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KATHERINE BELLAMY MITCHELL

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For Reuben Jackson (1956-2024)

For Lauren Berlant (1957-2021)

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> WE NEED NOT APOLOGIZE I SUPPOSE FOR
> DREAMING OF SOMEONE NOW AND AGAIN,
> BUT NEED WE ALSO MENTION IT IN PRINT?
>
> — Dorothy Iannone [1]

Apologies and dissertations, both, are aspirational gestures: insufficient to the material of living and history that they boldly purport to intervene in, organize, communicate, and perhaps transform. They are also inescapably a product of relationships and the worlds in which they occur. This dissertation is the result of so many people's effort, time, attention, curiosity, and faith, some of whom I will inventory here—though the worlds that brought this dissertation into being far exceed this container.

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1. My own transcription from photographs of the full set of cards that make up the *75 Apologies* series by Dorothy Iannone, provided by Lisa Pearson, whose interest in apologies and correspondence also deserves mention. The series was originally made by Iannone in 1996 and displayed in a three-part painted wooden box which contained three separate stacks of cards: "75 Apologies - 75 Complimentary Cards – 75 Uncomplimentary Cards." Any error in the transcription is my own. A selection of the apologies, not including this one, are curated and published in *You Who Read Me With Passion Now Must Forever Be My Friends.: Dorothy Iannone.* (South Egremont, MA: Siglio Press, 2014.) Personal correspondence, July 10, 2020.

academic year into smaller deadlines. She has read the messiest drafts of each of these chapters and helped me find the germ of an idea in an utter swamp. It is also imperative to mention that Tina's generosity extended to acts of world-making through her facilitation of our writing group—*Tina, Get the Axe!*—whose participants have shepherded my writing in many forms and whose brilliance has indelibly impacted and expanded my interests. Marissa Fenley, Arianna Gass, Fabien Maltais-Bayda, Clara Nizard, Eva Pensis, Lily Scherlis, Michael Stablein, Gasira Timir, Sila Ulug, Jennifer Williams, and Shirl Yang all hold this project together, and held me together in community through the bewildering experience of graduate school.

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In the Scottish ballad, "Tam Lin", the titular character is rescued from the Queen of the Fairies by his love, who must hold onto him as he undergoes a series of transformations into creatures and objects that are frightening or difficult to hold—a snake, a lion, a peregrine, a piece of burning coal, a sliver of ice, a toad, a worm. I have been lucky to have been firmly held down to earth by the love, concern, interest, humor, and generosity of so many beloved friends, who took in stride how much I changed and struggled and resisted and despaired and made myself variously difficult to hold.

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ABSTRACT

A Poetics of Apology theorizes apology as a capacious genre by reading precisely those apologies which are often dismissed as such—defense speeches, off-the-cuff quotidian apologetics, and infelicitous and ironic apologies—in order to examine the ways that this genre is used to a variety of effects in politics, literature, and daily life, apart from the generic expectation of producing forgiveness or closure. I identify three characteristic aspects: a narration of a past event, the establishing of a relationship across a binarized apologizer and recipient, and a transformative operation that rewrites the harm through a desire to undo or alter it. I uncover a history of apologies as fraught performatives which are transformative in their expected capacity to repair relationships in the aftermath of harm, but which are also creatively and efficaciously employed across power dynamics (as when a wage laborer apologizes to a customer or when a woman apologizes to safely escape unwanted attention or to navigate a situation of racialized tension and violence.) In chapters on queer performance art by Vaginal Davis, José Munoz, Adrian Piper, AA Bronson, and Adrian Stimson, public conversations between James Baldwin and Margaret Meade, novels by James Agee and Walker Evans, and poetry by Layli Long Solider and Claudia Rankine, I examine how the narrative, relational, and transformative facets of apology are deployed in the context of race relations, class and conversation, and scaled modes of address between indigenous artists and colonial nation-states.

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

In this dissertation I use both an initial capitalization and the lower-case when writing "black/Black." My variations defer to the orthographic practices of the authors, in relation to their published materials, performances, and making. When there are no, or inconsistent, orthographic preferences at work in the way that the authors in a particular chapter express and discuss Blackness or racialization, I capitalize the term. This inconsistency registers the contours of a debate about language and what it allows us to say, remember, and change in its performance, inscription, and enunciation—but it does not settle it.

INTRODUCTION:

> "He will never say the words to me. He will not make the apology. So it must be imagined."
>
> — V, formerly Eve Ensler. *The Apology.* 2019.[1]

Nearly every monograph and essay that focuses on the genealogical origins and operations of apologies in the West mentions Plato's *Apology* as a historical antecedent, if only to draw a contrast between the defense speech and the apologies that have begun to circulate during what scholars have begun to call the "age of apology" after World War II, a period of international law and truth and reconciliation frameworks that has resulted in a boom of public apologies delivered by nations on behalf of historical political atrocities. [2] Plato's rendering of Socrates' self-defense at his trial for impiety and corrupting the youth in 399 BC is often brough forth both as the formal origin point and central antagonist, often the start of a rough argument for periodization that characterizes contemporary apologies as remorseful, and historical apologies as defensive speeches:

> "Socrates is anything but apologetic as the term has come to be understood. Instead he provides an apologia (απολογια) as was customary in the classical Greek legal system in rebuttal to the prosecution's accusations."[3]

This tension about what an apology is, and is not, and how it ought to be, seems to be anchored in the apology itself, and is certainly a consistent part of the popular discourse. Philosopher and legal scholar Nick Smith puts the question thus: "How can we make sense of apologies as they transform from the ancient notion of a legal defense to the modern notion of contrition for wrongdoing, but then occasionally return to their roots as a kind of concealed

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1. Eve Ensler, *The Apology* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.)
2. Mark Gibney, Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann, Jean-Marc Coicaud, and Niklaus Steiner, eds., *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 137-153.
3. Nick Smith, *I Was Wrong: The Meanings of Apologies*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 8.

legal, political, and personal rhetorical stratagem?"[4] While examples of the supposedly "modern" use of apology as an admission of wrongdoing, rather than a kind of excuse or self-defense certainly gained momentum in the sixteenth century, with examples such as Shakespeare's use of the word in Richard III to describe Buckingham's polite request for pardon upon interrupting, the tension that apologies might have been being misused seems to be continuous.[5] Samuel Johnson's 1755 *A Dictionary of the English Language* observed that, "Apology generally signifies rather excuse than vindication, and tends rather to extenuate the fault, than prove innocence." However, he notes this trend was "sometimes unregarded by writers," who made use of the apology as defense speech, citing John Milton's *Paradise Lost* as a particular offender. Rather than see this "unregarded" aspect of apologies as the central defining characteristic, I make the following observations: (1) there is a consistent phenomenon of ongoing interest in defining and controlling the use and meaning of apology, and (2) presumably an equally vast and obviously continuing tradition of the "misuse" of them for other purposes. This tension between our expectations and desires for their operation—their straightforward, intuitive, habitual, and even gut-level understanding of what an apology is—and the ways in which they are still efficaciously used to a variety of purposes—is something that I take seriously rather than trying to explain away.

Apologies are ubiquitous: we perform them on a daily basis, automatically and with regularity, publicly and privately, on behalf of ourselves and others. We feel we deserve apologies when we have been wronged, we can tell good and sincere apologies from bad ones, and if they are skillfully and sincerely executed, we often attempt to use the good apologies to make amends for errors and violence, and to build new relations after damage

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4. Nick Smith, *I Was Wrong: The Meanings of Apologies*, 8.
5. Richard, in response to Buckingham: "My lord, there needs no such apology. I do beseech your Grace to pardon me." William Shakespeare, *Richard III.* Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Niles, eds. (The Folger Shakespeare Library. https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/richard-iii/) Act III. Scene 7. 105-106.

and trauma. When we issue or receive apologies we often call upon inarticulate but viscerally felt understandings of who we are and want to be, and the nature of our relationships to others. Apologies take place on individual and global scales, on behalf of collectives, communities, ecclesiastical hierarchies, corporations, and nation-states, between the living and the many-years-dead, and often with incredibly high stakes: apologies can leverage millions of dollars in reparations and lawsuits, can be made to address acts of unimaginably scaled atrocity, and can quite literally be the difference between life and death sentences in a courtroom or when interfacing with law enforcement.

Despite their frequency, familiarity, and obviously powerful impact, it is extraordinarily difficult to pin down what the wide variety of interactions we consider to be apologetic actually do. After all, people use these complicated and often ritualized performances to accomplish a wide variety of actions. Individuals use apologies to acknowledge having casually knocked into someone, offer a defense of their previous actions, explain their commitment to a position or faith, express remorse or regret for something they did, attempt to make amends for wrongdoing, articulate an intention to change something in the future, or promise to leave things exactly as they are. They are often employed as gestures of amelioration or as a kind of social lubricant: they can emphasize a gaffe or an error as accident rather than intent, and they can attempt to make an uncomfortable situation more comfortable by acknowledging a failure or an inadequacy. Apologies are often high stakes: they are affectively complicated for a person's biography and sense of themselves in relation to others, and often constitute attempts to repair relationships of trust or closeness that have been broken. Offering or receiving an apology is a moment of vulnerability or danger, particularly when the apology contains an admission of guilt or occurs between two parties who have an existing relationship to one another, or between whom there is an imbalanced power dynamic or a situation of domination.

Apologies can also be deceptive and powerful tools of legal repression, political manipulation, representation, and narrative control both for the singular or collective apologizing, as well as for the individuals receiving the apology or implicated in its terms.

The Oxford English Dictionary includes two contemporary and contradictory definitions for an apology distinguished specifically by their impact on the receiver: (1) an apology can constitute a defense speech by justifying, explaining, or excusing an action or event, (2) an apology can explain that no offense was intended in the course of an action or event, "coupled with the expression of regret for any that may have been given; or, a frank acknowledgement of the offence with expression of regret for it, by way of reparation."[6] As anthropologist Michel-Rolphe Trouillot observes, the "family resemblances" of apology are also especially hard to pin down in the context of English: "In English vernacular, the noun 'apology' (even more than the French 'excuse' or the Spanish 'excusa') covers a wide range of speech acts, not all of which denote a repentant subject… the family resemblance between these various acts creates a space for ambiguity."[7] In English, the etymological connections include "excuse"—a word whose etymology and usage make it clear that the speaker should be let off the hook—as well as the confession, and the apologia. This dizzying array of uses, purposes and functions has caused scholarship on apologies to often focus on drawing distinctions between types of apologies and other associated forms such as excuses, confessions, disclaimers, and justifications, often by historicizing them as antecedent practices, prior to what they historicize as the contemporary practice of the apology defined by regret and a request for forgiveness.

In this dissertation I attempt to problematize apologies by suspending, for a moment, their usual evaluative criteria, and by making what is taken for granted about them available

6. *Oxford English Dictionary*. "apology, n." Accessed July 18, 2024. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/apology_n?tab=meaning_and_use#767441
7. Michel-Rolphe Trouillot, "Abortive Rituals: Historical Apologies in the Global Era," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies.* (London: Routledge, 2011), Footnote 3, page 175.

for discussion. I do so by employing the concept of genre, understood in Lauren Berlant's terms as "loose affectively-invested zone of expectations about the narrative shape a situation will take," expectations that can vary and include dissent.[8] Apology, as a genre, is a way of speaking (or gesturing to, indicating, otherwise articulating) the regretted past into a split present—between people—for the sake of bringing about a new or different future. In their discussion of genre, Berlant explains that genre-building (and the genre flailing that we reach for when our expectations are not met, or are violently shattered and disappointed) can importantly and perhaps centrally be a kind of creative world-building, in some cases one that can hold contradictions and friction in addition to merging relationships, but one that brings us, often messily, together:

> The violence of the world makes us flail about for things to read with, people to talk to, and material for inducing transformations, that can make it possible not to aspire to, feel at war, or to be right; but to be disturbed together, thrashing with, and creating value through a shift in the object.[9]

Treating the apology as a genre of narrative-building or narrative-changing—inclusive of more codified literary genres such as the apologia—allows us to understand the lived and generated contours of what the apology promises and opens up socio-politically and interpersonally, both as it attempts to do what it says, and as it serves to reveal the instability of the sensorial, temporal, experiential world of an encounter. Such an approach also opens up the apology to the usual framework of narrative analysis: some apologies might necessarily include a narrative of one's actions in relation to one's sense of self or a set of desires, other apologies might be successful precisely because they lack this narrativizing. In reading broadly and comparatively, my dissertation will not purport to cover the fullness of what apologies are or do, nor does it trace a temporal argument about the evolution of this genre.

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8 Lauren Berlant, "Genre Flailing," *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry*: 156-162.
9 Lauren Berlant, "Genre Flailing," 161.

Approaching apologetics as a genre allows us to attend not only to the proliferation of new alter-apologetic discourses and literatures that use the occasion of the apology to explore questions of present, past, and future ways of relating, but to account for the apology as an expository tool that has produced all these various articulations of social, political, and material fault lines—and the ways that the genre of the apology activates, by articulating, a social situation for continued intervention and negotiation in the present. As Virginia Jackson said of lyric, "Perhaps the lyric has become so difficult to define because we need it to be blurry around the edges, to remain capacious enough to include all kinds of verse and all kinds of ideas about what poetry is or should be."[10] In my dissertation I take what I see as a similar "blurriness" around apology as an invitation to theorizing and exploration, rather than a sign that we have gone wrong with apologies and need to return to an ideal or more narrow definition of what an apology should be. I understand apologies, in this dissertation, as particularly affectively inflected tools for the production of history, a social form where the apologizer steps explicitly into the role of narrating the (or rather, *a*) retrospective sociohistorical significance of their own actions to an arbitrating and invested audience.[11] That an apology can achieve such varied ends as healing or enabling new relationships to form and inaugurating material reparations procedures, or conservatively—mitigating crisis, delimiting culpability and the extent of an injury—informs and motivates a deep skepticism towards apologies, especially when those gestures are carried out by the larger actors such as nations and corporations. In this way, the genre of the apology crystallizes the problem of the reparative crisis contemporary which seeks to narrate a history of past harm as if it might

10. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins. "The News from Poems: Essays on the 21st Century," *Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2014), 1.
11. I borrow this observation and attentiveness to apologies as a mode of producing history (and as a historically situated and particular action and gesture in themselves) to Michel-Rolphe Trouillot's breakdown of the human production of history, and creation of silences, through various modes of action and narration. Michel-Rolphe Trouillot, "The Power in the Story," *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995): 1-30.

mark a turning point, but which does so through a form of address which requires the repetition of that violence. Apologies, in as far as we insist that they *must* heal or close, can only bring that event in the past on in order to bring the sides of the wounds to meet. That is not, evidently and importantly, all that they do.

I build towards a sense of apology that is oriented toward a kind of collaborative world making rather than a neat project of self-constitution or a completed binary and controlled interaction. My approach to apologies allows us to examine how interesting apologies really are, paying attention to how conflicting acts of self-definition, misrecognition and identification, as well as resistant logics and desires, manifest and encounter one another through these formed and narrated apologies. I assemble an archive of apologies that articulate and activate political, structural, and material fault-lines, and make that social content available for discourse. By withholding—and questioning—our evaluative criteria for a good or bad apology, we are able to pay attention to the apology as atmospheric and affective situation, and the set of emotional responses and experiences that an apology can dislodge around it and manifest, including: shame, trust, disbelief, desire, regret, and anger. These affects and motivations are often entangled—productively and counter-productively—with the variety of possibly desired outcomes of apologizing: taking responsibility or accountability, making reparations, doing justice to a situation, or even excusing or defending an action.

In what follows, I will define this genre and its expectations using a tripartite armature: the identification, the narrative account, and the transformative operation. I consider these three parts "aspects" of the apology, namely, while they are part of structuring the expectations of the genre, they are not themselves the expectations. Rather, they are my basic criteria of inclusion, and must work relationally together in order to structure an apology. As a formal conversational interchange between an apologizer and receiver, the

performance of an apology necessarily includes acts recognition and identification (e.g. "I need to apologize to you for this," or, "She means me") by both parties. Acceptance of an identity or position by participation in an apology comes with its risks, and in cases where there is disagreement, interpolates the participants in the performance into a system that can harm them, especially in cases where apologies are issued by or accepted on behalf of collectives for mass atrocities or identity-based wrongs. In conversations about apology, the identification of who precisely it is that the apology is between, is often the litmus test of it efficacy: is the right person being addressed, or can they speak for those who were harmed? Who is the person (or corporate body) apologizing to the recipient? Some scholars, particularly from a legal perspective, put real pressure on numerical identity as a litmus test, as Trouillot writes: "The moral or legal case for redress—as well as for an admission of guilt—can be made only through a genealogical construction, that is, on a particular composition of the subjects involved and on a particular interpretation of history."[12] The identification, or relational aspect, often takes a binarizing form of "doer and done-to," a phrase that I borrow from psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin, whose work focuses on how both members of an analytic situation, the patient and the analyst, "with their projective and dissociated processes—co-create the dialectic of recognition and breakdown... understood as twoness—the complementarity of 'doer and done to' with its ball-in-socket interlocking dependency of opposites" in the clinical space.[13] This binarizing form has possibilities and pitfalls, and also always indicates further positions—a witnessing third, a cultural context. Apologies are always normatively situated and regulated, a stance which requires collective recognition by a moral community of an apology as a possible response to a violation, one

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12. Michel-Rolphe Trouillot, "Abortive Rituals: Historical Apologies in the Global Era," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies,* Vol. 2:2, (London: Routledge, 2011): 174.
13. Jessica Benjamin, "Our Appointment in Thebes: Acknowledgement, the Failed Witness, and Fear of Harming," *Beyond Doer and Done-to: Recognition Theory, Intersubjectivity and the Third,* (London, New York: Routledge, 2014): 49-50.

expected more than responding with rationalizing, defending. As Nicholas Tavuchis writes, “to apologize is thus to conform to a rule stating that, under certain conditions, an apology is in order. So an apology bespeaks a commitment to two normative orders: to conform to the general norm, we must acknowledge that we have violated another norm. The general norm, in turn, calls for a type of self-punishment and revelation as a form of conformity.”[14]

The narrative aspect of an apology is how the past even is brought into the present and can be accomplished in language through telling a story of what happened, or in gesture or through inference, as when I knock into someone and turn around with an apology, I am referring to that encounter a few moments ago. I use the word narrative to emphasize that the apology draws connections between the progression of events indicated and the binarized pair that it relates, and also to underline that identifying what an apology is about—and what happened—are often fraught and difficult activities, indeed, getting clear on “what happened” can be the transformative operation full-stop. Apologies can be attempts to reconcile two opposing worldviews: someone did something in the past that they now regret or that no longer makes sense, someone did something that they only now understand the full or accidental additional implications of, or new evidence came to light that changes what someone thought occurred. The narrative aspect of the apology is also often a mechanism put to evasive use, as in the dissatisfying example of an apology such as, “I’m sorry that you feel bad,” which attempts to transform the recipient’s feelings about an event rather than mark as regrettable the harmful event itself. One can offer an apology for the right wrong, or for something else entirely.

The transformative operation is the desired result of bringing those identified into relation around the story of what occurred: what it is that telling a story of what happened to

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14. Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991): Endnote, Note 2.

someone else is meant to achieve. Accounts of this transformation vary in what it is that they expect to achieve, and on what aspect of the apology the transformation is meant to work on. Is the apology meant to correct the apologizer's sense of themselves, or to offer a different? Does it structure a kind of recognition or position for the recipient that does not quite fit their sense of themselves, or their political investments? For Trouillot, the transformative operation functions to change the narration of the harm in the past by eliminating it, and is put towards, "the production of a partial or complete erasure [of the history], ideally verified by both sides."[15] For others, the apology functions to preserve or bring back into discussion a harm that has been ignored. Rather than propose a particular kind of apologetic transformation, I keep my sense of the transformative operation vague in order to encompass and register the shifts of apologetic use and purpose, including the achievement of forgiveness and closure—but do note that all apologies seek to transform some aspect of what it is that they articulate into relation, whether it is how someone feels about a particular event or whether it is the event itself. These aspects are required for the apology to work, each aspect structuring the others, in the ways that a protein folds and becomes an enzyme that performs a particular operation.[16]

The other noun that makes up this dissertation's title, *A Poetics of Apologies*, indicates both my methodological approach, and part of what I hope to highlight about apologies—namely, their status as made things, as compositions, which themselves structure opportunities for telling stories about ourselves to others. *Poeisis* has developed into a theory of literary making and creativity, and draws attention to the act of making, the thing made, and the world made, telling us about the structure of the world as we speak it into and through language. In calling my dissertation a poetics of apology, I hope to draw attention to

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15. Michel-Rolphe Trouillot, "Abortive Rituals: Historical Apologies in the Global Era," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies,* Vol. 2:2, (London: Routledge, 2011): 175.
16. I am grateful to Lily Scherlis for this formulation, in conversation, April 16, 2024.

the particular kinds of radical world-making happening in the apology. Along the three components I articulate—identity, narrative, transformation—there are acts of creative misrecognition of self and others, alternative worlds and possibilities written into being or grieved in their loss, and changes made or decisions defended. The methodology that I make use of in this dissertation to parse apologies treats them broadly as literary objects, as *grammata* or texts (written characters, letters, articulate sounds, writings, documents, images, symbols, and other such objects of examination) produced by attempts at self-explanation or explanation of events by producing objects of discourse. These statements, documents, agreements, and rituals are performed with the intention of allowing the individuals involved in space of the apology to establish a new relationship to and between themselves according to those terms. Political apologies, national apologies, and intimate apologies between friends all partake in the same formal genre even as they engage different discourses and implicate different scales of participation. Taking these apologetic texts seriously in as far as they attempt to perform something and structure a world of possible actions and reactions through their performance—requires a kind of close poetic analysis. The words of an apology, and the way that they are said, matters. It seems to me to not be incidental that, building on a docupoetic tradition, there is a growing archive of contemporary experimental poetry that interrogates the structures of legal or non-literary documents by re-making them into poetic form, usually with the intent of encouraging a certain politically inflected re-reading and criticism of the ideological contours which produced that source document in the first place. All of the literary, artistic, or performative examples that I include do, explicitly, call themselves apologies—or otherwise signal their participation in the genre by including words of apology such as "I am sorry" or "I regret." In my three body chapters, I explore three things that people have used the apology to do, which are outside of the purview of the project of forgiveness, and examine how these "bad" uses of the genre are also canny uses of

the affordances of the genre, to political, pedagogical, and personal (sometimes powerfully reparative) effect.

