



Mundane Language Trauma: Rereading The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison and Black Digital Narratives in the Contemporary.

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Abstract in English

This Research paper attempts to broaden the intellectual scope of the trauma research by placing the analytical lens of catastrophic, event-oriented ruptures aside in favor of what is considered to be mundane language trauma. Through close textual analysis of Toni Morrison's, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), the paper attempts to examine the cumulative, psychic injuries caused by quotidian speech acts which include pedagogical instruments, naming practices, and shared silences which are often overshadowed by the common Eurocentric paradigms of trauma. This study uses the Black feminist theory of Saidiya Hartman, Christina Sharpe, and Hortense Spillers to conceptualize the idea of mundane language trauma as a unique form of the slow violence that resides in the language utilized in racism. The analysis also connects the historical context of the narrative of Morrison to the digital context by arguing that platforms such as Tik Tok and X (previously Twitter) are both sites of linguistic injury and at the same time offer new possibilities of the work of the wake together with resistance and communal healing through digital practices of Signifyin and Distributed Blackness.

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Introduction

Since the 1970s, trauma theory has been based on the idea of the so-called cataclysmic - something unique and shattering, something that interrupts the linear flow of human experience, and is not easily represented. Based

Paper Info

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substantially on psychoanalytic understanding of the Holocaust, some early scholarship by the likes of Cathy Caruth has been known to institute a paradigm, according to which, trauma is stipulated in its suddenness, temporal displacement and the eventual ability not to talk about the memory in any way (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). But, as the growing number of scholars of color assure us, such a classical genealogy frequently does not help explain the slow violence and the ambiance forming part of the racialized life (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). In the framework of the Black diaspora, trauma is often not a sharp disruption followed by a period of safety; on the contrary, it is an ongoing and all-encompassing state what Christina Sharpe refers to as the weather (Sharpe, 2016, p. 102).

The *Bluest Eye*, (1970) by Toni Morrison is a dramatic way of dramatizing atmospheric trauma, and how devastating it can be when told through Pecola Breedlove, a tragic character. Although the critical discourse has customarily centered on the most sensationalized violations in the novel, in the largest part, the sexual assault of Pecola by her father, this center of attention risks blocking out the granular, linguistic text fabric. Before a physical infraction is made on her, Pecola is subjected to minute, daily deluge of verbal humiliations, pedagogical exclusion, and communal silences that strip away her identity long before a physical infraction can be made of her (Morrison, 1970, p. 28). This paper suggests that the overwhelming psychic harm caused by daily speech acts of inscribing racial inferiority and gendered shame can be termed as mundane language trauma. Through reconsidering *The Bluest Eye* in this light, the work has made Morrison not merely a historian of the suffering of the Blacks, but also a theorist of language critically, as it has the power to destroy and recreate the self. Moreover, the paper extends these lexical echoes up to the twenty-first century and explores how present-day Black digital

storylines serve as places of contemporary wake work, the work of living and telling in the afterlife of systematic violence (Sharpe, 2016, p. 113).

Literature Review

The Classical Model and the Eurocentric Focus

In the field of trauma, the concept of classical model includes a traumatic event to be described as a disastrous event that alters the cognitive schema of an individual. According to Caruth (1996), a trauma refers to the history of a wound that cries out (p. 4). Even though this model has provided a requisite lexicon when analysing the effects of past disasters, it has been criticized on account of its Eurocentric inclination. Stef Craps (2013) argues that the classical theory of trauma focuses on the category of individualistic and episodic occurrences, which overshadows the traumatic events that are structural, enduring, and become internalized in the performances of daily life (p. 32). This episodic position assumes an existence of a clear before and after, the time division which is frequently not possible when faced on a daily basis by pervasive atmosphere of anti-Blackness.

Black Feminist Revisions and the Quotidian

The concept of trauma as a singular break has been extensively challenged, and black feminist theorists have redirected attention to mundane production of the racial spectacle. Saidiya Hartman (1997) shows that the violence of the slavery was not actually stopped with the so-called terrible spectacle of the lash, but still persisted in the name of the so-called innocent amusements and the everyday communication that forms the social order (p. 2). In the framework of Hartman, the Black subject is not only bewove by new forms of coercion in the afterlife of slavery, but rather the rhetoric of rights and custom lets him entangle it. This is also the case, as Hortense Spillers (1987) notices that the Black body is being written into a state of

abjection, by what she refers as American grammar (p. 65). The Spillers believes that the dominant syntax constitutes and identifies the captive body, disabling it to belong to its own active desire and motive will (Spillers, 1987, p. 206). To these theorists, trauma permeates the very form of the regulatory apparatus of language a dysgraphia of the wake in which language is unable to form around the suffering of the Black (Sharpe, 2016, p. 96).

