "Master Narratives." History is laid out in material form within the archive and by this materiality and positioning claims precedence over storytelling. Because storytelling can undermine, challenge, and present alternate viewpoints, it is popularly considered to be "less true." Storytelling is fictional and subjective by nature and is created outside the sacred space of the archive, although it uses the same material that History does. It is History that the community ascribes to and believes in officially, that influences community structures and identity, that is sacred. History is considered verifiable by its own evidence within the archive which wields power because it is created and controlled by the hegemonic class. This is History instituted by others—the powerful, the conquerors, always the more inclusive, larger, and more powerful group in any social dynamic.

By contrast, stories are located outside the sacred space of the archive. They are concerned with the subgroups and individuals, the person, the self. Ralph Waldo Emerson famously stated that "There is properly no history; only biography" (9). The larger context of his quote, however, nuances this snippet: "We are always coming up with the emphatic facts of history in our private experience and verifying them here.

All history becomes subjective; in other words there is properly no history, only biography. Every mind must know the whole lesson for itself,— must go over the whole ground. What it does not see, what it does not live, it will not know” (9).

Emerson is underscoring the idea that effective knowledge of history comes only from a personal relationship with it, a writing of the body (biography—literally, the writing of life) in relation to “facts of history.” Since we are removed both locatively and temporally from these facts, our knowledge of them is possible only in their relationship to ourselves, and that relationship can only be clarified or understood by taking the pieces “in” our private experience—in other words, removing them from their dead time and into our living bodies.

Furthermore, Emerson states that “Civil and natural history, the history of art and of literature, must be explained from individual history, or must remain words. There is nothing but is related to us, nothing that does not interest us,—kingdom, college, tree, horse, or iron shoe,—the roots of all things are in man” (16). Thus, *History* is a Master Narrative, that which “remain[s] words,” powerful and confining/defining but personally relevant or effective in our desire to define ourselves from the “root of all things.” But *history* relates to the time that is past, what is available to memory and which is effective when narrativized. Stories are the immaterial, personal and communal narratives which relate to subgroups and which can challenge the definitions and confinement that Master Narratives of History attempt to institute through the archive.

In truth, Master narratives are no narratives at all because they are monumental History, cold dead referents with no inherent meaning. There is no master storyteller,

one intelligence guiding the narrative arc for society—just words, as Emerson reminds us. There is no meaning until the storyteller, who arises from the community voices, starts rearranging the debris.

The examples of *V.* and *Beloved* apply to every moment of storytelling, narrative, identity reference, and argument that we make. Every connection, every conclusion I have reached in this work has been through my own narrative connections and could have been done some other way. There is an unraveling of the narrative thread as soon as there is a weaving of it, a flow of meaning as fluid as water. The dust of the archive, the piles, the notations, the yellowing of the paper, the missing documents, the difficult-to-read handwriting all attest to the multiplicities of voices, the blanks, and the absences that must be filled in by the storyteller.

The notion of the archive enables a reading of the novel as if it were itself an inanimate artifact amidst the rubble of the twentieth century, one piece of many which can be added to the whole story and itself a microcosm of that story. The archive is figured to be objective, meaningless, raw material just like language is supposed to be inanimate and meaningless without context and elaboration of the signifiers, but the silent archive, formed and interpreted, produces the unstilled word, and Pynchon's novel shows that language is anything but inanimate, and the world still whirls about the center of the silent Word.

Within the archive, the hidden and authoritative material records of the past, the story-telling whirl is able to continue—the word waiting to be made flesh, or at least “narrative,” through the imaginative function of the storyteller. The archive preserves, protects and defends our memory, but it threatens it, too. The archive is a

force that lies quietly behind impressive architecture until the imagination of the storyteller raises it from the dead and animates it once again.

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