My first chapter, “Whereas When Offered an Apology”: Alter-Apologetic Responses to Formal Apologies from the United States and Canada to Indigenous Peoples,” examines the multiplicity of interpretations and use that can come from even the most tightly controlled apology. While state governments and actors have increasingly been turning to the form of the public or collective apology as a way of interfacing with historically harmed populations, they also tend to place rigid material and symbolic limits upon these apologies, turning what is characterized as a transformative ritual towards projects of shoring up political and legal stability. The project of protecting the state from any material legal or political impacts entailed by apologizing—while still mobilizing a restricted number of the “affective,” “emotional,” or “ethical” expectations that structure the performance of apologies—results in a tautological characterization of the impact of the state apologizing as “merely” or “simply” apologizing. These “safe” apologies proliferate several types of response, primarily in terms of assessing the success or failure of that performance. One mode of response that encompasses both critical analysis and acceptance of the apology attempts to verify its authenticity, in terms of whether the apology is sincerely meant, referring to the purported intention of the authors’ words. Critical responses to dissatisfying public apologies often ultimately declare that they are not in fact apologies at all, merely another example of a “pseudo-apology”, or a political “non-apology” issued insincerely, ineffectively, and perhaps nefariously.[17] Another approach examines the limited impact of such apologies in terms of its efficacy, or inefficacy, for particular political projects—leading to a number of substantial accounts of collective apologies as tools of recognition for both civic good and violent

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17. See, Roy L. Brooks, *When Sorry Isn’t Enough: The Controversy Over Apologies and Reparations for Human Injustice,* Critical America Series, (London: New York University, 1999). Also see, Robert M. Eisinger. “The Political Non-Apology,” *Society,* 48, (Springer, 2011) 136–141.

political and social repression as well as ongoing projects of colonization, and even providing opportunities for the public articulation of political stances such as the “Reconciliation is Dead” movement. Others take up the terms of the apology as a speech act, assessing whether certain formal criteria have been met in order for it to succeed or fail on its own terms, leading critics such as anthropologist Michel-Rolphe Trouillot to diagnose collective apologies as foundationally “abortive rituals.”

At an angle to these approaches—which each hold different evaluative criteria up to the apology—a number of artists, authors, and makers have taken up the apology for their own use. These artists work to uncover what Pauline Wakeham identifies as the “radically transformative potential” of the apology as a genre deployed in a variety of lived contexts that these formal apologies seek—and fail—to limit and circumscribe, often re-writing along the lines of the apology itself, or deploying apologies of their own, to critical effect. These alter-apologetic works play with apology in terms of the three broad expectations of the genre that I identify as (1) the relational (often structured through the form of the address, the invocation, or the to/from), (2) the narrative (the identifying of and thus the rewriting of the harm in the present as the issue addressed) and (3) the transformative operation of the apology (which changes the relationship of those interpellated in the apology to the content narrated, often an expression of regret or a request for forgiveness.) In what follows, I follow the work of Oglala Lakota poet and artist Layli Long Soldier in her 2017 book of poetry, *Whereas*, as well as related performances, as a central text that presents a critical re-reading and re-writing of the 2009 U.S. Congressional Resolution of Apology. I also examine works that I consider part of the wave of critical literary, artistic, and social engagement with formal apologies—which I call alter-apologetic. In these works, formal apologies, often dismissed as empty gestures, are re-read rather as actively *emptied* reparative gestures which take great pains to anticipate and fend off the possibility of material reparations. I treat these works as a

form of intellectual and artistic labor which opens up the apologetic relationship along its fissures to reveal the ultimate (effective, present) paradox of a gesture of apology from a colonial state regretting its path to becoming the state that could issue that apology. I make use of deconstructivist approaches to speech act theory and theories of language as a way of illuminating how these alter-apologetic works intervene in the performance of the apology itself to critical effect. I read works by Jordan Abel (Nisga'a) and the queer performance collaboration between Adrian Stimson (Siksika) and settler artist AA Bronson, works which explore how apologetic genres open unique ways to address a national politics whose power comes about through instruments that are bureaucratic, archival, and issued on paper.

In my second chapter, "The Danger of the Situation: The Indexical Present of Apology in the Performance Artwork of Adrian Piper and Vaginal Davis," I develop an account of what I call "structurally apologetic" subjects, namely those identities which are expected to apologetically transform narratives of harms committed by others by assuming de facto responsibility, as the flight attendants who apologize for mistakes caused by passengers whose training motto, "the passenger isn't always right, but he's never wrong," was examined by Hochschild in *The Managed Heart*. I define this concept and its subversive potential by considering how gendered performance, queer sociality, and minoritized populations employ apologetic (or unapologetic) postures to make politically productive their interpolation into maintaining dominant comfort, politeness, and conversational flow. This chapter is where a number of the dominant conventions and generic expectations for apologizing come into play, often as habit that can be made productive use of: the compulsive "sorry" that is met with affirmation, the expectation of acceptance to an apology as it offers to take or articulate responsibility for a harm, the sense that to refuse to accept an apology would be rude or disruptive, are expectations that are often activated not only as ways of making apologies better but of revealing the racist, classed, and gendered structures that they often serve to

navigate and reinforce. I read Adrian Piper's *My Calling (Card) #1 (for Dinners and Cocktail Parties)* as a procedural text at the intersection of apology and command, which activate postures of deference and aggression in the white participants who receive these cards. I relate her series of "Calling Cards" (1986-1990) to an apology delivered by Vaginal Davis in conversation with José Muñoz at NYU, wherein she apologizes for being black. I attend to the risks these artists take by deploying the fixed texts—calling cards, apologetic scripts and formal apologies—in relationship to the physical presences and positionalities of their audiences and readers, thereby articulating their variously racialized and "passing" bodies into variable and fraught apologetic scenes. In doing so, I draw out an account of the genre of the apologetic as a temporal, affective, and symbolic form, and discuss how the fragmentable relationship between the positions of apologizer and recipient illuminates the worlds it articulates.

In the third chapter, "Manic Reparation: Performances of Apology and the Politics of White Affects," I read the many-page apologies in James Agee and Walker Evans's documentary novel on sharecropping families, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, and in Agee's "America, Look at Your Shame!" which centers meditations on racism, regionalism, and responsibility prompted by Detroit's 1943 race riot. I examine the displacement of narrative control across power differentials in these two central texts alongside several other works of American modernist and documentary literature, ending with Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) and Christina Sharpe's *Ordinary Notes (*2023) which are studded with apologies for racist violence. Following psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, I read these apologies as manic attempts to separate wrongdoing from the speaker while (prematurely) narrating the harm as repaired, a split motivation that both sutures, and structures, conflicting histories of harm. These manic apologetics work in a frenzied way to make the apologizer feel better rather than addressing the harm, serving to effect what Eve

Tuck and K. Wayne Yang might describe as a "move to innocence." I use my concept of "manic apologetics" to stage a critique of projects which uncritically consider the reparative as an ethical imperative, such as Robin DiAngelo's descriptive project in *White Fragility*, which use reparation as way of erasing the immediate harm.

As a way of closing the introduction, and introducing the body of the dissertation, I want to offer another possible amendment to the usual genealogy of the apology in the *apologia* (evinced by Plato's *Apology*) by turning us toward another text in simultaneous circulation which somewhat provocatively fits my criteria of inclusion as an apology: the particular historical object of Stesichorus's palinode, as well as the formal repetitions it later inspired (and other examples of recantations of myths) of retractions or reversal of a creative composition through the composition of another, conflicting one.[18] Our oldest source for the biographical anecdote of the blinding of Stesichorus, and the only source of the fragment of the Palinode itself, is in Plato's *Phaedrus*. While speaking to the titular character, Socrates realizes that he has made a mistake, and reflects:

> So, my friend, I need to be purified. There is an ancient purification for those who have erred in muthologia, one which Homer did not perceive, but Stesichorus did. For when he was robbed of his eyes because of the slander of Helen, he was not ignorant like Homer, but since he was mousikos he knew the cause, and created immediately.
>
> > This is not a true story,
> > You did not embark in the broad-benched ships,
> > You did not reach the citadel of Troy.
>
> And when he had created the whole of his so-called Palinode, he recovered his sight immediately. [19]

The story of Stesichorus could be read in a number of ways, one of which is as a joke at the expense of the offended listener, Helen. The ode, which was likely an unflattering story about the woman whose mythic position as a catalyst for the Trojan War and the ostensible cause of

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18. Leonard Woodbury, "Helen and the Palinode," *Phoenix*, Vol. 21, No. 3, Autumn. (Classical Association of Canada, 1967), 157-176.
19. Plato, *Phaedrus,* 243a2—243b3. Note that I follow the translation of Alexander J. Beecroft, and thus Louise Pratt, especially in the decision to render the first line of the palinode as "This is not a true story."

mass death, could not be retracted. In order for Stesichorus to have recited a different ode, there would have had to be a different world: Helen had to have never left with Paris, the events of the *Aeneid* must not have occurred. There is certainly an insult in this, but there is also the possibility of a sincere grief present: the ode cannot be undone, the men cannot be brought back to life, honor cannot be restored, life does not have the pleasure and circularity of a palindrome—a word which reads the same backwards and forwards. The palinode writes the story of that possibility and presents it to the woman offended—a retraction that is also a defense of his prior speech, a beautiful counterfactual vision, a desire. However we read the enigmatic ode itself, and its brief but impossible wish of undoing, in the progress of the story it does succeed as a ritual of purification: the past (of Helen's being insulted, of the god's disfavor) releases him, and Stesichorus is able to see his way forward again. The story of the palinode is a story that emphasizes a perception of the linearity of history and the impossibility of undoing anything: if Stesichorus could have written a different ode, there would have had to have been no war, the word would have had to be a different world. The palinode—and the apology as the undoing of a story or a *logos* in favor of telling a different one—does not make it as though the ode, or the story, was never recited at all, nor does it undo any of the trauma and violence that it purports to account for. However, they both importantly undermine the linearity of that sense of time they create by engaging a fantasy of undoing—bringing into view another possibility, a world where the one apologizing might have done otherwise—and allows those identified in its terms to grieve the loss of how the world might have been different. What I find most moving is that the palinode is that it offers an instance of admitting regret—a complicated, multi-directional and ambiguous regret—and illustrates an attempt to change the shared world between two people in speech. Apologies that are not sincere, not serious, are often posited as less worthy of academic consideration—but also less transformative. Turning to this form alongside the apologia as an origin point for

the apology activates ways of reading apologies that are not about whether they are sincere or straightforwardly effectual, allows us to understand how the relational, narrative, and transformative work of apologies can operate even across those apologies that are dissatisfying. That work can be heartbreaking, healing, infuriating, and even funny. In what follows I look at what are often dismissed as dissatisfying or insincere apologies, which nonetheless avail themselves of the genre expectations and the aspects of apology to various effect: laughter, jokes, furious sarcastic apologies, and insincere but skilfully deployed apologies sit alongside more acceptable examples, and all of them transform.

CHAPTER ONE:

"WHEREAS WHEN OFFERED AN APOLOGY": ALTER-APOLOGETIC RESPONSES TO FORMAL APOLOGIES FROM THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

> The aim here is to show discourse as a strategic field, where the elements, tactics, and weapons are ceaselessly passed between one camp and the other, exchanged with the adversaries and then turned back against the very people who deploy them. It is in so far as discourse is common that it can become at once a place and an instrument of confrontation.
>
> — Michel Foucault, « Le discours ne doit pas être pris comme... »[1]

I. A "Simple" Apology: Genre, Performance, and Speech Acts

On December 19, 2009, House Resolution (H.R.) 3326—The United States Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2010—was approved and signed into Public Law 111-118 by President Barack Obama. In addition to securing billions of dollars of military spending for the next fiscal year, this law also included the text of House Joint Resolution (H.J. Res) 46 and Senate Joint Resolution (S.J. Res) 14 in Section 8113 as a "rider" or an otherwise unrelated provision. The Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans, signed into Public Law, exerts a legal force and has an effect—though a highly qualified and opaque one—in this case purporting to "acknowledge a long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies by the United States Government regarding Indian tribes" and to "offer an apology to all Native Peoples on behalf of the United States."

The Congressional Resolution of Apology proceeds with a series of twenty "whereas" clauses, articulating a narrative of the violent and deliberate settlement of and ongoing

1 Michel Foucault, « Le discours ne doit pas être pris comme... » *Dits et Ecrits, 1954-1988, Tome III: 1976 1979*, Bibliothèque des Sciences Humaines, (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994) Texte No. 186. My translation.

occupation of native lands, the making and breaking of hundreds of treaties between the United States Government—none of which have ever been formally abrogated—and the 574 indigenous tribes that are federally recognized by it, and the systematic removal, relocation, cultural oppression, and elimination of individuals variously encompassed or excluded by those bureaucratic ligatures.[2] A two-part resolution follows the twenty "whereas" statements. The first section contains seven resolutions in which "The United States, acting through Congress" performs various explicit acts of recognizing and taking responsibility for harms, expressing regret for the impact of those actions, and apologizing for the abovementioned circumstances. The second part adds a disclaimer to these actions, stating that "Nothing in this Joint Resolution:

> (1) authorizes or supports any claim against the United States; or
>
> (2) serves as a settlement of any claim against the United States."[3]

The presence of this disclaimer underscores the array of carefully crafted language and legal mechanisms that attempt to make this apology judicially inert, an act which despite being entered into public law, is effectively non-substantive: there are no delineated rights, duties, obligations, or causes of action that can be enforced, and the acts of recognizing and apologizing are explicitly—but inconsistently—reiterated and minimized as having a merely moral impact. H.J. Res 46 [S.J. Res. 14] is one of several "non-binding" apology resolutions that have been issued in the United States in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, a type of resolution which explicitly purports to create no changes to the legal or political relationship between the parties addressed, but rather to recognize and articulate it, and whose sole stated impact is, according to the U.S. Supreme Court, "a moral one: the acknowledgement of a

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2 Suzan Shown Harjo, "Introduction," *Nation to Nation: Treaties Between the United States & American Indian Nations,* (Washington, DC: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, 2014.)

3H. J. Res. 46 [S.J.Res.14], Appended to H.R.3326. US Public Law 111-118. "To acknowledge a long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies by the Federal Government regarding Indian tribes and offer an apology to all Native Peoples on behalf of the United States." (December 19, 2009, Accessed July 1, 2024.) https://www.congress.gov/111/bills/sjres14/BILLS-111sjres14is.pdf

failing and a resolve to do better."[4] Apology resolutions from the US Congress have been explicitly and formally distinguished and separated from other substantive legal acts, such as legislating reparations, or creating special procedures for redress.[5] In as far as any of these actions, as described and effected through legal text, may contain apologies, it is not the apology that motivates or entails any of the legal actions, often appearing as a numerically or otherwise separated declaration as in the Civil Liberties Act of 1987, where "Congress apologizes on behalf of the Nation."[6] In an interview about the 2009 Resolution of Apology to Native Peoples of the United States, the resolution's primary sponsor, Senator Sam Brownback, was explicit about what he saw as the clear and necessary separation between the apology and any claims for reparations: "we specifically in this apology say this does not settle any property disputes or settlement claims in anybody's favor. This is a *straight apology* without regards for any sort of property issues or disputes. And those are frequently

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4. Office of the Solicitor General, US. Department of Justice. "Hawaii v. Office of Hawaiian Affairs" Merits Stage Amicus Brief. Docket Number 07-1327. (Supreme Court of the United States. Accessed December 1, 2023.) https://www.justice.gov/osg/brief/hawaii-v-office-hawaiian-affairs-amicus-merits See Senate. Res. 39, 109th Cong. 1st Sess. 3. 2005, wherein Congress "apologizes for the failure of the Senate to enact anti-lynching legislation"); See also House Res. 194, 110th Congress, 2d Sess. 4, 2008, "Apologizing for the enslavement and racial segregation of African-Americans," wherein Congress "apologizes to African Americans… for wrongs committed against them and their ancestors who suffered under slavery and Jim Crow." These were both passed as simple resolutions, and as such were not voted on in other chambers and do not have the force of law. Simple resolutions are usually used for matters that affect just one chamber of Congress, often to change the rules of the chamber to set the manner of debate for a related bill. This simple resolution follows the same structure as the above, namely, a series of whereas statements, and a summary of the resolutions. They do not have the third "disclaimer" section because they have not passed into Public Law, but would very likely have such a disclaimer appended in event that they did.

5. For an example of reparations, see, e.g., Act of Aug. 10, 1988, Public Law No. 100-383, §§ 1, 105, 102 Stat. 903, 905 (apologizing for, inter alia, the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II and providing for compensation), also known as the "Civil Liberties Act" of 1987. This act, to "implement recommendations of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians," includes an apology for the evacuation, relocation, and internment of United States citizens and permanent resident aliens of Japanese ancestry during WWII and the Aleut civilian residents of the Pribilof and Aleutian Islands. Sponsored by Rep. Foley, Thomas S. on January 6, 1987. Signed into Public Law No. 100-383 on August 10 1988 by President Bill Clinton. The Civil Liberties Act also authorized $1.2 billion for payments of $20,000 to each of the roughly 60,000 internees still alive and for the establishment of a $50 million foundation to promote the cultural and historical concerns of Japanese Americans. For an example of Congress creating special procedures for redress, see, Indian Claims Commission Act, ch. 959, § 2, 60 Stat. 1050 (creating tribunal to hear claims by Indian tribes, including claims "based upon fair and honorable dealings that are not recognized by any existing rule of law or equity").

6. H.R.442, 110th Congress, Civil Liberties Act of 1987, Public Law No. 100-383, August 10, 1988, (Accessed July 1, 2024) https://www.congress.gov/bill/100th-congress/house-bill/442

the things that keep us from doing the right thing and then getting to reconciliation, which is the desperate need that we have."[7]

The archive of such apologies has been growing as governments of primarily western colonial powers have been turning to them when interfacing with Indigenous populations, as a way of addressing populations who have experienced historical and ongoing harms at the hands of the state, leading to what some scholars have called the "Age of Apology."[8] This "straight apology" from the U.S. Congress was the fourth apology offered by a representative governmental body on behalf of the United States to Indigenous peoples. [9] In 1990, Senator Daniel Inouye introduced Concurrent Resolution 153, "A concurrent resolution to acknowledge the 100th anniversary of the tragedy at Wounded Knee Creek, State of South Dakota, December 29, 1890, wherein soldiers of the United States Army 7th Cavalry killed and wounded approximately 350-375 Indian men, women and children of Chief Big Foot's band of the Minneconjou Sioux, and to recognize the Year of Reconciliation declared by the State of South Dakota between the citizens of the State and the member bands of the Great Sioux Nation." This resolution was approved by the House and the Senate, and as a Concurrent Resolution does not require the signature of the president, nor does it have force of law.[10] In 1993 the U.S. Congress issued a joint resolution of apology for the U.S.