Slow Violence and Attritional Lethality

The case of slow violence as introduced by Rob Nixon (2011) is an important analytical framework in understanding the processes involved in mundane linguistic trauma. Nixon characterizes slow violence as a violence that is both cumulative and covert, it is violence of postponed destruction, the violence that is scattered over time and space (p. 2). Compared to spectacular violence, which can be observed immediately and in a dramatic way, slow violence is accretive and gradual, and its effects can be detected on enormously long periods of time (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). Having been applied to language research, this concept defines the attritional lethality of everyday speech, the spoon-feeding of dismissiveness that happens daily and ultimately leads to psychological disintegration (Morrison, 1970, p. 21).

Theoretical Framework: Defining Mundane Language Trauma

Microaggressions and the Taxonomy of Injury

To understand the processes that bring about mundane language trauma, one will have to appeal to the taxonomy of the microaggression developed by Derald Wing Sue. Sue (2010, p.28), microaggressions are understood as everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental insults that express offensive, derogative, or disparaging sentiments against marginalised groups. Under this, injury is defined as having three different types:

microassaults, conscious and deliberate racial epithets; microinsults, which entails mild snubs that convey insensitivity; and microinvalidations, which entail communications that either omit or deny the experience of a person of colour (Sue, 2010, p. 29). These acts could be said to be powerful due to their invisibility to the perpetrators, and the cumulative nature of their effect. As Sue (2010, p. 52) notes, people of colour do not have the occasional acts of racial microaggression; they have a continuous, ongoing, and cumulative experience. The result of this accrual is a condition of racial battle fatigue, which is a mental condition that comes as a result of constant doubt of one reality, an example of this is the question such as Did what I think they meant really happen? (Sue, 2010, p. 42). In Toni Morrison, the *Bluest Eye*, psychic disintegration of Pecola is the final expression of this battle fatigue.

The Clinical Parallel: The "Small-t" Trauma

The theoretical inversion of the locus of injury into the inner realm is pointed in a different direction by the scholarship of Gabor Maté as a clinical analogue to these social structures. Maté (2022) argues that trauma is not the event to a great extent but an internal phenomenon of a persistent rupture or discontinuity in the self (p. 20). He separates the former into Capital-T traumas (spectacular abuse) and the latter (small-t traumas), which include feelings like not being seen and accepted (Maté, 2022, p.22). Though other researchers have accused Maté of having a reductionist vision on addiction, his elucidation of the emotional numbing feature needed to persist in an invalidating environment provides a useful psychological map of the internal reality of the troubled mind of Pecola (Maté, 2022, p.23).

Linguistic Performance and Interpellation

Extrapolating the theoretical disciplines of Frantz Fanon (1967) this theoretical basis holds that, to speak, is to impose a culture, to carry the burden of a civilization (p. 8). The effort in taking up a language that has historically marginalized or subordinated them makes the Black subject experience a state of self-alienation. Mundane language trauma is formulated as the small print of the soul- the sum total of microaggressions and exclusions of language that begin to merge into a deep psychic wound after a certain time.

Methodology

The method that is applied in this study is qualitative method with interpretative approach which is used in the analysis of the text data obtained from Toni Morrison's novel "The Bluest Eye" (1970). Selected passages are analyzed for the role of linguistic patterns, narratives, and common speech acts in the formation of racialized trauma in the novel. There is special focus on repetition, naming, pedagogical discourse, and silence as ways language works to cause persistent psychological trauma. The analytical lens is Black feminist and trauma theory, as designed by Saidiya Hartman, Christina Sharpe and Hortense Spillers. These are not spectrographically "theoretical" objects, but rather lenses to look at the language through the lens of power, exclusion, and psychic injury. In addition, a conceptual extrapolation to current "digital spaces", like TikTok and X (previously Twitter), is added as these are considered to be cultural spaces from which comparable processes of linguistic harm and resistance can be seen. This extension is not empirical, but is an interpretation of the literary image, and attempts to draw parallels between the image in literature and the image in digital discourse in the present day.

Analysis Part I: The Architecture of Linguistic Violence in The Bluest Eye

The Typographical Asphyxiation: The Dick and Jane Primer

Morrison (1970) does not just initiate the novel with a pedagogical device; she employs the actual Dick and Jane primer to execute the choking complete whiteness of the white gaze. The primer had been the predominant reading tool in 1940s America, with about 80 percent of first grade students in 1950s having access to the tool (Gray & Sharp, 1930). It taught not only literacy, but also white values of the middle class, a nice house, a smiling mother, a father in a suit. Morrison introduces this primer with three levels of legibility that are decreasing. The original one is pure and right: Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty” (Morrison, 1970, p. 1). However, the third form is the chilling block of text where all the punctuation marks and space have been removed: “HERE IS THE HOUSE It IS GREEN AND WHITE...” (Morrison, 1970, p. 1). This is not some random mixture of letters; it is a linguistic hemorrhage. The process of eliminating the breath, or the separation between words, that is, Morrison imitates the hyper-ventilation of the traumatized subject as the person descending to another plane is unable to find the point or refuge in the strong culture. Pecola does not even have time to exist as the white family literally leaves no space in their so-called clean syntax, leaving the life of the black person to be an unpunctuated, ungrammatical mistake.