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7. Sam Brownback and Melissa Block, Interview, "Apology to American Indians Moves Forward," (NPR, 2008, Accessed July 1, 2024) Emphasis mine. https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=91489003
8. Mark Gibney, Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann, Jean-Marc Coicaud, and Niklaus Steiner, Eds., *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008)137-153.
9. There are also several apologies included within other official texts, including for example the Civil Liberties Act of 1987, to "implement recommendations of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians," which includes an apology for the evacuation, relocation, and internment of United States citizens and permanent resident aliens of Japanese ancestry during WWII and the Aleut civilian residents of the Pribilof and Aleutian Islands. Though this apology does not include a preface of "whereas" statements, the document is similarly structured, containing similarly efficacious sections beginning with statements such as "with regards to" etc.   H.R.442, 110th Congress, Civil Liberties Act of 1987. Sponsored by Rep. Foley, Thomas S. on January 6, 1987. Became Public Law No. 100-383 on August 10, 1988, signed by President Bill Clinton. The Civil Liberties Act also authorizes $1.2 billion for payments of $20,000 to each of the roughly 60,000 internees still alive and for the establishment of a $50 million foundation to promote the cultural and historical concerns of Japanese Americans.
10. S.Con.Res.153, 101st Congress (1989-1990). The resolution "acknowledges the historical significance of this event," "expresses the deep regret of the Congress on behalf of the United States to the descendants of the victims, survivors, and their respective tribal communities," commends "the efforts of reconciliation initiated by

Government's role in overthrowing the Hawaiian monarchy on January 17, 1893.[11] In 2000, Kevin Gover (Pawnee) gave a speech expressing his "profound sorrow" for the "historical conduct of this agency" at a celebration of the 175th anniversary of the US Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).[12]

The inertness and ineffectiveness of these "straight" apologies on their own terms—legally declawed—has led scholars and activists to write off such apologies as empty gestures. Apologies, as part of state narratives of reconciliation and as a strategy of addressing colonial injustices, are often a part of what Matt James calls "pacifying routines of bureaucratic commemoration . . . and monument unveilings" which narrate colonial violence as part of historical bureaucratic record: reconciling those parties involved to the fact of loss having occurred rather than talking about redress for those losses, and relegating the conversation to a matter of paperwork.[13] Others push the argument farther, pointing out that official government-issued apologies and truth and reconciliation commissions are not only ineffective gestures, but rather actively productive tools of enforcing power, tracking the ways that they actively function as tools of state-making that undergird settler-colonial processes of land acquisition, and serve to maintain social, cultural, and legal structures of domination exclusive of indigenous sovereignty, which successfully seek to narrow calls for redress and reparations away from the more radical organizing points of returning colonized land. Sarah Dowling observes these apologies "rewrite Indigenous elimination as

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the State of South Dakota and the Wounded Knee Survivors Association," expresses "the support of the Congress for the establishment of a suitable Memorial," and "the commitment of the Congress to acknowledge and learn from our history, including the Wounded Knee Massacre, in order to provide a proper foundation for building an ever more humane, enlightened, and just society for the future."

11. S.J.Res.19. 103rd Congress. "A joint resolution to acknowledge the 100th anniversary of the January 17, 1893 overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii, and to offer an apology to Native Hawaiians on behalf of the United States for the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii." Sponsored by Sen. Akaka, Daniel K. on January 2st, 1993. Became Public Law No. 103-150 on November 23, 1993.

12. Kevin Gover, "Remarks at the Ceremony Acknowledging the 175th Anniversary of the Bureau of Indian Affairs," *American Indian Law Review,* Vol. 25, No. 1, (Norman: University of Oklahoma College of Law, 2000/2001) 161-163. https://doi.org/10.23070656

13. Matt James, "Wrestling with the Past: Apologies, Quasi-Apologies, ad Non-Apologies in Canada," *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past,* Ed. Gibney, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008) 137-153.

multiculturalist inclusion," casting Indigeneity as cultural difference, and writing Indigenous people as merely "one minority among many others," effacing histories of genocidal colonialism entirely.[14] One can see similar circular logics in an apology to state violence against indigenous populations, appended to a bill for securing further funding for that military.[15] As Jeff Corntassel and Cindy Holder argue, this circularity marks apologies out as both "hollow, symbolic gestures," and "fundamentally flawed mechanisms for transforming inter-group relations."[16] Many take firm stances *against* apologies full-stop, refusing and rejecting them definitionally and entirely.[17] Joanne Barker, for example marks an interest in activism and scholarship marked by a firm stance against repair work structured by apologies: "fierce rejection of liberal universalism and all its modernist clichés—from the binaries of the savage and the civil to the celebrated public and national restoration of Native-nation relations via apology."[18]

Indeed, the inertness of these apologies is now a matter of legal record. S.J.Res.19, "A joint resolution to acknowledge the 100th anniversary of the January 17, 1893 overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii, and to offer an apology to Native Hawaiians on behalf of the United

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14. Sarah Dowling, *Translingual Poetics: Writing Personhood Under Settler Colonialism,* (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2018) 160.
15. The designation of H.R. 3326 as a "rider" bill as in, unrelated to the Act signed into public law except incidentally, belies the symbolic and effective connections between the funneling of further funds into military spending and the national project of "reconciliation" and "redress" of past colonial wrongs. Indeed, the practical interconnectedness of colonial governmentality, warfare, and violence is entwined and evidenced in such bureaucratic rhetorical flourishes from US President James Monroe's founding of the Office of Indian Affairs in the Department of War in 1824 to the involvement of the FBI in the application of "homeland security" measures to Indigenous peoples as in the Oceti Sakowin Camp at the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota originally to block the construction of the Dakota Access oil pipeline. See, Alleen Brown, Will Parrish, Alice Speri, "Leaked Documents Reveal Counterterrorism Tactics Used at Standing Rock to 'Defeat Pipeline Insurgencies."*The Intercept.* May 2017. Accessed Jan. 4, 2024. https://theintercept.com/2017/05/27/leaked-documents-reveal-security-firms-counterterrorism-tactics-at-standing-rock-to-defeat-pipeline-insurgencies/
16. Jeff Corntassel and Cindy Holder, "Who's Sorry Now? Government Apologies, Truth Commissions, and Indigenous Self-Determination in Australia, Canada, Guatemala, and Peru," *Human Rights Review 9(4)* (Springer: 2008) 467, 466.
17. See also, Roland Chrisjohn, Andrea Bear Nicholas, Karen Stote, James Craven, Tanya Wasacase, Pierre Loiselle, and Andrea O. Smith, "An Historic Non-Aplogy, Completely and Utterly Not Accepted." (*The St'át'imc Runner,* July 2008) 3–8.
18. Joanne Barker, "Reply to Wolfe (and Rifkin) and Some Questions," *Tequila Sovereign*, April 29, 2011. As quoted in Vimalassery, Manu. Juliana Hu Pegues, and Alyosha Goldstein. "Introduction: On Colonial Unknowing." *Theory and Event.* Vol. 19, Issue 4. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University. 2016.

States for the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii," proceeds in the same standard format of other resolutions, consisting of a litany of "whereas" statements—these delineating how the combined forces and interests of American missionaries from the Congregational Church (now known as the United Church of Christ), American businessmen and investors profiting from the sugar industry, and the United States Navy under the authority of United States Minister John L. Stevens, conspired to depose and successfully force the abdication of Queen Liliuokalani, and deprived "the rights Native Hawaiians to self-determination."[19] In a subsequent Supreme Court Case, *Hawaii v. Office of Hawaiian Affairs*, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs made a case using legal facts established in the "whereas" section of Public Law 103-150, but the oral argument dwelt on whether or not the apology could *do* anything of legal weight. Mark J. Bennett, arguing the case on behalf of the State Government of Hawaii, insisted in line with the Supreme Court's eventual decision that that the 1993 congressional apology resolution had no legal effect and did not alter the State of Hawaii's right to dispose of its public lands, so that despite the apology acknowledging ongoing and unresolved land claims by Native Hawaiians, the State could sell public and crown lands. Bennett remarked specifically that the apology did not change anything about the relationship between the Federal government, the State government, and what is described as the special legal and political relationship between the United States and the Indigenous populations it colonized: "It was, as its sponsor said at the time, a simple apology, and no more."[20]

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19. S.J.Res.19. 103rd Congress. "Joint Resolution to Acknowledge the 100th Anniversary of the Overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii, and to offer an Apology to Native Hawaiians on behalf of the United States for the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii," Public Law No. 103-150, 107 Stat. 1510. November 23 1993. Sponsored by Sen. Akaka, Daniel K. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-103sjres19enr/pdf/BILLS-103sjres19enr.pdf

20. Hawaii v. Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Oral Argument Recording and Transcript. *Oyez.* Accessed December 1, 2023. https://www.oyez.org/cases/2008/07-1372 As quoted in the amicus brief, Senator Inouye of Hawaii, the committee chairman and a chief sponsor of the Resolution, described the apology as "a simple resolution of apology, to recognize the facts as they were 100 years ago." Office of the Solicitor General, US. Department of Justice. "Hawaii v. Office of Hawaiian Affairs" Merits Stage Amicus Brief. Docket Number 07-1327. Supreme Court of the United States. Accessed December 1, 2023. https://www.justice.gov/osg/brief/hawaii-v-office-hawaiian-affairs-amicus-merits

The "simple apology," or "straight apology" included in these resolutions of apology, then, has been defined in the negative: it has no legal force or consequences, it performs no action other than what it can effect on its own terms, namely 'apologizing.' But what, precisely, apologizing requires, entails, and consists in, is opaque. Where legal literature is prolific in its strategizing around apologies, offering practical analyses of, for example, "how an apology can be useful for avoiding litigation, how an expression of sympathy should be worded to minimize the possibility that it could be misunderstood to be an admission of guilt, and why someone who is guilty of some error should apologize without concern that this would make their situation worse" the archive of literature broadly across all disciplines including law, literature, ethics, philosophy, politics, and sociology is short on consensus and short on satisfying definitions, perhaps because, as legal scholar Jonathan Cohen put it, "[n]o definition of apology is perfect, in part because apologies vary considerably."[21]

So many and varied are the uses to which we put apologies that the establishment of particular evaluative criteria to encompass them—and thus clarify what the United States means by a "simple apology"—is daunting. What makes a successful apology would seem fundamentally to rely on the context in which it is deployed: who is speaking at what is their relationship to the harm discussed, what harm occurred, and what change do the participants (issuer and recipient) want to effect in relation to that past event? The concept of the performative, or the "speech act" mentioned by Trouillot, seems to offer a way of grasping this family resemblance without getting mired in context. In his analysis of such speech acts—of which "apologizing" is a preferred example—ordinary language philosopher J.L. Austin attends to the titular question of his lecture, *How to Do Things with Words.* Austin introduces the concept of the performative speech act: a locution which, when uttered, does

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21. Peter H. Rehm and Denise R. Beatty, "Legal Consequences of Apologizing," *Journal of Dispute Resolution*, Issue 1, (Jefferson City: University of Missouri, 1996.) And, Jonathan R. Cohen, "Legislating Apology: The Pros and Cons," *University of Cincinnati Law Review,* (Cincinnati, 2002,) 819. Available at http://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/facultypub/31

what it says. Saying “I bet,” “I promise,” and famously, “I do” in the proper situation with the proper intention, is to perform the action of betting, promising, or marrying someone. Performatives do not refer to things outside of themselves—or “correspond” to some aspect of reality in a way that “constative” utterances like, “it is raining outside” do according to Austin. Rather, they produce or transform a situation. It would not make sense to respond to someone who offers an apology by saying, “that’s incorrect.” Rather, Austin observes that they can fail to be carried off, or “secure uptake,” a situation that he calls “infelicitous.” These necessary conditions for felicity include that the act—apologizing, marrying, etc.—have a conventional procedure and effect in the social world in which it is deployed, that the persons and circumstances be appropriate (saying “I do” in response to the question of whether I would like a cup of coffee is not performing the act of marrying anyone,) and that if the act is designed for use by persons having particular thoughts or feelings—that the participant actually have those thoughts and feelings.

That the Congressional Resolution of Apology could be judged infelicitous, and has been, has provided a rich seam for critical analysis. [22] Considering apologies as speech acts reveals, for Trouillot, “the fact that collective apologies are rituals in history, for history, which engage their participants as doers and as narrators, thus on both sides of historicity.” However, for Trouillot’s analysis, that invocation of its participants into the ritual of history ends in a stalemate, as collective apologies cannot felicitously establish numerical identity (his preferred criterion) between the perpetrators of the past and the apologizer of the present,

22. There is a wealth of normative and practically oriented research in the domains of philosophy, legal theory, and conflict mediation. But especially in their descriptive granularity, these characterizations of how apologies operate, what makes a good one, and what results they should aim to effect differ drastically depending on the framework in which they are applied. In addition to Austin’s criteria for felicity and infelicity with regards to illocutionary speech acts, using the apology as an example, see legal scholar Nick Smith’s precise taxonomy of apologetic interactions along thirteen different aspects. He posits his Kantian-inflected regulative ideal of the “categorical apology,” which fulfils all thirteen, as a possible framework for assessing acts of contrition across all scales of social interaction. (See, J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962)15-18; 46. And, Nick Smith, “The Categorical Apology,” *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vol. 36 No. 4. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, Winter 2005) 473–496.

nor between the individuals harmed in the past and those to whom gestures of repair are being made. As he writes: "collective apologies cannot fulfil the promises of their purported assumptions and fail to reconcile these two sides of both. They are abortive rituals, meant to remain infelicitous."[23] For these "safe" apologies, which are acts only in name, speech act theory seems to support the claims of the legal interpretation: that these apologies are "safe" and prevented from acting, or from producing any effect or consequence beyond its deployment. But then, what do we make of their deployment?

Jacques Derrida and a number of scholars and writers in the wake of deconstruction make much of the impact of this performative "text" of the speech act as it escapes any intention or felicitously determinable meaning-making, prying open Austin's intervention using its own terms. Such interventions focus on the conceptual primacy of writing over speech, the iterability of every mark of signification, and the importance of chance and context. Austin himself notes that felicity or infelicity does not necessarily preclude the speech act working as desired on its addressee. If someone promises—or apologizes—but doesn't intend to keep his promise or intend to continue the behavior he states that he has regretted, he still *promises* or *apologizes* according to convention*:*

> "For he *does* promise: the promise here is not even *void*, though it is given in *bad faith.* His utterance is perhaps misleading, probably deceitful and doubtless wrong, but it is not a lie or a misstatement."[24]

Additionally, the "misfire" of the apology could extend to the formal restrictions of the Congressional Resolution of Apology as written—an "infelicity" that Austin illustrated by saying that there are instances when saying "I do" during a marriage ceremony is not in fact *marrying* anyone, as it occurs in the context of a play on a stage or is a bit of dialogue written into the plot of a novel. Where Austin excludes these infelicitous performatives as abnormal,

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23. Michel-Rolphe Trouillot, "Abortive Rituals: Historical Apologies in the Global Era," *Interventions*, 2:2*,* (London: Routledge, 2011) 174.
24. Austin, J.L., *How to Do Things with Words,* 10-11.

or parasitical language outside of the purview of his analysis, these seem to be precisely the uses of language that constitute the meaning of apology, and indeed the location of some of the most meaningful speech acts. In their everyday operation, we can see that a "successful" apology according to a definition that requires the achievement of forgiveness and closure is a rare outcome. Public discourse is more often dissatisfied with public apologies than convinced by them, a fact that I take to be both a "bug" and a "feature": apologies most often inaugurate critical discourse, serving as articulations of history and identity which are then available for discussion and parsing—they are called out as issued to the wrong person, producing an unconvincing account, identify the wrong harm or wrongly characterize the event, and can be productively subject to other critiques that often illuminate quite a lot about those implicated in the apologetic terms and their senses of world and person. The issuance of any apology is—whatever else it does—a catalyst for discourse and critique. The legal apparatus of the state wields sovereign power, both by issuing speech—apologizing as an "act" of law—and also by attempting to delimit the action of that performance to a particular intended meaning. But by referring readers specifically back to the intended meaning (when the "intending speaker" is a corporate governing body, indeed, is absented by having written the apology down on a document) and the contextually-determined social usage of "apologize," the project of ascribing a distinct and transparent meaning to this verb gets even more opaque. Layli Long Soldier literalizes that opacity in her 2017 book of poetry, *Whereas*, by reproducing the text that introduces the apology resolution with the contested verb redacted, presenting the components that are defined and related by the apology, without the locution that would catalyze them into a relation, and action:

> The United States, acting
through Congress—
on behalf of the
people of the United States to
all Native Peoples for the
many instances of violence,

maltreatment, and neglect
inflicted on Native Peoples
by citizens of the United
States;[25]

Without the verb, the fragments hover in expectation of composition, leaving the question of what precisely the referring relation between all the component parts might be, not definitively answered. The first "resolving" claim of the formal apology now reads as ineffective as it is purported to be, but also echoes the aesthetics of a declassified document, as if the apology is personal, private, or perhaps incriminating, important in a way that might be more efficacious or dangerous than the "simple" apology is.[26] Regardless, the apology sits here on the page as a suture—and a question—between the parties involved, making literal the particular relational seam that the apology purports to resolve or to eliminate. The redaction prompts a pause that sends the reader out to other documents, texts, contexts, languages, and experiences as a way to determine the meaning of the word.

The redacted space of the word "apologizes" structures delayed critical engagement with the content apologized for, and invites those implicated in its terms to consider the narrated harm as "open" for conversation or processing rather than closed. This sense of groping for meaning is particularly inflected by the larger poem in which it appears, the fourth of a series of her own "Resolutions," this one that focuses on the difficulty of an apology being issued—in English—to Native peoples, given that "in many Native languages, there is no word for 'apologize.' The same goes for 'sorry.'" However, the poem continues, that blank effacing the particular word "apology" preserves the space of an action without fidelity to a particular mode of unfolding of it, structuring an explicit opportunity for other readers to find analogues

25. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas,* (Minneapolis: Greywolf Press, 2017) 92.
26. The U.S. Government has a practice of declassifying governmental records and information that is determined to no longer require protection under Executive Order 13526, "Classified National Security Information," and making it available to the public. Information appraised as having permanent historical value is automatically declassified once it reaches 25 years of age unless it requires continued classification under E.O. 1352. United States National Archives, the National Declassification Center. https://www.archives.gov/declassification/ndc

or bring their own practice in: “This doesn’t mean that in Native communities where the word ‘apologize’ is not spoken, there aren’t definite actions for admitting and amending wrongdoing.” She continues, “Thus, I wonder how, without the word, this text translates as gesture.”[27]

In posing her question, Long Soldier is not interested in troubleshooting the success—or failure—of the particular action effaced, but rather in examining what the gesture dislodges, and its modes of operation across different contexts and recipients, specifically her own first-personal experiences. Long Soldier describes the titular section of her book of poetry as a response “directed to the Apology’s delivery, as well as the language, crafting, and arrangement of the written document,” a description that places her work at an angle to, or a critical remove from, the expected operations of the apology itself.[28] Speech for Long Soldier is both a matter of acting, but also of articulating and expressing desires, and apology a linguistic structuring that allows a relationship to be articulated, and maintained, through gestures and expressions. Meanings proliferate in the poems well beyond the purview of the intended and “canonical” meanings, as she writes in the poem, “Vaporative”: “I’ve always wanted *opaque* to mean see-through, transparent. I’m disheartened to learn it means the opposite.” She continues, after a number of beautiful misuses of “opaque,” forgiving the English language its apparent rigidity of meaning: “I understand the need to define as a need for stability. That you and I can be things, standing, understood, among each other.”[29] The legal language—and the kinds of interpretive control it ascribes through its insistence on distinct and transparent meanings to legal texts—is not loosened by her intervention, but revealed as always already precarious, a live edge of provisional definition and misunderstanding. In the middle of the prose poem “Edge,” Long Soldier interrupts a

27. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas,* (Minneapolis: Greywolf Press. 2017) 92.
28. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas.* 54.
29. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas. 27.*

narration of a drive taken by a mother and infant daughter, "along the road the bend the banks behind the wheel I am called Mommy," with a chain of associations: "Your mother's mouth has a roof your mother's mouth is a church. A hut in a field lone standing. The thatched roof has caught spark what flew from walls the spark apart from rock from stable meaning."[30] The interpretive text that the apology writes grips place, space, person, and time in particular ways: Long Soldier reveals the strength and position of that grip. She also reveals how the terms of address—the terms by which she appears before the law, and therefore this apology, as US citizen and enrolled member of a federally recognized tribe—enclose an unruly and ever-expanding set of names and activities:

> I am a citizen of the United States and an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, meaning I am a citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation—and in this dual citizenship, I must work, I must eat, I must art, I must mother, I must friend, I must listen, I must observe, constantly I must live.[31]

Indeed, along the binarizing lines of an apology—issued from the doer of the harm (the United States) to the recipients who that harm was done-to (all Native Peoples)—Long Soldier encapsulated both in the collective issuing and receiving the apology. According to the terms of the document, Long Soldier is apologizing to herself.

I reach towards a deconstructivist questioning of whether speech acts always *work* (and an embrace of the constitutive unpredictability of speech) in conversation with Long Soldier's explicit citations of Derrida's work, not to discount the negative repressive effects that the apology brings about through law, or indeed to the positive effects that it brings about on its own terms, but in Judith Butler's terms, "to leave open the possibility that [the speech act's] failure is the condition of a critical response," and to identify the ways that these artistic responses to—and rewritings of—infelicitous "safe" state and formal apologies open up new possibilities for response.[32] Long Soldier's work, and indeed, alter-apologetic discourses

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30. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas.* 48.
31. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas*, 57.
32. Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative,* (New York & London: Routledge, 1997) 19.

broadly, illuminate how the apology is in some ways a meta-performative, an utterance whose manifest function and content consists explicitly of an attempt at resignification, to bring—by describing it—something new into being, to write or speak into meaning a future that does not yet exist (forgiveness, closure, reconnection). It is a method of producing history (intimate histories) and a meeting place, a way of offering a vision and seeing if that vision can provide a shared direction or opportunities for thick relation, responsibility-taking, and interaction. Note, that one of the possible effects of alter-apologetic discourses is the production of scholarship which identifies forgiveness as a criterion for a successful or felicitous apology. While it might serve as a telos for some, and the expectation of forgiveness is certainly used to effect particular perlocutionary outcomes, I am far more interested in ways that the apology can be used for a variety of transformative operations of the past, and include it in the category of transformative operations—just not as the criterion of success.

In Long Soldier's work, and in the larger wave of artistic, performative, and personal responses to these ever-increasing gestures of regret, the apology appears as a fault-line, a site of negotiation with the articulated expectations of person, narrative, and future possibility. Examining the performance of the apology beyond the parameters of its success or failure as such, and instead in terms of a larger context of cultural, social, political and intimate usage creates social expectations, rather than definitional rules. It preserves the "space for ambiguity" that Trouillot acknowledges as part of the phenomenon, but centralizes that space as that which attends and indeed provides force and possibility to all invocations of the apology as a reciprocal ritual.[33]

33. Michel-Rolphe Trouillot, "Abortive Rituals: Historical Apologies in the Global Era," *Interventions*, 2:2, (London: Routledge, 2011) Footnote, 174-175.

This space is present in Pauline Wakeham's attention to what she calls the "apologetics" of settler sovereignty, where she effectively identifies a wide variety of strategic uses of precisely the blurry, overlapping, and multiple expectations and understandings of what an apology is, as they have been used to effect a variety of outcomes by both the Government of Canada and the Inuit. In her article, "At the Intersection of Apology and Sovereignty: The Arctic Exile Monument Project," she examines the Inuit-conceptualized and Inuit-sponsored project of erecting a pair of statues commemorating the forced relocations of Inuit peoples to the high arctic and then invited then-Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs John Duncan to attend the ceremony, thus "leveraging the possibility of bad press to pressure the government into presenting an apology" and using the resultant apology as a way of mobilizing a larger social and political agenda: bringing the program of the forced High Arctic relocations of Inuit Peoples to common awareness.[34] Although the resultant 2010 apology, brought about by canny lobbying and mobilization of the generic expectations of the apology by the Inuit, was ultimately transformed into "an opportunity to reassert Canada's Arctic claims in an era of global warming that is rendering the region a renewed site of international interest," Wakeham observes that carved "monuments at Resolute and Grise Fiord reclaim sculpture not as a static form of Inuit authenticity, but as a complex medium of Inuit social and political expression that speaks back to, and also beyond, settler apologetics."[35] She writes that the sculptures are mobilized:

> not to conclude a reconciliation process and institutionalize strategic forgetting but, rather, to reignite Inuit lobbying for redress. Instead of allowing Minister Duncan's apologetics to stand as the final word on the relocations, the sculptures continue to speak in the mea culpa's wake, catalyzing active remembering of the past and renewed assertions of Inuit rights in the present… rather than constituting an acquiescent response to the apology's interpellative call, the scripting of the plaques

34. The Inuit-led redress coalition operated under the leadership of the Makivvik Corporation (an Arctic Quebec land claim organization that represents the Inuit of Nunavik) and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (the Inuit Organization that oversees the implementation of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement.)
35. Pauline Wakeham, "At the Intersection of Apology and Sovereignty: The Arctic Exile Monument Project," *Cultural Critique,* Volume 87, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.) 84-143.

actively preceded and precipitated Duncan's statement.[36]

The state's careful insistence on the legal inertness of these apology resolutions, often cited specifically as a mode of enabling the apology to operate *only* on the emotional or social register indicated by restrictive language like the "simple apology" the "straight apology" and the "safe" apology, belies the ways in which the act of apologizing is various and complex—*especially* within the social, emotional world the apology purports to limit its action to. This slipperiness of language and literature produces complex "mirroring effects" when the performances of apologies are engaged as such—rather than merely accepted or rejected, or troubleshot to improve them. The collected contours of these various possibilities—inhabiting, rather than eliminating, the space that Trouillot acknowledged as one of family resemblance—make apologetics cohere as a genre, using Lauren Berlant's sense of the term "genre" as a "loose affectively-invested zone of expectations about the narrative shape a situation will take."[37] Considering the apology as a genre is also accurate to the bewildering slipperiness of the apology as it represents a live edge of cultural negotiation and use—being read and being written. We can observe how the performance of an apology, even an unsuccessful one, activates a social situation for continued intervention, as opposed to merely restricting its operation only to the "intended" terms of audience, event, and outcome. For the purposes of this chapter, and as a way of illuminating how these alter-apologetic discourses intervene, I examine a number of alter-apologetic performances by settler and native artists insofar as they explore the possibilities of these three generic (and formal) expectations: the relational (often structured through the form of the address, the invocation, or the to/from);

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36. Pauline Wakeham, "At the Intersection of Apology and Sovereignty: The Arctic Exile Monument Project," 103-104. See, especially: "although the inscriptions on the plaques do incorporate some of the idioms of official commemorative discourse, they also invoke the word that was deliberately absent in both the 1996 reconciliation agreement and the 2010 mea culpa: namely, sovereignty. By speaking this word, the Monument Project affirms the connection between the relocations and their significant role in substantiating Canadian use and occupation of the region, thereby suggesting that Canadian Arctic sovereignty is grounded not on settler power but on Inuit perseverance."
37. Berlant, Lauren. "Genre Flailing." 156-162.

the narrative (the identifying of and thus the rewriting of the harm in the present as the issue addressed); and the transformative operation of the apology.

This chapter is also an attempt to step into the community of readership of the Congressional Resolution of Apology, in as far as it is an apology issued ostensibly on my behalf, as one of the "citizens of the United States" narrated into apologetic relationship with Native Peoples. Following the openings and pauses that alter-apologetic works like *Whereas* open in apologetics for the variously interpellated readers opens possibilities for connection, solidarity, resistance, or at the very least, deeper engagement with the real embodied and spatialized consequences of such apologetic gestures in our shared present. Such work provides a way of attending to the social and material consequences of when indigenous and settler subjects are brought into conflicting, ambivalent relationship to one another—and especially when that relationship is mediated through the attempt to control one's responsibility for the past and possibilities for the future through the interpretation and creation of a document.

II. What Whereas Does: The Narrative Affordances of Apology

> "Whereas the arrival of Europeans in North America opened a new chapter in the histories of the Native Peoples"[38]
>
> "The treatment of children in Indian Residential Schools is a sad chapter in our history."[39]
>
> "Framed by that theory, here is the story, as true as I can tell it…"[40]

38. "Joint-Resolution of Apology to All Native Peoples on Behalf of the United States." H. J. Res. 46 [S.J.Res.14], Appended to H.R.3326, became US Public Law 111-118 on 12/19/2009.
39. Harper, Stephen. Right Honourable, Former Prime Minister of Canada. "Statement of apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools." Ottawa, Ontario. June 11th, 2008, Version: 09/15/2010.
40. Ben Miller, "Determined to Keep Up Their Dances," *A Public Apology to Siksika Nation*, (New York: Mitchell Innes and Nash) 82.

Throughout her work, Long Soldier engages and estranges the structure of the particular document of the Congressional Apology through a number of poetic interventions that are increasingly common to contemporary American poetics: excision, erasure, rearrangement, historical contextualization, and lyric (first-person) perspective. In doing so, her work situates itself in an archive of poetry that seeks to use and reveal the mechanics of that original document—the particularly shaped words and grammatical structures that shape it—estranging them from the logic that connects them by rewriting them into what she identifies as the "gears of the poem." Orthographic conventions, grammatical interventions, and vocabularies become conspicuous in the ways they act in isolation from the larger prosaic coherence of their documentary context, or as they perform their function on unexpected material, or in poetic form. Staging this re-writing of a non-poetic text as poem, in this sense, treats the action of re-making into poetry as a technique for engaging that text as a composition.[41] By moving the language of the apology out of the legal interpretive space (which disavows its own speaking of the apology as a legally ineffective) and into the broader contours of genre and association, she expands the apology into the spaces where she lives it as an artist working within its language.

The title of Long Soldier's book, *Whereas,* and the central preoccupations of the poems it contains, are anchored in the most deceptively neutral language of any of the resolutions of apology: the whereas statement. Legally, "whereas" clauses exert no force, but only provide a framing. In the Supreme Court Case subsequent to the adoption of Public Law 103-150, where the United States acknowledged that "the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii occurred with the active participation of agents and citizens of the United States" and that "the Native Hawaiian people never directly relinquished to the United States their claims

41. An archive of such acts of poetic re-reading by re-making would include M. NourbeSe Philips's hydration and fragmentation of the text of the 1783 Gregson v. Gilbert case in *Zong!,* Philip Metres' *Sand Opera*, which erases and re-inhabits the Standard Operating Procedures for the U.S. Department of Defense, and Travis Macdonald's erasure of the The 9/11 Commission Report, entitled *The O Mission Repo*, among others.

to their inherent sovereignty as a people over their national lands," and apologized, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs made a case that sought to enjoin residential development on a parcel of former crown lands of the Hawaiian Monarchy now owned by the state, which was held in trust for Native Hawaiians. The case, *Hawaii v. Office of Hawaiian Affairs*, relied on facts established in the "whereas" section of Public Law 103-150, but the oral argument focused on whether or not the apology could *do* anything of legal weight, ultimately concluding, as discussed above, that the apology exerted to legal force precisely because of intention: neither the apology nor the "whereas" statements can effect anything of legal relevance on their own, by virtue of their issue. Only material included after the resolving clause—here, "Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled"— has any operative effect. Senator Inouye of Hawaii, the committee chairman and a chief sponsor of the Resolution, described the apology as being issued with very limited historical impact, saying that the purpose of the apology was "to recognize the facts as they were 100 years ago… This resolution does not touch upon the Hawaiian homelands. I can assure my colleague of that." And similarly, Senator Inouye confirmed that the "whereas" clauses that prefaced the apology were not intended to have any operative effect, but "were placed in the resolution for a very simple reason: So that those who are studying this resolution or those students of history in years to come can look back and say that is the way it was in Hawaii on January 17, 1893."[42] The Supreme Court of the United States affirmed in a 2008 decision that "whereas" clauses, as part of prologue or preface, cannot bear any enacting weight: "[W]here the text of a clause itself indicates that it does not have operative effect, such as 'whereas' clauses in federal legislation… a court has no license to make it do

42. Hawaii v. Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Oral Argument Recording and Transcript. *Oyez.* Accessed December 1, 2023. https://www.oyez.org/cases/2008/07-1372

what it was not designed to do."[43] So what are "whereas" clauses designed to do, and to what uses are they put?

In its two-part archaic origin, the word compound "where as" in English functioned as an adverb, indicating the location and conditions under which something is or occurs. When the word appears most commonly today in legal documents, it often introduces a preamble or recital of whereas statements, serving as an illative or adversative conjunction between two separate clauses states or affairs.[44] Illative conjunctions indicate a chain of inference, inaugurating a series of connected claims that follow from one another. In its illative usage, the word indicates that what follows the "whereas" will be the point of consideration, the pertinent facts, and is roughly equivalent to the statements "seeing that," "given that," "considering that," "in light of," and "inasmuch as." 'Whereas' asserts along the lines of the two words it still contains: "where"—in or at the place in or at which; at the part at which—and "as"—in which ways and in the particular mode of affordance. The when- and where- and in-what-way of the word "whereas" structure an epistemic, and ontological, claim. It asserts, for the duration of the document, the "facts" of the case at hand. This gesture of limitation is powerful in its ability to silence other possibilities. Any objection to the series of whereas statements from which a conclusion might be drawn can be dismissed as being beyond the purview of the document. Certainly, there may be other states of affairs or competing perspectives, but the statement is only responsible for the purview delimited by the whereas. A whereas statement is circular, its logic is fixed. It isolates and preserves the

43. Supreme Court. *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 554 U.S. 570. 2008. Accessed December 10, 2023. https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/554/570/#F3

44. See "Recital," *Black's Law Dictionary*. 9th Ed, 2009. 996. "The formal statement or setting forth of some matter of fact, in any deed or writing, in order to explain the reasons upon which the transaction is founded. The recitals are situated in the premises of a deed, that is, in that part of a deed between the date and the *habendum*, and they usually commence with the formal word 'whereas.'" And, "The formal preliminary statement in a deed or other instrument, of such deeds, agreements, or matters of fact as are necessary to explain the reasons upon which the transaction is founded." Also see "Preamble," *Black's Law Dictionary*. 9th Ed, 2009. 1294-95. An "introductory statement in a constitution, statue, or other document explaining the document's basis and objective; esp., a statutory recital of the inconveniences for which the statute is designed to provide a remedy."

content of the "facts" it introduces as being at-issue from other explicit or implicit states of affairs, and establishes them coercively as necessary criteria. In order for the action of apologizing included in the "resolved" clause to be legally effected, the whereas clauses that preceded it must be accepted, and true. For example, the following narrative:

> Whereas despite the wrongs committed against Native Peoples by the United States, Native Peoples have remained committed to the protection of this great land, as evidenced by the fact that, on a per capita basis, more Native Peoples have served in the United States Armed Forces and placed themselves in harm's way in defense of the United States in every major military conflict than any other ethnic group;[45]

The narrative within sets out several broad characterizations of Native People's willingness and collaboration in the defense of the United States, and celebrates their doing so "despite the wrongs committed against" them, and later measures the strength of their connection and commitment to "this great land" in terms of their willingness to serve in the armed forces to protect the national government. In the context of the whereas statement, these attitudes, actions, and commitments (militarism, patriotism, nationalism) are not only "the facts that" but prescriptions—whereas it is the case that these statements hold true, therefore be it resolved we apologize. Unsaid, but structurally entailed: whereas these statements are not true, and fail to hold, the apology, we (the United States) do not offer an apology. These whereas statements are a kind of ground-clearing—a functional necessity for the apology—here a gesture of self-protection and narrative control in the whereas clause. The apology, as a form used to address a particular historical harm, requires the repetition and articulation of that historical violence in the present in order to transform that harm. A story of some kind must be told—a past event gestured to—into which the teller and listener are brought into relationship. Here, the ground that is cleared (the where) is both the land itself and the nation atop it, and those who stand on it are only admitted insofar as they support that nation. The

45. H.R.3326. "Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2010." 111th Congress (2009-2010). https://www.congress.gov/bill/111th-congress/house-bill/3326. Accessed April 20, 2024.

language of the Congressional Resolution of Apology equates the truth of the events narrated with fact, and thus reasserts the permanence of nationhood: the past regretted is the origin story of how the apologetic corporate speaker—the United States—came to be as such. The circular language continues in President Joseph Biden's "Proclamation on Indigenous People's Day, 2021" where he addressed Indigenous peoples and Tribal Nations as "America's first inhabitants." This circularity, which posits the state as somehow prior to the indigenous peoples it colonizes, illustrates how the apology serves to naturalize and articulate a particular story of the past *as past*, in line with Jodi Byrd's observation that: "It is not entirely clear that… colonialism in North America is understood as anything other than an afterlife metaphor for something that might have happened at some point in time to make the present possible."[46] Biden's insistence through that document on recognizing the "inherent sovereignty"—rather than material or enacted sovereignty—and commitment to honoring the Federal Government's trust and treaty relations to Tribal Nations relies on and reinforces the completion of what is narrated as an inevitable colonial project: the land is always already America. Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox observes: "by conflating specific unjust events, policies, and laws with 'history,' what is unjust becomes temporally separate from the present, unchangeable. This narrows options for restitution: we cannot change the past."[47] That the apology cannot change the past becomes a repeated refrain, one which belies the ways in which the apology—as a speech act—narrates a story of *what happened* and thus creates an account of a past as an available story.

This is a type of narrative move illuminated by Jean Dennison's writing on the "affects of empire," where empire functions not only as a power structure sustained and created through government policies, infrastructures of enforcement, and violent incursions

46. Jodi Byrd, "'Weather with You': Settler Colonialism, Antiblackness, and the Grounded Relationalities of Resistance," *Critical Ethnic Studies,* Vol. 5, No. 1-2, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019) 208.
47. Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, *Finding Dahshaa: Self-Government, Social Suffering, and Aboriginal Policy in Canada,* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009) 33.

and warfare, but "as an entity kept in place by emotional disruptions" through symbolic, associative, cultural and emotional practices that reinforce a sense of the centrality, inevitability, and power of the colonial state, thus making optimism about any other possible organizations or change to the status quo feel impossible.[48] The word "whereas" serves as a toggle that establishes and circumscribes an epistemological situation for the sake of a particular document and its terms. Similarly, an apology articulates—or indicates—that situation, and separates it as the material it seeks to change the significance of. The motivations behind such actions are much more obviously contested across contexts. As an act of colonial entanglement, it is an attempt to reify and naturalize narratives of settler place and power as the context in which apologetic transformation will take place—rather than the material that the apology might transform. The form of the resolution attempts to make the narrative aspects of the apology inert, the acknowledgement by recitation of the "long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies" building those recited histories inescapably into the landscape of the nation: both the narratives of harm that are included, and the nation that committed them, remain.[49] Long Soldier takes the inertness that those narratives are emplaced within as a question from her position as reader.

The legal use of the "whereas" is an illative conjunction, a linking enclosure that establishes connected facts. However, Long Soldier's *Whereas* activates the adversative possibilities of the word: contrasting, overturning, shifting, opposing. When "whereas" performs as an adversative conjunction, it introduces a statement of fact in contrast or opposition to the state of affairs expressed by the principal clause. It is roughly equivalent to the phrases: "while on the other hand," or "to the contrary." In these cases, the word "whereas" creates a structure of relation through disjuncture: holding up one state of affairs

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48. Jean Dennison, "The 'Affects' of Empire: (Dis)trust Among Osage Annuitants," *Ethnographies of U.S. Empire.* Eds. McGranahan, Carole and John F. Collins, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2018) 27.
49. H.R.3326. "Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2010." 111th Congress (2009-2010). https://www.congress.gov/bill/111th-congress/house-bill/3326 Accessed 04.20.2024.

either in contrast to the facts stated in another clause, or merely as itself. The word "whereas" can establish and define the terms that it compares. In *Whereas* (the title naming the book itself a shared location indicated by and made, ambivalently, through legal acts and *whereas statements* including the resolution) Long Soldier demurs from full acceptance of the terms established, writing her own "whereas" statements to show that, whereas the state wrote an apology and issued it without ceremony—she received it as an act, and responds with recourse to her experience with such acts. In the poem she receives the apology as she receives all apologies—with cautious observation, as if receiving one from an individually embodied human—turning the state into the embodied interlocutor it purports to be (a center of meaning and intention). This turning also thus structures a pause, a kind of waiting where she can assess how to move the interaction forward:

> Whereas when offered an apology I watch each movement the shoulders/high or folding, tilt of the head both eyes down or straight through /me, I listen for cracks in knuckles or in the word choice, what is it that I want?[50]

The "whereas" here is both an illative—connected to the other "whereas" statements that she writes throughout the book, establishing a different set of documentation of "the facts at hand"—and could also be read as a mark of departure and a criticism of the performance of the apology. Except for a small reading by the resolution's original sponsor to representatives of five of the more than 560 federally recognized tribes in the United States, this document was signed by the president and committed to the legislative archive without ceremony or formal announcement.[51] The refusal to offer the apology to any living audience is a gesture of neglect that turns the apology into an apostrophe—an address to one who is absent, likely deceased, but conjured in a spectral way through the words, perspective, and memory of the

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50. Long Soldier, Layli. *Whereas.* 61.
51. A note that including all federally recognized tribes would exclude non-federally recognized nations such as the Muwekma Ohlone in the San Francisco Bay Area of California and other tribes that were previously federally recognized, but whose status as tribe was "terminated" as part of the US Indian Termination Policy, as well as other peoples who do not seek recognition. See, Roberta Ulrich, *American Indian Nations from Termination to Restoration.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 2010.

speaker. Thus it structures an erasure of both the individual, bodily presence of a Native person, and the idea of ongoing present of Native peoples as they might be able to respond to an apology.[52] Although the document of the Congressional Resolution was signed by the President and committed to the legislative archive without ceremony or formal announcement, when "she" the speaker Long Soldier is offered an apology, she imagines the material embodiment of the state as interlocutor rather than abstraction—perhaps in the form of its agents, soldiers, politicians—and shows us how her body, addressed, is also brought within the apology.