Phonetic Violence and the Economy of Scorn

The naming conventions portray the acoustic trauma of spoken language in case the primer is the symbol of visual trauma. Morrison is very careful in the way she writes the insults of the community, in order to show their rhythmic lethality. When a group of Black schoolboys surround Pecola, they carry out a ritual object ceremony oriented to proving their rejection of blackness even to the white master (Awkward, p. 189). They sing: Black

e mo. Black e mo. Ya daddy sleeps nekked (Morrison, 1970, p. 65). This particular phonetic performance, i.e., Black e mo or Blackimo, rather than the latter, imposes a staccato rhythm, which resembles a ritual drum beat. It is at this point that the word fixes the Black subject (Fanon, 1967, p. 8). The adjective Black is turned into an n-word weaponized into depriving Pecola of humanity and turning her into an aural object of contempt. Breedlove serves as a bitterly ironic title to this fact his of its own, a signifier of love to which an individual is particularly referred to as the daily spoon-feeding of dismissiveness (Morrison, 1970, p. 347).

The Silence of the Counter: The Yacobowski Incident

The mundane trauma leads to the quietness in the grocery store of Mr. Yacobowski. Pecola meets the complete lack of human acknowledgment in the storekeeper, as indicated by his eyes (Morrison, 1970, p. 48) when standing before the counter to buy Mary - candies. Morrison describes the proprietor gaze as a glaze that also acts as a mirror, which is sucking the liveliness out of Pecola. This experience signifies the loss of the primordial call and response scheme that is inherent to a human interaction. This would be classified by Sue as a micro- invalidation, or deliberate refusal to extend the right to look or greet the Black child, thus establishing a vacuum that her sense of self falls into (Sue, 2010, p.32). Pecola also feels the inexplicable flow of shame when he realizes that to him, there is nothing to perceive (Morrison, 1970, p. 48).

Analysis Part II: Contemporary Echoes in Black Digital Narratives

Digital "Signifyin'" as a Cultural Performance

The language conflict initially expressed by Morrison is now going onto the internet. But unlike popular linguistics, which often generalize digital Black communication into a simplistic text speak, Sarah Florini (2014) believes that it consists of a complex act of Signifyin, a kind of linguistic

play, obliquities, and cultural self-identification (p. 224). Black users perform the identity in the anonymized physical body of an online environment as a manifestation of cultural competence. Signifyin mainly consists of wordplay, GIFs, and African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as ways of indexing common cultural knowledge, which builds online hush harbors (Florini, 2014, p. 230). Such social media as X and Tik Tok also facilitate this performative gesture, allowing Black performers to express several layers of meaning simultaneously without being burdened by the so-called mainstream gaze (Brock, 2012, p. 534). This, in turn, leads to group solidarity and functions as a place of resistance to the hegemony of the digital world dominated by the so-called American grammar.

Algorithmic Oppression and the Policing of Black Joy

The digital architecture remains an agent of everyday trauma despite the evident agency. According to Safiya Noble (2018), this phenomenon is defined by the researcher as algorithmic oppression and technological redlining. Noble in a case study of Google search results based on the query terms Black girls found that sexually explicit or derogatory images were frequently shown when using the query term, but when she did similar queries using the term white girls, she found very different, sanitized image displays (Noble, 2018). Such commercial appropriation of Blackness is explainable as a modern approach to Dick and Jane mentality, whereby whiteness gains an advantage and Black womanhood becomes the victim of a digital sorting system. Moreover, empirical studies by Maarten Sap (2019) observe that there is a high level of a racial bias in hate speech detection. On average, algorithms trained on biased datasets will label more tweets in African American Vernacular English and posts by self-identified Black users as being toxic or offensive than they will label posts by other demographic groups. It is an example of an algorithmic mundane

trauma, in which the digital infrastructure is coded to understand the Black vernacular and community happiness as a norm breaking of norms. The replace-rather-than-remove paradigm which large language models adopt often replaces the explicit attacks with so-called covert risks, thus neglecting the cultural background of the Black discourse.