Though in the legal document the "whereas" and the terms it conjoins or divides purport to function as indicatives, in a realist mood, Long Soldier's revision shows that these statements of fact are subjunctive and that the whereas clauses express various states of unreality and imagined states of affairs. While the mitigation of the indicative possibilities of the "whereas" further closes down the world of the apology and what is being apologized for into a perfectly inert legal document—one could read most of the careful wording of the formal apology as attempts to close down possibilities for its use in cases of reparations or otherwise—it also opens up the structure of the formal apology itself for something like play. Layli Long Soldier's revision seems to open the more explicitly subjunctive content of this purportedly legal and carefully definitive document by filling out the grammatical format with her own subjunctive content: wishes, emotions, possibilities, judgments, opinions,

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52. For further work on the ways that the state's acquisition of land through the violent murder of, or effective and symbolic erasure of present native bodies, see Jean M. O'Brien's *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England*. Also, for creative work, see Syd Zolf's re-working of the immigration recruitment pamphlet from the Canadian Pacific Railway published in 1886, "What Women Say of the Canadian North-West: The Indian Question," where various women respond to the question "Do you experience any fear of the Indians?" According to the Canadian Pacific Railway, a majority responded with versions of: "no," "none," "never did," and "there are none around here." The book in which this "poem" is located, *Janey's Arcadia: Errant Ad^ent$res in Ultima Thule*, interleaves the compositions with a list of handwritten names of missing and murdered indigenous women, illuminating a concrete way in which the lives and presence of Indigenous women is continually and materially erased. See: Zolf, Rachel. *Janey's Arcadia: Errant Ad^ent$res in Ultima Thule*. Toronto: Coach House Books. 2014.

senses of obligation or inheritance, and actions that have not yet occurred or may not have occurred, actions that veer into the mythical or incomprehensible.

Most of Long Soldier's own whereas statements are prose poems explicitly preoccupied with stasis and conclusion created by full-stops, in contrast to the whereas statements which graft onto one another through a series of semi-colons, creating a description through accumulation.[53] The finished, grammatical sentence serves throughout the book as the "orderly sentence; conveyor of thought," but paired with the "whereas" moves in an accumulative and ultimately unresolved way through a process of statement and re-statement of terms. In contrast to the congressional juris-generative processes which reproduce nation, Long Soldier's generative making by replicating the *whereas* subjunctive forces conflicting understandings of sovereignty, the pain of her body, her understanding of herself, and the wide and varied contents and contexts of this book of poetry to abide in the same phenomenological domain. There is an apology from a father with a history of alcoholism:

> I often say he was a terrible drinker when I was a child I'm not afraid to say it because he's different now: sober, attentive, showered, eating. But in my childhood when things were different I rolled onto my side, my hands together as if to pray, locked between knees. When things were different I lay there for long hours, my face to the wall, blank. My eyes left me, my soldiers, my two scouts to the unseen. And because language is immaterial I never could speak about the missing so perhaps I cried for the invisible, what I could not see, doubly. What is it to wish for the absence of nothing?"[54]

In the history of the past, the poem writes and grieves both the harm that occurred and the impossibility—the loss—of what good might have been otherwise, the *missing* that could have been. The apology intervenes, interrupts, and brings both speakers and that liminal could-have-been-otherwise together:

> I turned to him when I heard him say *I'm sorry I wasn't there sorry for many things*/ like that / curative voicing / an opened bundle / or medicine / or birthday wishing / my

53. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas.* 49.
54. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas,* 65.

> hand to his shoulder / *it's okay* I said *it's over now* I meant it /because of our faces blankly / because of a lifelong staredown / because of centuries in sorry;[55]

Long Soldier's application of this technique to the form and content of a single document does more than expand the context of various accounts of an event by quoting multiple media in the tradition of documentary poetry, and explicitly does not seek to reveal the "true" meaning or intention behind that document. Rather, this technique reveals the ways in which a particular document manifests and structures the world it encapsulates (precisely, only) in the ways it is made and written. These re-writings re-stage aspects of the rules, functioning, and performance of those individual documents as individual instruments of power, and by metonymic connection reveal the historical, legal, social, political and normative context that produced those texts.

III. To & From: Invocation, Identification, or *Who's Coming to Dinner?*

In 1991, Canada's deputy minister for Indian Affairs, Bill Van Iterson, offered the first of four apologies that the Canadian Government has made for the Indian Residential Schools.[56] In 1998, Canada's Indian Affairs Minister Jane Stewart offered a "Statement of Reconciliation," at the unveiling of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.[57] Subsequently, on June 11th 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper offered a "full" Statement of Apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools, on behalf of the Government of Canada.[58] This

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55. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas,* 65.
56. Matthew Dorrell, *English Studies in Canada,* Special Issue: Aboriginal Redress. Vol. 35, Issue 1. (Edmonton: Western University. March 2009) 27-45. This apology was followed by the "Statement of apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools" made by Prime Minister Stephen Harper on June 11, 2008—discussed in this chapter—was followed by the "Apology to residential school survivors" made by Alberta Premier Rachel Notley on June 22, 2015, and the "Apology to Indigenous peoples" made by Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne on May 30, 2016.
57. "Address by the Honourable Jane Stewart Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development on the occasion of the unveiling of Gathering Strength - Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan." January 7, 1998. Government of Canada. https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100015725/1571590271585
58. Harper, Stephen. Right Honourable, Prime Minister of Canada. "Statement of apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools,"

apology was part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, which was implemented on September 19, 2007 alongside the launch of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission. What exactly a "full apology" means in the terms of this apology is unclear. Formally, it resonates with the "full pardon" a chief executive officer is often empowered to give, namely, a pardon or release from guilt that constitutes a full reversal or retraction by giving back a convicted person the status they had prior to the conviction, and reinstating all rights that were lost.[59] A full, or entire and complete apology, takes full responsibility—rather than a reluctant, partial, or "safe" apology—and might be understood to have some relationship to the kind of absolution,[60] or closure made possible by it.[61] It also implies that it takes full control of the meaning and responsibility, as well as the question of the felicity and acceptance, of the apology.

In the later progression of Austin's argumentation, he differentiates the "act" of a speech act into three simultaneous but separate classes of action, identifying what he calls the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary act. The first act—the locution—is the act *of* saying something, for example: saying, "I'm sorry." The second act, the illocution, indicates what we perform *in* saying "I'm sorry," namely: apologizing. Though Austin ties the locution and the illocution together as necessarily following from one another, the third act—the perlocution—is the possible, but not necessarily entailed, consequence of my saying "I'm sorry" and thereby apologizing *to someone*: namely, convincing them of my remorse,

59. "Pardon, law." *Encyclopaedia Britannica.* Editors, 1998. Revised, Patricia Bauer, 2019. Accessed 2021.
60. New Red Order, occupying Artist's Space, defined "absolution" as a temptation offered by collaborative projects: "Absolution: formal release from guilt, obligation, or punishment. Instead of absolving, we non-absolve, and Artists Space and New Red Order hold that tension together. Artist Space's history of showing Indigenous art on stolen land commenced with the 1987 exhibition *We the People*, organized by Jimmie Durham and Jean Fischer. In 2017, Artists Space presented *Unholding*, an exhibition that implicitly reflected on the thirty-year space between." (New Red Order, Occupying Artist's Space. *The New Red Times Magazine*. *Artist's Space.* 2.) These interventions will be important to answering the question of the role of art, here: these are literary responses, not precisely programmatic, avoidant of ultimate decisive didacticism.
61. Whether it involves "full" atonement is problematic: as a perlocutionary, it is not in the apologizer's power to grant himself absolution, which may be part of the problem of all these official apologies from a strict speech-act-theoretical standpoint.

communicating my regret and sincerity, or similar. The perlocutionary act is the production of "certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons," or, "what we bring about or achieve by saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading."[62] Where the intentions of the speaker, as well as the felicitous achievement of the right contextual conditions, determine the performance of the illocution, the perlocution relies on the "you" who is addressed, and their experience of the performance, to occur.

With the apology, the tension between what the speaker intended and its impact is particularly crucial. The infelicity or felicity of the illocutionary act—whether or not the apology succeeds or fails *as such*, or how the speaker intends their doing (x) to result in (y)—does not necessarily prevent or restrict the perlocutionary act, or consequences, of apologizing. The consequences of a perlocution can be unintentional. Cavell, discussing the perlocutionary, observes that the perlocutionary effect relies primarily—if not entirely—upon the audience and recipient of the speech act, writing that "the claim to my having embarrassed or harassed you by saying something must come primarily from you, not me—I can claim, or claim not, to have meant to, even not to have done it, to deny that my words could rationally be taken as you have taken them."[63]

Some define the apology as an illocutionary act—one which produces an immediate effect in its utterance through social and linguistic conventions—and some define it as a perlocutionary act, whose utterance initiates or produces a set of consequences which occur *after* or as a result of its utterance. Sianne Ngai categorizes apologies as participating in the perlocutionary class of utterances, citing Cavell: "It is the person in the position of possibly receiving a compliment or apology, rather than the one who offers it, who ultimately

62. J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words.* 101-103, 108.
63. Stanley Cavell, "Passionate and Performative Utterance: Morals of Encounter." *Contending with Stanley Cavell,* Ed. Russell B. Goodman, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005,) 191.

determines whether the act of complimenting or apologizing has successfully taken place."[64] Speech is thus both a matter of acting, and in Cavell's terms, of articulating and expressing desires—acts that allow a relationship to be articulated, and maintained, mutually, through gestures and expressions. The determination of the perlocutionary effect of the apology is in the hands of the recipient of the apology.

Nisga'a poet Jordan Abel explores the relative creative empowerment of the recipient versus the deliverer of the apology in his poem, "Please Check Against Delivery," which receives Stephen Harper's apology by re-writing it. In an introduction to his poem as included in the anthology *The Land We Are*, Abel reflects how Harper's June 2008 apology served as a catalyst for him to explore questions about truth and reconciliation, as well as a word bank—the text of the poem is constructed entirely from the speech.[65] He writes: "[the] speech was a starting place in thinking through Truth and Reconciliation, and seemed to be freely available for repositioning, reconstruction, and reimagining." In describing his method, he presents himself and Stephen Harper as partners in the production of the piece, though notes that such collaboration is qualified:

> As a collaborative piece—Stephen Harper delivered the speech and I reconfigured it using the words provided—the process was unfortunately unidirectional. I divided the speech into clusters of three to five words, and randomly rearranged those clusters until they started to reveal meanings that resemble truth. The transcription of the speech, however, starts with the imperative "PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY"; this phrase was the only part of the speech I felt the need to leave intact.[66]

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64. Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories,* (Harvard University Press, 2012) 39. A note that in the section Ngai refers to, Cavell also appears to cite the apology as an illocution, in contrast to passionate, perlocutionary utterances: "Perlocutionary acts make room for, and reward, imagination and virtuosity… Illocutionary acts do not in general make such room—I do not, except in special circumstances, wonder how I might make a promise or a gift, or apologize, or render a verdict. But to persuade you may well take considerable thought, to insinuate as much as to console may well require tact, to seduce you or to confuse you, may take talent." Stanley Cavell, "Performative and Passionate Utterance," *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow,* (Harvard University Press, 2005) 172-173.

65. "This poem ['please check against delivery'] was commissioned by Simon Fraser University's Centre for Dialogue in honour of Chief Robert Joseph, recipient of the 2014 Jack P. Blaney Award for Dialogue, and was originally presented at Vancouver Public Library as part of the City of Vancouver's Year of Reconciliation." Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, Simon Fraser University. https://www.sfu.ca/dialogue/programs/jack-p-blaney/reconciling-injustices-in-a-pluralistic-canada/events/reconciliation-through-poetry/jordan-abel.html

66. Abel, Jordan. "Please Check Against Delivery." *The Land We Are: Artists and Writers Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation.* L'Hirondelle, Gabrielle and Sophie McCall, eds. Winnipeg: Arp Books. 2015.

Abel uses the literal terms of the apology, cut loose from their arrangement, to reveal how they encompass and obscure a variety of meanings. The invitation to "check against the delivery" now rings out in a few ways: (1) as an instruction to verify that the written speech matches what was said, (2) to check that the narrated history matches what has been historically delivered, and (3) that the promised transformations will be brought about in the future. Moving this work of accountability, repair, and change delineated in the apology out of the monologue and into a reciprocal process opens up the invitation of the address of the apology—and the interpretation of its meaning and felicity—to a community of readers.

Tracking Abel's citational poetics, Sarah Dowling notes that the phrase "A cornerstone" has been removed from the celebratory language that ends the apology—where it modified the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a part of the "new beginning" signified by the "implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement."[67] Instead, in Abel's poem, the word serves instead to emphasis that the schools themselves as part of a larger project, a "cornerstone of the Settlement together," and activates that the word settlement can mean both the Settlement Agreement of material recompense, and also the larger and ongoing project of settlement by Canada.[68]

The perlocutionary effects that the apology has on Abel—at least those he makes available through the preface and the composition of the poem itself—are inaugurated by his accepting the apology as a collaborative text, and complicated by the ways in which he re-

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67. Dowling, Sarah. *Translingual Poetics: Writing Personhood Under Settler Colonialism.* 2018. Also, note: "One of [Abel's] most notable excisions [from the text of the state apology] is Harper's moment of multilingualism… the original apology includes both of Canada's official languages, English and French, as well as three Indigenous ones, Cree, Anishinaabe, and Inuktitut. Writing the poem entirely in English, with only one small deviation into French, enacts and comments on the perilous harm to indigenous languages that was caused by the forcible separation of Indigenous children from their families and communities and that has actually worsened since the closure of the last residential school. That 'please check against delivery' does not use any indigenous languages—especially because its source text includes them—powerfully demonstrates the ongoing impacts of residential schools… [and] obliquely refers to the fact that the harm of language loss was not recognized under the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement." 163.

68. Jordan Abel, "Please Check Against Delivery," *The Land We Are: Artists and Writers Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation,* L'Hirondelle, Gabrielle and Sophie McCall. Eds. (Winnipeg: Arp Books) 2015.

writes it to reveal hidden and additional meanings. The perlocutionary effects of this apology are certainly not acceptance, but skepticism and questioning about the networks of meaning that make it up, and a motivation to close-read and respond by re-making.

In response to the US Congressional Resolution of Apology, and in contrast to Abel's work which snips the grammatical and semantic ligatures of the text, Long Soldier's poetic making insistently inhabits the architecture of the sentences and language that makes up the Congressional Resolution, and their desire to stabilize her identity within the document, they fray upon examination in isolation from the grammatical chain of logic that connects the sentences, a fragmentation that begins at the very outset in the way she recognizes the apology is *offering* of an identification to her. The literature on Indigenous refusal of and resistance to offers of recognition is copious: works by Joanne Barker, Brian Klopotek, Audra Simpson, Glen Coulthard and others outline the perils of accepting modes of state recognition—where such gestures offer to enable participation and recognition in the legal and political systems of the United States, they also reinforce and reinscribe colonial regimes of knowledge and power that reinforce the primacy of the state.[69] As Barker notes, in federal Indian law and policy, "the recognition of Native status and rights is really about the coercion of Native peoples to *recognize themselves* to be under federal power within federal terms."[70]

Long Soldier inhabits the ways that the articulated boundaries of identity offered by the state, and her own identifications and names for herself—self-given, imposed, or otherwise—fray under their own weight. The transformation is painful and incomplete:

> If I'm transformed by language, I am often
> crouched in footnote or blazing in title.

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69. Joanne Barker, "The Specters of Recognition," in *Formations of United States Colonialism*, ed. Alyosha Goldstein (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Joanne Barker, *Native Acts: Law, Recognition, and Cultural Authenticity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Brian Klopotek, *Recognition Odysseys: Indignity, Race, and Federal Recognition in Three Louisiana Indian Communities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
70. Joanne Barker, *Native Acts: Law, Recognition and Cultural Authenticity,* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011) 22.

Where in the body do I begin; [71]

As narrator and poet, Long Soldier both does and does not comfortably inhabit the specified terms, or the names that she is called forth as. The "we" apologizing both includes and excludes her. The contours of the paradoxical "we" nonetheless persists and articulates a relational and reciprocal relation, as she writes in her poem about a collaboration on a poem, "We": "We did this together yet/she doesn't like my use of *we* the presumption."[72] She writes: "I understand the need to define as the need for stability. That I and you can be things, standing understood, among each other."[73] The "whereas" allows her to insist on her presence and implication, personally, and to refuse certain other terms and names that might call her into the text. These articulated boundaries of identity, these definitions—self-given, imposed, or otherwise—enable participation and recognition within the legal and political systems of the United States. As Butler observes, "When we argue about protection against discrimination, we argue as a group or a class. And in that language and in that context, we have to present ourselves as bounded beings – distinct, recognizable, delineated, subjects before the law."[74] However, the coherence frays upon closer examination. It is an uncomfortable position, to be mis-described, to be imprecisely grasped by this text, and the speaking positions (of recipient, issuer, and reader of the apology) require poetic and violent contortion to take up, and promise only consumption and misunderstanding:

> "the term American Indian parts our conversation like a hollow bloated boat that is not ours that neither my friend nor I want to board, knowing it will never take us anywhere but to rot. If the language of race is ever truly attached to emptiness whatever it is I feel now has me in the hull, head knees feet curled, I dare say, to fetal position—but better stated as the form I resort to inside the jaws of a reference." [75]

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71. Layli Long Soldier. "(I) Whereas Statements." *Whereas*. 61.
72. Layli Long Soldier. "We" *Whereas*. 47.
73. Layli Long Solider. "example:" *Whereas*. 27.
74. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* (New York & London: Routledge) 24. Also see "constitutive exclusion," Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. Second Edition. New York: Verso. 1985, 2001.
75. Layli Long Soldier. "(I) Whereas Statements." *Whereas*. 62.

As Mishuana Goeman observes, the calls from the colonial state that hail the Native interlocutor are predatory and deforming, demanding a kind of legible nostalgic pastness from the performance of indigeneity that will reinforce their difference from the colonizer citizen, "constraining people in places and in bodies that are marked and unmarked in ways that make them legible or illegible as Indigenous peoples."[76] In the tenth of Long Soldier's "Whereas" poems, she puns on the idea of a "pigeonhole" as a term for a fixed and unfair idea of what someone or something is like, a typographic error of an excess of white space between words, and a white birdshit-covered recess for a pigeon to nest in, and writes about a writerly or artistic desire to avoid being "pigeonholed" and placed as a particular, darkly humorous, but inescapable interpretive violence:

> I definitely don't want it either the stigma of a place I shy. Away from admitting to her what's in my work: this location. Where I must be firmly positioned to receive an apology the spot from which to answer. Standing here I regard an index finger popping up pointing out a reminder:[77]

That interpretive and foundationally impossible position where she must index herself, as in, categorize and identify, is also one that sticks out like a sore thumb—a reminder—that she *could* stand there to respond to the apology, but perhaps she would rather not.

The question of who stands where as a recipient of an apology is explored with particular creativity in the work of Siksika artist Adrian Stimson and settler Canadian artist AA Bronson. In *A Public Apology to Siksika Nation* and its related performances and collaborations, Bronson and Stimson play with the imprecise question of identification as a form of intimacy and relationship building, rather than only a negative trap. In the text of his "Apology," Bronson proliferates the binarizing affordances of the address (in the form of a "to/from" section) into unwieldy scale, by issuing the apology but refusing to let it end.

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76. Mishuana R. Goeman, "Disrupting a Settler-Colonial Grammar of Place: The Visual Memoir of Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie." Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith, eds. *Theorizing Native Studies.* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2014) 236.
77. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas.* 71.

Where Harper's apology concludes with a commitment "to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us," and ends with a collective pronoun that incorporates Indigenous peoples into the text's "we" and into the "stronger Canada" that it describes, Bronson's apology disambiguates the conflicts and contradictions in that "we." Bronson's doubled insistence on and disavowal of the form of the apology puts all of the pressure (and indeed the bulk of the page count in the publication) on the invocation: the contents of the "To" and "From" sections of his apology, which serve a similar contextualizing function to Long Soldier's employment of the "whereas" statement form. Unsurprisingly for its preoccupation with the apostrophic, the multi-media work itself—which includes performances, publications, and conversations—makes collaboration and conversation its primary media. Indeed, the apology consists of and proliferates discourse. The publication itself is more of a folio, consisting of the apology itself, in the form of a letter, an essay by Ben Miller,[78] a timeline of the life of J.W. Tims in relation to the Siksika Nation,[79] a list of recommended further reading, and a bibliography.[80]

At the center of the project is the apology issued between the two artists in conversation with and on behalf of their inherited positions: AA Bronson is the great-great-grandson of the man who established and ran the Old Sun Residential School on Siksika Nation until conflict forced him to leave the reserve, and Adrian Stimson is the great-great-grandson of the Siksika warrior, Old Sun (Naato'saapi), for whom the school was named, and

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78. Ben Miller. "Determined to Keep Up Their Dances," *A Public Apology to Siksika Nation*, (New York: Mitchell Innes and Nash) 77-108.
79. AA Bronson and Ben Miller. "J.W. Tims Timeline." *A Public Apology to Siksika Nation. 109*-153.
80. This would be a place to lay out the account of how the speech act/performative is related to writing, beginning from the question of whether this composition (as a script) is a preparation for the performance of the apology, a *record* of the apology that was performed, or itself an apology. Indeed, the performance—*An Apology to Siksika Nation*—encompasses a constellation of performances, interviews, "scouting missions," dinner parties, conversations, and response. The question of delimiting the work and impact of the apology points back to how speech act theory (as it promises criteria of evaluation such as felicity and infelicity, the illocutionary and the perlocutionary) is a limited mode of response which truncates from view the *acts* that the genre enables and supports.

whose children and grandchildren were forced to attend the school. The apology, written and performed, begins with a "simple" statement, an introduction of the speaker: "This letter, which I am reading now to you, is FROM: AA Bronson, born Michael Tims in Vancouver, Canada, at dawn on June 16, 1946." Though this identification expands substantially into a brief biography of his origins and development "from parents of Irish extraction. From the loins of colonizers and immigrants and the offspring of settlers" into his work as an AIDS activist and artist and "master of butt massage for fifteen years," it turns quickly to list those whom the apology is directed: "To."

I abbreviate the catalogue for the sake of space—Altogether the list of people to whom this apology is addressed takes up nine and a half pages of the fourteen-page apology. The expansiveness of the address is broken into beats, and marked with expansive categories of inclusion that cite the comprehensiveness of the catalogue form, but also invite readers or listeners to think beyond it. It also structures the story of what happened: the repetition of the conjunctive punctuation (;) serves a similar purpose as the "whereas" clauses in the Congressional Resolution of Apology. The story told by these sentences does not end, but rather continues as a part of the same thought/breath. As each name progresses, their place in the story get told, relating them to one another. There are a number of names that are called into complicity on both sides of the address. The following is an excerpt from the "To" section of the text/invocation:

> "And as well to the living, also to the dead: I speak to and for my blood relations and I apologize on their behalf: to my great-grandfather, the Rev. John William Tims, the Anglican missionary who did his best to destroy Siksika culture, and narrowly escaped the Siksika reserve alive; and his wife Violet, who wrote poetry and by doing so convinced herself that she was civilized; and his son, my grandfather, Sydney Christopher Tims, who was born on the Siksika Reserve and went on to run a residential school of his own, and who mimicked his father in his disdain for aboriginal culture and people; and his son, my father, Master John William Tims, named Jack, who was born on a reserve—which one I have been unable to determine—and who ran away from home at fourteen to escape the culture of abuse that permeated the reserve and his home; and to my mother, Kathleen Alice Tims, named Kitty, a war bride from Britain, who came to Canada in 1945, little

> comprehending the genocide perpetuated by her husband's father and his father before him—she came to Canada expecting a new life and an escape from terror, and found instead old and pestilent patterns of abuse percolating for generations."[81]

Bronson expands the range of recipients even further from the event, drawing connections of responsibility and taking up a position of relationship to larger systemic violences that structure his present and his past:

> And I speak to those who suffered from abuse as children, or adults; to those who committed suicide because of their inability to live fully as who they felt they were; to those who died of HIV and AIDS; to all those who have been persecuted, and murdered, and especially indigenous girls and women; and as well as to the indigenous nations, I speak to the refugees, those who travelled across oceans but never made it to this safe haven of Canada, and died along the way; I speak to the dispossessed and abandoned; to all those who have died but cannot leave this place: I invite them to join us here, in this invocation; for we are a community of the living and the dead." [82]

After a number of pages of additional names of those who have been harmed—in a variety of relationships to Canada, as place, as land, as aspiration and idea—he turns to the participants of the discrete historical "events" that occasion the apology:

> And I speak to Old Sun, the great Siksika chief, after whom the Siksika residential school was named, great grandfather to Adrian Stimson; I speak to Red Crow and Chief White Pup and Crowfoot and Three Bulls and the other great Siksika chiefs of the late nineteenth century; to the Siksika children who Rev. Tims forbade to speak their own language; to those children then, separated from their parents, partitioned from their own culture, forbidden to perform their own rituals or eat their own foods, prevented from attending their own dances, especially the Circle Camp, or Sun Dance; to all the children who were abused at Old Sun Industrial School, whether physically, sexually, emotionally or spiritually; to all those children who escaped the Old Sun Industrial School, and who were caught and returned, and to those who escaped and did not return; to the Siksika parents who were denied access to their beloved children, especially in 1895, when the European scourge of diphtheria and tuberculosis broke out in the school, and children were dying; to the children who died then in that fateful year, and were not allowed to see their parents in their last days; I speak to Henry Scratching Hide—his son one of the first to die—who killed the stock man Frank Skynner, called Owl Eyes, and was in turn killed; and especially to Mabel Cree, the child who died of diphtheria in Old Sun Industrial School, without her parents; and to those who mourned Mabel Cree, to White Pup and to Big Road and to Calf Child and to Red Old Man, and to the others whose names I cannot know; to her father Greasy Forehead, and to her mother, and to her uncle The Wood—who came to confront the Rev. Tims and was admonished for using the front door, and

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81. AA Bronson, *A Public Apology to Siksika Nation*, (New York: Mitchell Innes and Nash) 18-19.
82. AA Bronson, *A Public Apology to Siksika Nation*, 18-19.

> sent to the kitchen door—and to all Mabel Cree's relations; to the medicine men, who were not allowed to attend to the dying children; and to Dr. Lindsay, the white doctor whose ministrations did not help; to The Cutter, who took matters into his own hands, who set out for the Mission House, intending to kill the Rev. Mr. Tims, but was intercepted, and sent home; and to Mr. William Baker, the farm instructor, who intercepted him and sent him home; to Mabel's mother, who also went to the house with drawn knife but was taken away by three men; I speak to those who stood in front of that same doomed house, chanting Tims' name as they shot stray dogs; I speak to White Pup, Big Road, and Calf Child, who protected the lives of other white settlers in exchange for their ability to mourn Mabel Cree in their own homes, I speak to Running Rabbit, to Head Old Man and to Little Chief; and I invoke the family story: I speak to those who set fire then to the Mission and to the Church and to Old Sun Industrial School and burnt them to the ground; I speak to all those who participated in the Siksika uprising of 1895."[83]

I read Bronson's semi-colons as performing a related connective function to Long Soldier's deployment of the whereas statement, in that both expose the ways that the stage-setting of the apologetic logic can be pressed beyond the bounds of what the state intends. As Austin observes that in all illocutionary acts "The 'I" who is doing the action does… come essentially into the picture," Stanley Cavell adds that it is the "'you' in perlocutionary acts comes essentially into the picture."[84] In an interview, Bronson cites Paul's letter to the Galatians as a formal intertext for his invocation—a letter that begins by identifying the sender and his context, and world, before identifying its addressee, and then subsequently spurs a moment of self-reflection:

> Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia…. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.[85]

The question of who the author is, the ground on which he stands on to speak and his justifications for speaking, are drawn into question and require the letter. Bronson invites Stimson to speak by apologizing to him directly by name, and Stimson responds—and resists

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83. AA Bronson, *A Public Apology to Siksika Nation.* 19-22.
84. J.L Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*. (London: Oxford University Press) 61. And, Cavell, Stanley. "Passionate and Performative Utterance: Morals of Encounter." *Contending with Stanley Cavell,* Ed. Russell B. Goodman, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005,) 191.
85. Galatians 1:1-5, *NIV*.

the response—replying both as himself and as “Buffalo Boy,” unnamed but nonetheless accepting the hail. Stimson embraces the discomforts and impossibilities of the position of accepting an apology—as an individual—to an unspecified amalgam of indigenous people through his alter-ego, a drag persona entitled Buffalo Boy, who inhabits queerly and precisely what Gerald Vizenor terms “the ruins of representation”: the incoherent aesthetic and nostalgic amalgamated figure of the Indian created by a colonial perspective, and the shadowy “trickster” visions and play that escapes both the posited “reality” and representation. Stimson, a Two-Spirit artist, and member of the Siksika (Blackfoot) Nation in Southern Alberta, Canada, has been exploring the legacies of Old Sun Residential School his entire life, and is best known for his satirical and camp performances as “Buffalo Boy” and “The Shaman Exterminator,” persona that embrace figures and fantasies of the colonial past and inhabit them as characters in the present. That alter-ego both is, and is not, Stimson, who receives the apology—as a member of Siksika Nation population, and as named in the apology—but also receives it as an impossible and mythic figure. Buffalo Boy is described as a “Campy Indian Cowboy,” an embodiment of a generic, commodifiable, conquered and agglomerated nostalgic “Native” object who might be included in the non-place performance of a “Wild West show,” rather than an individual in a particular landscape, defined by the specificity of tribal place, lived bodies, and customs. However, Stimson’s characteristic pearls, disco cowboy hat, buffalo g-string, buffalo corset, place him both in the visual and discursive construction of the Native as historical fiction, and at odds to it, both in the “past” and in the present, in the particular and the mythic. Goeman describes such processes as the symbolic displacement of particular place into generic spaces—a metaphorics that tracks literal displacement:

> “Whereas Indians can exist in space, as in the space of the Wild West in the 1800s, it is much harder to place Indians. To do so means you have to acknowledge their presence and thus rights or the fact that they are still here and have a voice that articulates their own relationships in the world. A settler-colonial grammar would

prefer to have Indians in a ubiquitous space, controlled by problematic imagining."[86] This queer emplacement in the non-places of the historical past—while also in the place of present relationship and community—is further literalized in Stimson's work. Stimson currently lives in the garden of the Old Sun Residential School, in the circular grove of trees where his father grew food to supplement the inadequate food provided by the institution, and makes art out of the literal material of the school building. In "Sick and Tired," now in the collection of the Mackenzie Art Gallery, Stimson repurposes objects he found in the "dump" behind the school—windows, bedframes, light fixtures. The title of one of the performance pieces explicitly made in response to the apology, Stimson's *Inii Sookumapii: Guess who's coming to dinner?* cites the 1967 American romantic comedy film starring Sidney Poitier as the "surprising" husband in an interracial marriage that Katharine Hepburn's character brings back from a vacation. In this context, the apology rings out as a "simple apology" offered—an invitation to dinner—that suddenly becomes qualified when accepted by a specific person. The implicit biases, expectations, and structures of the social world that issued this invitation crystalize and become explicit around the figure of the unexpected, racialized guest. One can ask: who was the expected recipient of the apology, and who is the surprise or disappointment? Do apologies from colonial nation states to colonized populations address and expect *Buffalo Boy* of the Wild West Show, or Adrian Stimson of Siksika nation? Or, since the work stages an apology from Bronson to Siksika Nation, is Bronson's presence on Siksika Nation as he takes up the position of historical perpetrator and apologizer the surprise? Trouillot's concerns about the numerical identity of perpetrator and apologist, or victim and recipient, do not apply. The scenes of relationship forged in these accidental hailings are intimate and real, though performances between people in a variety of guises.

86. Mishuana R Goeman, "Disrupting a Settler-Colonial Grammar of Place: The Visual Memoir of Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie," Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith, eds. *Theorizing Native Studies.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.) 239.

Across the documentation of the performances, those involved are constantly specifying who they are to speak in particular ways, sometimes inhabiting multiple identifications. Stimson speaks as himself, "Adrian," and as "Buffalo Boy" and as a "survivor of the Residential Schools system," other invited guests at the table speak as tribe and council of Siksika Nation, and less formally as themselves, as guests at a dinner party. All of them receive Bronson's apology at a dinner party documented as part of *Iini Sookumapii: Guess who's coming to dinner?* and explicitly question what it means to accept the apology in terms of who is in the room.[87] As Stimson explains:

> "And so at that dinner table was AA, Ben Miller, people from the crew of *In the Making,* as well as the elders Myrna Youngman, Gregory Big Eye, Letitia Red Crow, Romeo Crow Chief, myself and others. And so often dinner tables are the places of conversations, and it was as that dinner table that we asked those hard questions about apologies, and what do they mean, and should we accept them? And it was a real wonderful opportunity to share our stories and it was at that table where AA first—in terms of the process with the Elders—talked about it in terms of genocide. And I think it was a real important gathering, and it was from that gathering that we continued on with the work. [88]

Adrian Stimson also responds to the apology with his own publications and art-making, recently with a book of school portrait photographs of the male students enrolled at Old Sun Residential School in the spring of 1955, which include Adrian Stimson's father, also named Adrian Stimson, entitled *Old Sun Boys.*[89] In his introduction to the book, titled, "Our Fathers," Stimson writes that he knew about their traumatic experiences:

> "When I agreed to respond to AA Bronson's *A Public Apology to the Siksika Nation,* I knew well that we would be exploring that trauma. Yet I felt it was important. This would be a moment in time when we could exorcise that trauma, and in the process come to know the forces that have shaped the often-tenuous

87. See documentation of one of the dinner parties that made up *Iini Sookumapii: Guess who's coming to dinner?* In third installment of the documentary series, *In the Making: Adrian Stimson.* CBC Arts. September 21, 2018. https://gem.cbc.ca/in-the-making, and see documentation of the installation at the Remai Modern here: "Adrian Stimson and Tarah Hogue: Online Conversation." Remai Modern Museum. April 13th, 2021. Accessed Tuesday, February 6. https://remaimodern.org/art-artists/art-artists-all/adrian-stimson-and-tarah-hogue-online-conversation/?utm_source=wordfly&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=MidmonthNewsletter-June2021&utm_content=version_A
88. Adrian Stimson, "(*At Home)* On Art and Healing. Artist Talk with AA Bronson and Adrian Stimson" February 2 2021. Hirschorn Smithsonian Museum Gallery and Sculpture Garden. Online. https://hirshhorn.si.edu/explore/at-home-on-art-and-healing-artist-talk-with-aa-bronson-and-adrian-stimson/
89. Adrian Stimson, *Old Sun Boys,* (New York: Mitchell-Innes & Nash) 2020.

relationships between settlers and First Nations, and perhaps create more balanced friendships and relationships into the future.

> Reconciliation does not happen between governments and citizens; it happens between peoples. Individuals must take it upon themselves to seek the truth of what happened to the indigenous peoples of Canada and the Americas, understand their relationship to that history, their complicity in that history, and seek ways to readdress it."[90]

Rather than providing an opportunity for redressing a harm, as in healing it, reconciling populations to it, or closing it up, Stimson's sense of the opportunity that the apology promises is distinct: the consequence (or at least, the first impact) of the performance of apology includes, at least, an opportunity to re-address actors to the historical facts of the Residential Schools Program: "to address oneself again to a task, to speak again to a person, to consider or attend to again" or even to change the address on a letter.[91] As an infelicitous, and highly regulated speech act, the utterance (or issue) of this apology *is not* the accomplishment of an act of repair. Delimiting the work of the apology to "readdressing" rather than redressing could be read as another limiting gesture, an echo of the "disclaimer" from the US Congressional Resolution that indicates what the apology does not do: nothing is fixed, nothing is repaired, the fact that the state offered the locution of "sorry" does not "settle" anything. As Bronson includes in his apology: "I have no apology for genocide: / my words make no difference." However, the apology does bring those invoked in the address into conversation—into the same room, in the case of Bronson and Stimson. And as Bronson's apology concludes after that two-line disavowal, the relationships that the apology articulated, named, persist:

> I care about the living and the dead.
> And, here and now,
> we are the living and the dead;
> We are the living and the dead;
> We are a community
> of the living and the dead.

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90. Adrian Stimson, *Old Sun Boys,* 2020.
91. *Oxford English Dictionary,* "readdress, v." Accessed July 18, 2024.
https://www.oed.com/dictionary/readdress_v?tab=meaning_and_use#26825553

And the dead are with us still.[92]

The imprecision of identification and the attribution of neat responsibility—what makes the formal apology on behalf of a collectivity an infelicitous and abortive gesture—is exploited here as an opportunity to build community and share questions of how to move forward in the aftermath of colonial violence, along broader lines of relationality, kinship and agency than those delineated by the state. Where the state apology is a highly regulated speech act, seeming to limit the modes of response to acceptance or rejection of its terms, the apology here moves laterally and radically: proliferating publications, discourse, and relationships.

These examples of play, connection, and expansion are part of a larger analysis of how the apology ultimately reveals itself as a genre which is distinguished by a high likelihood of *not* finding its receptive audience. More clearly, it is a genre that often fails to be such, or a genre that is increasingly less likely to meet the conditions under which its structures of expectation—acceptance, forgiveness—would come to fruition. That does not mean that when an apology is judged to not succeed, or is otherwise infelicitous as such, it does not *apologize*. That means it does something other than the expectations that it is structured by. The apology is thus also a form that can be used to structure a kind of delayed critical engagement with the content apologized for, that invites those implicated in its terms to consider the narrated harm as "open" for conversation or processing rather than closed. And that, in Bronson and Stimson and Long Soldier's examination, the question of reparation is opened by the form—regardless of disclaimers. This openness is antithetical to the anticipated (and protected against) legal question of compensation, which leaves open the worry that the tally of wrongs might add up to something wrong, and worries about the impossibly vast sum that might have to create adequacy. In these artists' use of the form, the

92. AA Bronson, "A Public Apology to Siksika Nation," 26.

fact of the apology indicates that any gesture of reparation requires a more fundamental shifting or unsettling address.

IV. Literally Unsettling

The impact of Bronson's particular use of the genre of the apology—its perlocutionary consequences, even—extends far beyond the almost definitional inertness, and even beyond his own explicit disavowal, of the apology itself. In an interview conducted in 2023, when reflecting on the ongoing project of the *Public Apology to Siksika Nation,* Bronson's first response was a demurral, an uncomfortable observation on the incommensurability of the gesture of the apology and of his position as apologizer in relation to histories of genocide: "I should say in advance that since our original project, the many unmarked graves have begun to appear across Canada. And my apology carries very little weight in the face of that disastrous history. Who cares if another white man apologizes?"

Bronson's observation of the weakness of the colonial apology that his performance participates in is apt: perhaps no one (really) cares that another white man apologizes. But in an interview with Bronson, Adrian responds to this disavowal with a corrective. The apology was a language, a form that they used to get to the thing that mattered: a relationship, and where Bronson stepped into a position of taking responsibility for his position, variously inherited, and for a history of violence he did not personally commit but nonetheless is connected to, he did so as himself—in the present—in real lived relationship to real people. That the apology does not change the past is almost beside the point. Stimson responded directly to Bronson's disavowal in an interview: "I don't see it as… being nothing. You know, AA, you touch the hearts of many people in this nation, through your apology." Stimson then began another catalogue, listing individual people involved with the process and

performances who often ask after Bronson, whose relationship to him—catalyzed by the act of apologizing—is not one that he can disavow or limit the impact of by pointing to what the apology fails to achieve:

> I think for, for everybody at that table, it was, it was a lovely moment. And it was a reckoning in many ways, and it cemented in… our relationship that we see is ongoing, the whole point of why I say conciliation, because reconciliation indicates this happened before, and it hasn't! …recognizing that history and moving forward, it's not about forgetting, it's not about getting over it or anything like that. It's about understanding what happened in the context, but also the damage that's done and, and how we are moving through it. And part of that moving through it is creating new relationships. And, you know, for me, the opportunity to create that new relationship with AA, I think speaks to the future and the hopes of the future.[93]

In Toni Morrison's Nobel Prize Lecture, she tells a story about an old woman who is characterized as blind and wise, and a group of children who decide that they are going to contest the limits of her wisdom, by asking a question whose expected possible answers must be ascertained through sight. Morrison characterizes this question as: "the one question the answer to which rides solely on her difference from them, a difference they regard as a profound disability: her blindness."[94] One of the children asks: "Is the bird I am holding living or dead?" The woman pauses a long time before she responds, refusing to engage in the proffered shape of the interaction—by giving a yes or no answer, either of which carries danger for herself, for the possibility of the bird, if there is one, in their hands. Instead, she replies: "I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands." As Morrison observes, the woman's response serves a number of critical purposes: "For parading their power and her helplessness, the young visitors are reprimanded, told they are responsible not only for the act of mockery but also for the small bundle of life sacrificed to achieve its aims. The blind woman shifts

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93. "AA Bronson and Adrian Stimson by Bellamy Mitchell," (*BOMB Magazine*, April 13th, 2023.) https://bombmagazine.org/articles/2023/10/05/aa-bronson-adrian-stimson-bellamy-mitchell/
94. Toni Morrison, "Nobel Lecture," December 7, 1993, *Nobel Lectures: Literature 1991-1995*, ed. Sture Allén, (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing.) 1997. Accessed on December 15, 2023. https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/lecture/

attention away from assertions of power to the instrument through which that power is exercised."[95] Reading this passage in terms of hate speech and threats, Judith Butler observes: "the blind woman returns the implicit threat delivered by the children by referring to 'the hands' of the one who holds the bird, to expose the body of the one who speaks, to counter the act with an act that exposes what is most unknown to the ones who deliver the threat."[96] The alter-apologetic approach, similarly, addresses the instrument that exercises power, rather than engaging the assertions themselves. Thus it creates space within the genre by drawing attention to the genre itself, making plain the automatic expectations and functioning that would seek to limit the possibilities. Indeed, the question that the kids ask of the woman, "is the bird alive or dead?" now reads as an uncanny echo of the binary framing of the question of "reconciliation": do you forgive us or do you not?