Wake Work as Digital Ratchetness

To this, Andre Brock (2020) argues that black digital praxis has a libidinal economy comprising of joy and pleasure-seeking (p. 37). Using the construct of ratchetness, as an unfiltered way of acting or speaking, he establishes this as one of the ways of libidinal digestion that avoids placing the white gaze at the center, and that does not fit the respectability politics. Contemporary digital activists reflect on what is now called wake work by expressing their marginalization in an articulate form in public, thus transforming personal forms of harm into collective pedagogical expressions (Sharpe, 2016, p. 113). Black TikTok creators are rewriting the Dick and Jonas book of the present-day by parodying the term NPC (Non-Playable Character) and coping as an archetype traditionally unrelated to inclusion. These performances force the larger cultural milieu to acknowledge them in their respective language structures and therefore beyond the deficit model of Blackness and on the path to a distributed and festive image of self-conceptualization.

Discussion: The Persistence of the Weather

In the current discussion, it is clear that the notion of the master narrative is perceived as dynamic, not as a written object, but rather as a mutable socio aesthetic space. Weights and embeddings in the natural language processing models have replaced the white yardsticks that historically were used to measure Pecola Breedlove in 1941. It is clear that Nixon concept

of slow violence works based on attrition, instead of a one-fatal occurrence, thus eliminating the necessity of a one cataclysmic event to bring about the destruction of the subject. Instead, it is based on the mundane action of the dismissiveness of the spoon-feeding, which makes Black children unseen by the grocer and implements the spoil elements into the algorithms of decision-making. The move in agency also refers to the channeling of the shift between analog printed primers to distributed digital networks. As Pecola crumbled under the silence that pressed on her, modern topics are using the concept of fingered speech and digital ratchetness as a way of revitalizing agency, or putting breath back into the body (Sharpe, 2016, p. 113). Signifyin as a practice allows the performance of identity which is pungently done, in spite of the lack of a corporeal body. The tool of appropriating the interstices, or the fault lines in language that control passage of phenomena through the cracks, Black digital practitioners can use the linguistic trauma as a site where communal witnessing and transformation can occur (Spillers, 1987).

Conclusion

The language erasure that Pecola Breedlove underwent in 1941 is mirrored in the erasures that are algorithmic in nature in the twenty-first century. The catastrophes only reflect the tip of a linguistic iceberg; the underbelly harbors the mass of gradual violence, which occurs in the form of the quotidian spoon-feeding of dismissiveness and the so-called American grammar of subjection (Spillers, 1987, p. 65). According to the work by Morrison, the language serves as a potent weapon of terror and oppression as well as according to her commentary in her Nobel Lecture, it is the currency of our lives (Morrison, 1993). The message of language being reclaimed, that is to say, word-work by Morrison, and Signifyin by digital Signifyin by modern narrators, is a central point of change. When mundane

linguistic trauma is named and we perform the wake work we generate the conditions in which we are able to maneuver such a world in which the impetus is always towards Black death (Sharpe, 2016, p.113). The competition of legibility becomes the competition of the breath, the interstitial between the words into which the subject might eventually find a locus of rest.

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الخلاصة

تحاول هذه الورقة البحثية توسيع الأفق الفكري لدراسات الصدمة من خلال تحويل العدسة التحليلية التي تركز عادةً على الانقطاعات الكارثية المرتبطة بالأحداث الكبرى نحو ما يمكن تسميته **صدمة اللغة اليومية**. ومن خلال تحليل نصّي دقيق لرواية (1970) «**The Bluest Eye**» للكاتبة Toni Morrison، تسعى الدراسة إلى مراجعة الإصابات النفسية التراكمية والمتراكمة التي تنجم

عن أفعال الكلام الاعتيادية، بما في ذلك الأدوات التربوية، وممارسات التسمية، وأنماط الصمت المشتركة، وهي عناصر غالبًا ما تُهمل أو تُحجب في إطار النماذج الأوروبية-المركزية السائدة في دراسات الصدمة. وتعتمد هذه الدراسة على الطرح النسوي الأسود لدى كلٍّ من Saidiya Hartman وChristina Sharpe وHortense Spillers من أجل بلورة مفهوم **صدمة اللغة اليومية** بوصفها شكلًا مميزًا من **العنف البطيء** الكامن في اللغة المستخدمة ضمن ممارسات العنصرية. كما يربط التحليل بين السياق التاريخي لسردية موريسون والسياق الرقمي المعاصر، مجادلًا بأن منصات مثل TikTok وX (Twitter) تُعدّ في الوقت نفسه فضاءات لإلحاق الأذى اللغوي، لكنها تتيح أيضًا إمكانات جديدة للعمل الجماعي في إطار العيش في أعقاب الصدمة (work of the wake)، فضلًا عن ممارسات المقاومة والشفاء المجتمعي عبر الممارسات الرقمية مثل التضمين البلاغي الأسود (Signifyin') والسواد الموزّع (Distributed Blackness).