Scholarship on apologies often focuses on drawing distinctions between apologies and other associated forms such as excuses, confessions, disclaimers, and justifications, often by historicizing them as antecedent practices, prior to what they historicize as the contemporary practice of the apology defined by regret and a request for forgiveness. Attending to the genre allows all these different and conflicting forms to surface as they impact the lived performance of apologizing, and how they are active in ongoing social relations and the seeming permanence of institutions. These alter-apologetic readings and re-writings collectively, indeed the contentious discourse around public apologies full-stop, writes an account of the apology as a reparative form that seeds its own impossibilities and fruitful failures. Critical discourse and conversation is more often dissatisfied with public apologies than convinced by them: a feature and a bug. While states tend to place rigid material and symbolic limits upon apologies and other forms of reparative inter-group work in order to

95. Toni Morrison, "Nobel Lecture," December 7, 1993.
96. Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative,* (New York: Routledge) 1997, 12.

promote political and legal stability, the apology as a genre and an iterative performance resists those efforts: opening up modes of address, critique, and contestation.

Located at the end of the first section of Long Soldier's book, and just before the "Whereas" statements, is a long poem entitled "38." The poem is preoccupied with the stasis and conclusion created by the idea of a full-stop as the end of a sentence and the symbol which brings "the idea to (momentary) completion."[97] The sentence functions here as the "orderly sentence; conveyor of thought," but moves in an accumulative and ultimately unresolved way through a process of statement and re-statement of terms. The poem recounts the events surrounding—and according to official archival record, the events that led to—the execution of the thirty-eight Dakota men on the orders of President Abraham Lincoln, for the Sioux Uprising, or the US-Dakota War of 1862.[98] The execution remains the largest mass execution in American History.[99]

Long Soldier tells the story of the expansion of US territory as it proceeded through acts of purchasing land from other tribes, but follows that with a modification of meaning: "But another way to understand that sort of "purchase" is: Dakota leaders ceded land to the US government in exchange for money or goods, but most importantly, the safety of their people." [100] After the 1851 Treaty of Traverse des Sioux, the Dakota Sioux ceded the remainder of their lands in the area now called Minnesota in exchange for a strip of reservation land approximately twelve miles wide and 150 miles long and the promise of annuities for fifty years, which were mishandled by federal agents and effectively not

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97. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas, 49.*
98. Ned Blackhawk, *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2023) 293-299.
99. David Martínez, "Remembering the Thirty-Eight: Abraham Lincoln, the Dakota, and the U.S. War on Barbarism." *Wicazo Sa Review*. Vol. 28, No. 2. (Fall 2013) 5-29. See also, Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, ed. *In the Foosteps of Our Ancestors: The Dakota Commemorative Marches of the Twenty-First Century,* (St. Paul: Living Justice, 2006) 25. Eric Foner, *The Firey Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery,* (New York: W.W. Norton 2010) 261. And see, Alvin M. Josephy, *The Civil War in the American West,* (New York: Viking, 1991)133-39.
100. Long Soldier, Layli, *Whereas,* 49-53.

delivered. Each sentence does not replace the previous on or erase the logic of euphemism. Rather, she rewrites as a poetic treatment the documents that purport to make a land, to found and maintain a nation, to make a world out of paper. This re-*poiesis* is accumulative and referential, building on previous statements, though not towards a logical end. "38" is an accumulation of *grammata*: statements that delineate a state of affairs, and also *acts* that re-inscribe a different meaning to those stated affairs. The place itself, named, resists narrative clarification: "The word *Minnesota* comes from *mni*, which means water; and *sota,* which means turbid. / Synonyms for turbid include muddy, unclear, cloudy, confused and smoky. Everything is in the language we use."[101] Later in the poem, the language recurs: the contracts and agreements made between the US government and the Dakota, paperwork which promised money that never arrived, which parceled off land that had not been sold, are referred to as the "turbid treaties," and the land and territory stolen also "dissolves," a legal term for disorganizing and disuniting a relationship between two parties and an evocatively aquatic term.

This formally echoes both the progression of the whereas statements in the Congressional Apology, and the accumulation of "terms" and "treaties" and communications (such as apologies) between the United States and various encapsulations of Native Peoples. As Long Soldier writes: "to make whatever-it-was official and binding, the US government drew up an initial treaty." This original text becomes obscured by "another (more convenient) treaty, and then another," but it does not leave the archive of the poem. [102] It remains, buried under a re-statement. This accumulation of re-statements of what-happened over the course of this poem ultimately becomes an over-trafficked landscape of unclear and questionably effective text-acts which is difficult to navigate. She writes: "As treaties were abrogated

101. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas,* 51.
102. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas,* 49-53.

(broken) and new treaties were drafted, one after another, the new treaties often referenced old defunct treaties, and it is a muddy, switchback trail to follow." (30) Despite the confusion she creates by re-writing, resurrecting, and insisting on the simultaneous presence of each of these historic texts—each of which articulates a different relationship or state of affairs, a narrative stumblingly progresses through the connections she draws in the body of knowledge that has been re-established in the text between her and the audience of the poem's iterations. This iterative re-making includes the logic of trade, contract, treaty, predatory capitalism, relocation, and military intervention. It also includes Long Soldier's self-conscious participation in the retelling and re-phrasing of those verbs. It rewrites, by recounting, a historical act, another performance, and the slow muddying back through repetition into unintelligibility—the land persists, the skies, waters, landscapes, animals, people, physically provide the grounding possibilities for this work. The abrogated treaties, agreements, apologies, and documents melt away as the land emerges as landscape and location, as a witness and party to the binarizing form of the apology as offered. Such use of the apology reveals an understanding of the politics of form, and an attempt to intervene—at the level of grammar and syntax and at the level of landscape—in a politics whose exercises of power that endanger and materially oppress the lives of its publics and excluded constituencies—come about through justificatory instruments that are bureaucratic, archival, and issued on paper. I reproduce the text as follows:

> When the Dakota people were starving, as you may remember, government traders would not extend store credit to "Indians."
>
> One trader named Andrew Myrick is famous for his refusal to provide credit to Dakotas by saying, "If they are hungry, let them eat grass."
>
> There are variations of Myrick's words, but they are all something to that effect.
>
> When settlers and traders were killed during the Sioux Uprising, one of the first to be executed by the Dakota was Andrew Myrick.

When Myrick's body was found,

his mouth was stuffed with grass.

I am inclined to call this act by the Dakota warriors a poem.

There's irony in their poem.

There was no text.

"Real" poems do not "really" require words.

I have italicized the previous sentence to indicate inner dialogue; a revealing moment.

But, on second thought, the particular words "Let them eat grass," click the gears of the poem into place.

So, we could also say, language and word choice are crucial to the poem's work.

Things are circling back again.

Sometimes, when in a circle, if I wish to exit, I must leap.

And let the body swing.
From the platform.

Out

to the grasses.[103]

In Long Soldier's text, one tool of this deconstruction takes place by an insistence on literalizing and making explicit as much of the textual situation and functioning as possible: the empty gesture becomes/makes a poem. The accumulative archive of writings and re-writings is resurrected—despite the neatness and authoritativeness of the history netted in by the Congressional Apology—as are all the temporal and ontological arrangements of states-of-affairs for the purposes of the document encapsulated by those texts. The landscape that emerges appears again and again as the compound word: grassesgrassesgrasses. In "38" the body that swings out and escapes the circling of its individual sentence—legal and grammatical—emerges over an unparsable plurality: a space of resistance to ordering, but

103. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas,* 49-53.

also subject to orthographic ordering and sense-making. The value of treaties is symbolic, more than just their material object—the paper upon which they are written, or the wampum and hide exchanged—treaties create kinship alliances, often discussed in metaphor: "A treaty is not solely words of agreement on parchment but rather an ongoing relationship in which both parties continue to have their concerns openly discussed and considered."[104] Kiowa scholar and poet N. Scott Momaday calls misunderstandings of meaning, interpretation, and translation between treaties "confliction of language."[105]

That compound word, rendered without spaces, re-establishes an indexical *here* where the apology—and the pair of Layli Long Soldier and the United States implicated in the apologetic scene—takes place. She situates the reader and the conversation temporally, spatially, and grammatically between these two texts, in this landscape. She re-makes the disclaimer by inserting herself as writer of the book—of the claims, statements, fragments, and landscapes within—in a conversation between writers of texts. The reiterative "grassesgrassesgrasses" could be spaced out as individual words, interrupted with commas, ended with a period. Or, literalized, the grasses could be parsed into species, families, landscapes, separated into states, defended as countries, or fenced off as reservations. The grasses that the apology encompasses proliferate beyond individual subject positions, though not neutral or un-haunted by all previous methods of ordering. They are constituted by but not reducible to individual blades of grass in a field. To say it out loud animates the field like the sound of the wind through the grasses.[106] This echoes—and builds out the meaning of—

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104. Richard W Hill, "Linking Arms and Brightening the Chain: Building Relations Through Treaties," *Nation to Nation: Treaties Between the United States & American Indian Nations,* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2014) 37—60.
105. N. Scott Momaday, interview by Suzan Shown Harjo, August 15, 2005, School of Advanced Research, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Film transcript, *Treaties Project—Great Nations in their Own Words.* National Museum of the American Indian, Washington DC.
106. I am indebted to Tina Post's attentiveness to and keen reading of text towards performance for this observation about "grassesgrassesgrasses" as a sonic and tactile experience.

the enigmatic opening of the book. What was first an invitation now, on re-reading, reads as a threat, a weapon, a victory, a poem.

> Now
> make room in the mouth
> for grassesgrassesgrasses[107]

The invocation of a landscape (and the language for it) that resists simple speech, that cannot fit in the mouth like the word "America" but still must be spoken. Long Soldier's work makes use of linguistic, narrative, and perspectival fault lines between how treaty language and apology language rely on the ability to establish fact, which is to say, the sense of what it means to be grounded in a literal sense (connected to the ground) and also an everyday sense of using something as precedent (e.g. this claim is grounded in). Long Soldier's neologism "grassesgrassesgrasses" interrupts the circuit between the policed boundaries of the colonial nation state and the violently repressed possibility of uncolonized (or decolonized) indigenous relationships to land with something that exceeds both. The term "grassesgrassesgrasses" might be fruitfully understood as taking off from or operating alongside Derrida's deployment of terms such as *différance*, archi-writing, *pharmakon*, supplement, hymen, gram, and spacing.[108] The repetition of the injunction to make room in the mouth, to expand the scope of utterance and the content of the imagined meanings, pushes at what Mishuana Goeman calls a "settler colonial grammar of place," and expands that with her own first-personal use of the form. Goeman writes:

> Foundational to normative modes of settler colonialism are repetitive practices of everyday life that give settler place meaning and structure. Yet space is fluid, and it is only in the constant retelling and reformulating of colonial narratives that space becomes place as it is given structure and meaning. Grammar, or that which provides

107. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas*, 5.
108. The connections between deconstruction as an approach to parsing the relationship between text and meaning, the impossibility of translation, and its conceptual and methodological to thinking and writing in a number of works of contemporary poetry by indigenous writers, is worth exploring, especially in the context of activist scholarship that has consistently drawn connections between deconstructivist methods and decolonial projects. See, for example, Natalie Diaz's *Postcolonial Love Poem.*

> a system of rules, indexes, and thus forms certain patterns, structures, and meanings, is not without lapses, critiques, and disavowals.[109]

The *here* that Long Soldier inhabits—impossible, erased, paradoxical, citizen, indigenous, living, persistent—and the position she speaks from in sideways response to the hailing of the formal apology—provide the (non-nation-defined) grounds for her disclaimer, which she includes at the end of her book:

> Nothing in this book—
>
> (1) authorizes or supports any claim against Layli Long Soldier by the United States; or
>
> (2) serves as a settlement of any claim against Layli Long Soldier by the United States, here in the grassesgrassesgrasses [110]

This rewriting of the legalistic disclaimer of the Congressional Resolution shows how that disclaimer neurotically defends against two expectations of the genre: the first disclaimer neutralizes the generic expectation that an apology, in naming relational harm between two addressed parties, would structure a way for individuals to demand or assert responsibilities owed in terms of that relationship. It attempts to make an apology that is reparative in the sense of marshalling affective orientations of shame and regret, but one that cannot actually *repair* in the sense of producing reparations. That attempted prevention of any possible action following from the claimless claims articulated produces the second disclaimer, which seemingly cuts both ways—as does the original apology: it acknowledges that the issuing of the apology does not constitute closure or forgiveness, it does not release any claims known or unknown, that might be laid between the parties. So, while the Congressional Resolution of Apology structures a narrative of harm, it cannot suture: it is arrested at a standstill. The addressed party cannot formulate any claims, and the issuing party cannot release themselves

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109. Mishuana R Goeman, "Disrupting a Settler-Colonial Grammar of Place: The Visual Memoir of Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie," Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith, eds. *Theorizing Native Studies,* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2014) 236.
110. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas,* 101.

from responsibility for those (inarticulable) claims. Long Soldier's disclaimer, a repetition and response, holds the United States reciprocally in that same stasis around the harm—unresolved, unrepaired, and unreleased from responsibility for the question, and emplaced in the grassesgrassesgrasses, land before and without nation. The second claim, in addition to insisting on the unsettledness and irresolvability of the apology, also re-locates spatially and temporally the ground on which and from which and as which all these claims are made, authorized or not, as an un-locatable here in this unparsable plural landscape of the grassesgrassesgrasses. Instead of troubleshooting the machine of this apology to better serve its function, Long Soldier reveals how well the document qua apology serves certain purposes, conveys social meanings, and resolves by "re- / structuring complex / ideas into simpler / ones."[111] But she also frees up the apology as a relational genre whose contours can be entered into and engaged by anyone. While states tend to place rigid material and symbolic limits (disclaimers) upon apologies and other forms of reparative inter-group-work such as truth commissions in order to promote political and legal stability, the genre of the apology as such resists those efforts: opening up modes of address, critique, and contestation. Long Soldier's repeated lyric refiguring of the terms of address within the grammatical gears of the Congressional Resolution of Apology—namely, by taking up a first-personal position of speaking in relation to the "first-personal" address from the state, and by inserting different content and lacunae for terms that designate land, place, god, and person—takes up the state that has made itself addressable (and that has personified itself as emotional, regretful and sorry/sorrowing) and shows how its relationships to place, land, and territory are distinct from those she herself inhabits. This reframes the relational features of the apology (a binarizing address, a narrative form of the story of a relationship, an implied or hoped-for future relation) as a kind of land acknowledgment, in the more productive and provocative

111. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas,* 82.

valences of the land acknowledgment as illustrated by Theresa Stewart-Ambo and K. Wayne Yang in their essay, "Beyond Land Acknowledgement in Settler Institutions," where such acknowledgments mark a relationship of transition or translation between different—but not subordinated—groups. Acknowledgment or recognition of a threshold, as it were, reflects and recognizes both parties as an act of sovereignty, separate governance, and diplomacy which preserves the practices and lifeways of Indigenous people outside of settler structures: affirming their relationship to place, political relationships, and kinship. Layli Long Soldier builds on the affordances of the genre of the apology, as employed by the state, in order to illuminate the presence—not articulate the fullness of—land relationships and ways of knowing that exceed the speaking settler present, the human, and extend indigenous self-governance and sovereignty.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE DANGER OF THE SITUATION: THE INDEXICAL PRESENT OF APOLOGY IN THE PERFORMANCE ARTWORK OF ADRIAN PIPER AND VAGINAL DAVIS

On October 31, 2012, drag queen and punk artist Dr. Vaginal (Crème) Davis apologized at the start of a performance with José Esteban Muñoz. The performance, entitled "No One Leaves Delilah': A (W)rap on Race," cites all the formal trappings of an academic lecture or debate between public intellectuals and amplifies it into parody: the stage is set with two armchairs and a coffee table, classical music plays lightly in the background, and a PowerPoint cycles above the two for the duration of the conversation. The slides read more like intertitles or slogans for a film trailer, flashing by in a stream of perverse wordplay in the style of drag names (think Farrah Moan, Eileen Dover, and Mimi Imfurst) touting "A Post Haul O'Caust… Hootenanny" and "America in Flames… is a Sweet Taste… Gnut Kracker Suite," while pornographic photographs and American flags flicker in the background. Muñoz makes the inspiration for the subtitle and the aesthetic explicit: the two are modeling themselves askance, "riffing" on the seven-and-a-half-hour "serious discussion" of topics pertinent to the histories of "race and society" between the white anthropologist Margaret Mead and the black author, activist, and American expatriate James Baldwin which took place on August 25, 1970 and was recorded and transcribed into the book *A Rap on Race*.[1] More than the content, it is the aesthetic contours of that historical conversation, the position of the oracularly consulted intellectual, the splendid "fatuousness" of the figures that Davis and Munoz insist they are citing, the fact that they "were important iconic figures… always shrouded in a mist of inappropriateness, self-importance, and just a grifteriness to them which we very much admire."[2] This aesthetic of celebrity intellectualism is carried to even greater heights in

1. James Baldwin and Margaret Mead, *A Rap on Race*, (Philadelphia & New York: J.B. Lippincott Co.) 1971.
2. José Muñoz and Dr. Vaginal Davis, "'No One Leaves Delilah': A (W)rap on Race," NYU Performance Studies, October 31, 2012. Transcription and description based on video and audio footage uploaded to YouTube

subsequent iterations of the performance-conversations, such as when Vaginal Davis and filmmaker Wu Tsang are seated on opposite sides of a vintage tête-à-tête couch in the center of a crystal-chandelier and gold mirror-filled parlor in the Musée des Archives Nationales in Paris.[3] In New York, after Muñoz's introduction, the self-titled Dr. Davis turns away from her academic interlocutor towards the audience as her homemade earrings flip on her shoulders—two rough paintings on cardstock of a bare-chested white woman with hot pink lipstick and blonde hair—and delicately unfolds a single sheet of paper:

> First of all, I must apologize in all sincerity to everyone who gathered here tonight. You've all been brought here under false pretenses. What I am about to reveal to you here at NYU's hallowed Performance Studies Studio, I know you are all going to find this very hard to believe, and some of you will be quite shocked by this revelation, but I fear that I must take the risk, even though my sanity and perhaps my very safety in the United States is probably in jeopardy. In good conscience I can no longer continue to live a lie. I must tell you the truth, and nothing but the gospel truth, despite the dire consequences, and I can only pray to god Jehovah of Armies, that you can forgive me for having led you astray for so many years, letting you go on thinking I am something that I am not, and could never be. I want to use this occasion to celebrate my true self. I feel that the time is right for me to now shout from the highest mountaintop that I am indeed—yes, really truly—

At this point, Dr. Davis looks up from her paper, swallows, and then stage-whispers: "black."[4] The audience laughs. "Did you hear me the first time? I am black." Her eyes open significantly each time she says the word, which she pronounces slowly and exaggeratedly, as if miming the word to someone across a great distance or repeating it for the twelfth time to someone who has misunderstood it. "Yes, it's true. I'll give you a moment to let it sink in. Go

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by Jim Fouratt. "Dr Vaginal Davis and Professor Jose Munoz(NYU) [*sic*] in a serious discusion [*sic*] on ART and Beauty." https://youtu.be/9nagZnr6yTQ.

3. Vaginal Davis and Wu Tsang, "No One Leaves Delilah: A (W)rap on Dr. Jose E. Muñoz by Vaginal Davis and Wu Tsang," Editathon Art+Feminisms, Lafayette Anticipations – Fondation Galeries Lafayette, organized by Wu Tsang and Flora Katz, (Paris: Archives Nationales, 2017.) https://www.lafayetteanticipations.com/en/media/editathon-artfeminism-vaginal-davis-et-wu-tsang Also relevant is the subsequent performance, "No One Leaves Delilah: A (W)rap on Riots." Curated by Natasha Ginwala, Gal Kirn, Niloufar Tajeri. Untie to tie, ifa-Galerie Berlin. January 26—27, 2018.

4. In this paper I follow the orthographic practices of the authors in their published materials and the art objects discussed with respect to uncapitalizing the term "black," as I track the term and the elaboration of the concept in relation to their usage and performances of the term.

ahead, lesbian-process amongst yourselves."[5] The laughter that ripples up from the audience reaches a peak as she taps her fingers on her wrist, seemingly waiting for the audience to catch up to the revelation. Part of the gag of this apology is that the members of the audience would already understand the artist as black, given the color of her skin, but the apparently self-evident connection between Davis and that racial identification becomes less stable in the context of Davis's drag, which often includes play with and performances of various racial, cultural, and ethnic identities.[6] In her bubblegum pop band ¡Cholita! The Female Menudo, she performed as the thirteen-and-a-half-year-old Chicana singer Graciela Grejalva, while in her speed metal thrash band, Pedro, Muriel and Esther (PME), she performed as Clarence, a "white-supremacist militia-man from Idaho complete with ZZ Top beard."[7] As part of the Afro Sisters, where her persona Vaginal Davis was inaugurated, Davis was known to hold the microphone out for the white members of the band (sporting black afros) and white members of the audience, urging them to shout along to the Civil-Rights era anthem: "say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud!"[8]

Drag has a long history of playing with the significance of gender, race, class, and sexuality as it (re)produces them through the creation of visually observable difference and bodily performance, through costume, comportment, and other modes of manipulating what Robyn Wiegman calls "economies of visibility." The world of ballroom—a performance

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5. Vaginal Davis and José Muñoz, "'No One Leaves Delilah': A (W)rap on Race," 2012.

6. Indeed, even's Davis's self-mythologizing origin story as related across various publications and performances including this one includes the narrative that she was conceived during a one night stand under the table at a Ray Charles Concert at the Hollywood Palladium in the early nineteen-sixties, when her "Black Creole Choctaw Indian mother"—then forty-five or forty-six years old—met her twenty-year-old Mexican-American German-expatriate Jewish father. As with all her performances, and in keeping with drag, the seemingly impossible details cohere, and it is difficult to tell when, or if, she is being serious. As Dodie Bellamy observes of her biographical disclosures and sociological observations in this performance, tracking the veracity of each statement is a perhaps impossible task as "Davis keeps a straight face. No change in tone, no indication that this is a joke, which I know it is, but I nevertheless find myself googling "Do Germans have sex with cabbages," just to make sure." Bellamy, Dodie. "Vaginal Davis Troubles the Smile." Milan, Italy: *Mousse Magazine.* Issue #79. 2022. https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/vaginal-davis-dodie-bellamy-2022/
7. Connie Monaghan, "Vaginal Creme Davis," (*Coagula Art Journal*. May 1997.) 27. Online Archive of California; University of California, Los Angeles Library Special Collections.
8. Stuart Timmons, "Wiping Out On the New Wave of Drag," *The Advocate,* (October 1988) 12-13.

community originally developed by queer people of color in the 1960s and 1970s as an alternative to drag queen pageants where racism and transphobia were prevalent—inaugurated the term "realness" as an evaluative category for how successfully and realistically one can perform and embody a particular category or identification. In a ball, performers compete in categories which often include matrices of regional, socioeconomic, and implicitly racialized stances of power, privilege, and access such as "Executive Realness," "Town and Country," "Schoolboy/Schoolgirl Realness," and "Military Realness."[9] Realness also delineates a sense of what tactics are required for a minoritarian individual to present themselves—outside of the ballroom—as part of a majoritarian heteronormative milieu. Marlon Bailey defined this latter sense of "realness" in the Detroit ballroom communities as:

> the way in which members enact their realness performances to create the illusion of gender and sexual normativity and to blend into the larger heteronormative society to avoid homophobic discrimination, exclusion, violence, and death.[10]

On stage in this performance, rather than effecting a transition into normativity by donning the signifiers of a particular identification (such as a beard, camo pants, and deepening her voice in her transition into her white supremacist persona "Clarence"), Davis's apology ironically stages a removal of the artifice of whiteness to an audience who misread her as such, revealing what she calls "her true self." This gesture places her racial identification as black in the register of all the tools, costumes, names, titles, and poses that she uses to generate the variety of performative personae she employs, of which Dr. Vaginal Davis is only one.[11] It also opens up the question of what exactly it was that Davis might be presumed

9. Jennie Livingston, Dir. *Paris is Burning.* (Off White Productions: 1990.)
10. Marlon M Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit,* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press) 2016, 55-56.
11. In addition to the above discussed personae employed in the various bands she founded between 1970-1999 before her move to Berlin, other identities include the Most High Rev'rend Saint Salicia Tate, an evangelical woman, and various boy drag personae. Vaginal Davis, "Vaginal Davis Biography," http://www.vaginaldavis.com. Also see: José Esteban Muñoz, "The White to Be Angry," *Disidentifications:*

to have done earlier in the performance (or prior to the show) to disavow her blackness, or what identities or actions might be considered in conflict with, or obscuring of, this racial identification. The apology for "living a lie" and campy disclosure of her race as a provocative secret is conversationally unnecessary in the space, but surfaces nodes of perceptual relations and power dynamics that crystallize into and enforce identities racist presumptions about who can authoritatively address a public, who holds doctoral honorifics, who belongs in the "hallowed halls" of NYU where whiteness is the often-unarticulated norm, and whose presence must be accounted for in some way. Audience members insofar as they are receiving the apology are figured as possibly *expectant of* an apology for or account of her race. Thus, while Davis is giving what we could call 'fatuous intellectual realness', her apologetic disclosure of her race also acts on and implicates her audience first-personally because of the procedural contours of how apologies are deployed and received: what would it mean to accept the apology, or even forgive Davis for the deception? Davis's disclosure is thus received with some uncertainty and delay by members of the audience, who laugh increasingly nervously as the joke, and the implications of the apology addressed to them, progresses.

In his early analysis of Davis's artistic output in his book *Disidentifications*, José Muñoz emphasizes that her drag aesthetic is productively and "obviously fake," interested in parodying the performance of passing rather than aspiring to "realness" in any register. Muñoz reads this emphatically parodic drag, where the seams of particular transformations are featured rather than smoothed over, as central to his theorization of Davis's punk oeuvre of publications and performances as emblematic of a tactic he calls "disidentification": the performance of strategic identifications with, and misrecognitions of, subject positions

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Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,) 1999, 95-97, 103-111.

offered by mainstream majoritarian culture by minoritarian (queer, classed, racialized) subjects.[12] The seams of the performance highlight that all identities are performances—including those normatively quotidian performances of cis-heterosexuality, whiteness, and class—but more strikingly those seams serve what Muñoz calls Davis's "terrorist drag," a ground-level "cultural terrorism" whose impact is outwardly-oriented towards producing emotional responses in its audience (especially fear and anger) towards political ends.[13] Caught in the possible affordances of the apology as recipients, the audience's discomfort becomes palpable as Davis then discloses a catalogue of further identifications and synonyms for "black," while tapping her fingers on her wrist. "Half-Deutsch, and Yiddish, a Schwarzer. For those of you who are politically correct, an African American." After each subsequent ethnicity, identity, and epithet is revealed, the laughter diminishes, drastically when she expands her list to include a catalogue of historical and contemporary racist slurs and derogatory characterizations: "a jigaboo, pickaninny, a tar baby, a neglette, a spade, a spear-chuck-stress, a Hottentot, a Jemimah, a Sambo, a coon, a spook, a jungle bunny, a nigger, and a porch-monkey." She places the paper back onto the coffee table and smiles. "Thank you!"

The footage of this event I am consulting was taken from a seat in the middle audience, on a shaky handheld camera or phone, so when a member of the audience next to the camera laughs it can almost overwhelm Davis's voice, and the way the laughter peters out as the audience becomes increasingly uncomfortable is similarly conspicuous.[14] While the particular dominance of the audience's laughter over the comparatively muted conversation between Davis and Muñoz is obviously an artifact of the amateur documentation of the performance, it emphasizes a crucial aspect of the scene: the audience's discomfort. Figuring

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12. Vaginal Davis and José Muñoz, "'No One Leaves Delilah': A (W)rap on Race," NYU Performance Studies, October 31, 2012.
13. José Muñoz, "The White to be Angry," *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.) 1999. 102.
14. Vaginal Davis and José Muñoz, "'No One Leaves Delilah': A (W)rap on Race," 2012.

out how to read the increasingly uncomfortable laughter and shifting in the audience—the awkward squirming of physical movement as well as a response to an awareness of emotional discomfort or ethical uncertainty—requires attending to the impact of the apology. If the audience laughs because they do not need the apology because they already "know" that she is black, then it is precisely the nature of this purported knowing as a form of racism that Davis illuminates by embroidering it with her catalogue of slurs. If the audience takes her apology seriously, they hold the position of expecting an apology for the fact of her racialized position in that space, and for a kind of deception. If the audience watches the performance of the apology as ironic without accepting the interpellation of the apology, other possible questions reveal themselves: who needs to be forgiven, for what? What precisely is the harm apologized for, and to whom? What could the audience have done such that a person feels they need to apologize for this? Is the audience in fact the entity which should apologize, rather than receive the apology? The apology, its mock deference and its humor, operates along provocatively similar lines to another apology by a black artist deployed in predominantly white art spaces and white supremacist social worlds. Indeed, the "black intellectual read as passing for white in white spaces realness" that Davis is performing as drag in the 2010s, conceptual artist and philosopher Adrian Piper lived as a graduate student and artist in New York in the 1970s and 80s.[15]

Beginning in 1986 and continuing until 1990, Piper staged a periodic performance piece entitled *My Calling (Card) #1: A Reactive Guerrilla Performance for Dinners and Cocktail Parties*, wherein she would hand a small printed card to people who made racist remarks within earshot, or directly to her. Where Vaginal Davis's apology for being "secretly" black rings out as a provocatively insincere ironic apology, Piper's performance is almost

15. Adrian Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black," *Transition Position*, No. 58, (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1992) 4-32.

painfully earnest: it was often delivered in moments where she *was* understood as white due to judgments about her skin tone and appearance—but also, presumably, due to a racist interpretation of other cues of class and context at these "dinners and cocktail parties." The card contains the following text:

> Dear Friend,
>
> I am black.
>
> I am sure that you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark. In the past, I have attempted to alert people to my racial identity in advance. Unfortunately, this invariably causes them to react to me as pushy, manipulative, or socially inappropriate. Therefore my policy is to assume that white people do not make these remarks, even when they believe that there are no black people present, and to distribute this card when they do.
>
> I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me.
>
> Sincerely yours,
> Adrian Margaret Smith Piper[16]

While much has been said and written about this performance, including by Piper herself, no attention has been paid to the fact that this calling card catalyzes a racial and emotional confrontation through the genre of the apology. While Piper does not ever say the word "sorry" or "I apologize," she does evidently engage the expectations of what an apology is: the card addresses an individual, names a harm between them, and marks that harm as regretted. The central apology is bidirectional and reciprocal, with Piper acknowledging in light of her disclosure: "I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure

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16. Here, and in all quotations subsequently, I refer to the edition of the card reproduced as "*My Calling (Card) #1: A Reactive Guerrilla Performance for Dinners and Cocktail Parties*" in "My Calling (Cards) #1 and #2," included in Adrian Piper's *Out of Order, Out of Sight. Volume 1: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968-1992*, and the transcription of the text included in Maurice Berger's "Styles of Radical Will: Adrian Piper and the Indexical Present," in *Adrian Piper: A Retrospective.* Issues in Cultural Theory 3. Fine Arts Gallery, University of Maryland Baltimore County. 1999. Subsequent copies of the card, especially those reproductions made available for others to take and circulate as part of the exhibit at the MoMA, *Adrian Piper: A Synthesis of Intuitions, 1965–2016*, which was on view March 31–July 22, 2018, do not include the complimentary close and signature of "Sincerely yours, Adrian Margaret Smith Piper." This has implications for the iterability of the performance and the cards as printed and printable matter. Where these anonymized cards imply a greater iterability in that anyone else (who identifies as black) can deploy them, no one besides Piper can hand out the cards with her name.

you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me." The card can thus be understood as catalyzing something like an apologetic scene, one where Piper expresses regret that she, deploying the card, causes discomfort—and also where the recipient of the card is represented as having committed an action (making/laughing at/agreeing with a racist remark) and also represented (or assumed) as regretting that action, as well as being made-uncomfortable by Piper's presence as black, making regret the default and polite response to receipt of the card. The doubled apology is certainly read as such by those who receive it, or who might receive it. In a discussion of the performance piece at the Randolph Street Gallery in Chicago in 1987, part of a series of "meta-performances" discussed later in this chapter, an individual responds to the card by taking up the position of being someone who would have issued that racist remark and received the censure in the form of the card: "Do you want me to apologize to the group? Do you want me to apologize to you, do you want me to acknowledge 'oh how stupid of me I didn't even realize it was a racist remark?' I mean, what do you want me to do?"[17] As with Vaginal Davis, the artist's invocation of the genre of the apology generates questions of responsibility and activates a self-conscious response in their audience. As the audience member here tracks, the possibility of apologetic gestures proliferate around the conflict articulated in the card, marking zones of felt responsibility to individuals and also to a larger social milieu whose norms and admonitory gaze recognizes the individual conflict as violent, but none of the possible apologies satisfactorily resolve the harmful scene. As a matter of fact, Piper responded to the barrage of questions by saying that offering an apology in response to the card would be missing the point, rather: "I don't think apologizing to the group or apologizing publicly would really be good, for all sorts of reasons… What I would like is for the person to approach me quietly, later, and have a

17. Adrian Piper, *Documentation of the January 30, 1987 performance and discussion of "My Calling (Card), No. 1 & 2."* Video 8, 1:31:54, Sound, Color; Randolph Street Gallery Archive, Flaxman Library. Accession Number RSGA 148. (School of the Art Institute of Chicago Library & Special Collections. Digital Collections. 1987) https://digitalcollections.saic.edu/islandora/object/islandora%3Arsga_6456

discussion about it…" But before we hear what Piper would like to discuss, the individual interrupts her again, telling her repeatedly that the card is "very forward" and inaugurating a phase of the discussion in which individuals attempted to troubleshoot the card by changing the wording or the presentation, encouraging Piper to leaven the scene with humor, deputize someone else to hand over the card, or to give up the project of confronting individuals about their racist behavior entirely. Instead of closing up a harm, Piper's apology activates her immediate card-receiving transgressive audience, and even these hypothetical recipients who take up the position of being addressed by the card, into a frenzy of negotiation and emotional agitation around the ways people understand themselves and others in terms of responsibility for racialized harm.

In what follows, I track how the procedural contours of the genre of the apology serve the differently socially critical and investigative projects of both these artists, and indicate some of the ways in which that genre, as deployed, activates emotions especially around the senses of individual and collective responsibility. I understand genre in Lauren Berlant's sense of the term, as "a loose affectively-invested zone of expectations about the narrative shape a situation will take," and also therefore as orienting a situation that can fall apart and leave its participants flailing to cohere the scene again.[18] These expectations cast the apology as an aspirational reparative gesture, a stylized and routinized first-personal performance addressing some event or fact that has damaged a relationship between the two parties of the apology. Broadly, apologies temporalize a present speaker in relationship to a past harm, instantiate and relate two parties of the apology to one another around the content and according to the terms of the apology, and allow the individual apologizing to produce a narrative account of themselves or of an event. In addition to being relational narrative

18. Lauren Berlant, "Austerity, Precarity, Awkwardness," Unpublished paper presented on the panel "Sensing Precarity" at the annual conference of the American Anthropological Association, 25 November 2011, accessible online at Lauren Berlant's academic blog, *Supervalent Thought*. https://supervalentthought.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/berlant-aaa-2011final.pdf. Accessed March 7, 2023.

objects, apologies are effectively critical narrative objects structured by regret, and constitute attempts to repeat, re-write, or re-narrate a scene or a situation that occurred as a harm to be addressed. They are activated in situations of conflict, where there is some possibility of multiple interpretations of the event apologized for. Understanding apologies as a genre with socially determined generic contours, rather than tracking their functioning as speech acts with strict rules of felicity or failure, allows us to see how Piper and Davis are leveraging this genre in order stage a critique of the apologetic expectations of their racialized milieu. Rather than reading dissatisfying, ironic, or aggressive apologies as failures, genre analysis allows us to see how these apologies work and what it is that they do. This approach short-circuits the most common criticism of ironic, insincere, or otherwise unsatisfying apologies, namely, their failure to function straightforwardly as such—and allows us to examine how the possibility of an apologetic address activates a first-personal relationship of responsibility for harm, regardless of whether the apology repairs the harm it articulates, or whether the articulated relationship between the "doer" and "done-to" is accepted as accurate. Thus: the genre of the apology as deployed by these artists structures, rather than sutures, the harm it represents, making it variously available for critique.

It is the first-personal structure of the apology that also allows Piper to bring her audiences into what she calls the indexical present, subverting what she calls the "who, me?" tendency to avoid first-personal responsibility for racist action while keeping a larger framework of white supremacy as a collective and structural racism—not merely an individual—violence.[19] The performance of handing the apologetic card to someone generates two separate events, illuminating the original remark, laughter, or joke in the near past that prompted Piper to deploy the card as the beginning of the performance, and also

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19. Adrian Piper, "Xenophobia and the Indexical Present I: Essay," *Out of Order, Out of Sight. Vol. I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968—1992,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press) 249.

prompting the person who she is addressing to account for their likely negative emotional response to and personal investment in her racializing self-disclosure. Where the performance itself activates and names emotional responses within the immediate circuit of card and apology issuer and recipient, Piper's documentation of and subsequent representations of the performance in her *Meta-Performance* discussions allows the emotions and responses to reverberate out beyond this binary pairing of the card exchange into the social world as the audience responds. The various audiences to the calling card performances, on all levels of deployment and estrangement, can take a variety of critical positions: identifying with the individual who makes a racist remark, identifying with the black individual who deploys the card, or taking a distanced evaluative stance. An audience member might perhaps feel a kind of recognition or solidarity with Piper as she is variously attempting to correct a mis-reading of her as "white," or for being read as too political or confrontational for a polite social scene upon having named an act as racist, or for otherwise failing to serve "realness" for any real-life categories of evaluation in which they have to perform their labor and live.

The difficulty of navigating individual senses of complicity in and responsibility for racism, aggression, and violence which occurs at the larger institutional and social scale, especially in institutions and among groups whose sense of purpose or identity is well-meaning and not explicitly racist, is equally central to the titular *Rap on Race* that was the starting point for Vaginal Davis's more recent apologetic performances. To read through the transcribed dialogue between Mead and Baldwin, or to listen to the taped recording, is to encounter moments of communication studded with attempts to re-negotiate the terms of who is speaking to whom, and who the participants are to each other in terms of their race. Baldwin's historical and narrative comments about his experience with racism—which did not directly accuse Mead—were often met with first-personal refusal from Mead, under the

premise she states: "I will not accept any guilt for what anybody else did. I *will* accept guilt for what I did myself…I absolutely refuse that. I refuse racial guilt."[20]

The title, *A Rap on Race,* implies that the conversation will be low-key, off-the-cuff and familiar: not any sort of official statement or pre-prepared academic discourse. In Davis's subsequent citation, "rap" gains the additional implication of rapping as a form of musical delivery related to genres of hip hop which was popularized in the later 1970s, a form with roots in African American forms of poetry, music, and speech. Davis's intervention in her title, "No One Leaves Delilah: A (W)rap on Race", further plays with the various meanings of rap: the conversation purports to be a "wrap" as in: "that's a wrap," a closed encounter, the end, the final version, or the last word.[21] A "wrap" can also, wryly, be a wrapper or a condom or a prophylactic placed around a phallus or some other potentially dangerous form, which creates a fluid boundary and therefore attempts to enable a safer and more innocuous version of intercourse, or at least, one without repercussions: nothing really gets *exchanged*. The re-naming of the conversation, which is prefaced with an apology and whose content is primarily a biographical conversation about how race influenced Davis's career, as a (W)rap on Race in all these senses thus stages a number of expectations of form, and notably, an examination of some of the formal dynamics of the conversation between Baldwin and Mead. Davis's apology does two things: it establishes the terms on which she wishes to be addressed as racialized, and it makes that situation available for discussion. If the work of the apology is, in some ways, to enter into a mutually implicating and responsible discursive form in which one person's account of the world is at stake, Mead and Baldwin's conversation is haunted by the absence of any apology from Mead, and haunted by the threat of the demand of an apology for the violence of regimes of racialization. Baldwin's response to Mead's

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20. James Baldwin and Margaret Mead, *A Rap on Race*, *A Rap on Race*, (Philadelphia & New York: J.B. Lippincott Co.) 1971. 177-179.
21. The first part of the title, "No One Leaves Delilah," is explained as a citation of Davis's favorite actress, Hedy Lamarr, who played Delilah in the 1949 film based on the biblical story, *Samson and Delilah.*

refusal of generic racial complicity, her rejection of the possibility that she might be in a first-personal position of responsibility for harm in light of her positionality, was to return to the terms on which both of them were hailed into the conversation about race in the first place. Following up on a heated discussion about whether America, as a nation, can change its fundamental racism, Baldwin attempts to address the division between his pessimism and Mead's insistence that he must be hopeful:

> BALDWIN: …Now, we've got to make some kind of connection between what you believe and what I've endured. I'm not using you as Margaret or me as Jimmy. But you really must consider seriously, I think, the state of a nation in which I, Jimmy, or I, historically, am forced to say I do not care what the pursuant facts are. I cannot afford to care.[22]

Baldwin continues, narrating her structural involvement in the "historical" second person, speaking to her as a collective "you," but importantly and emphatically not saying that she *qua* Margaret, the woman in front of him, has directly harmed him. Mead refuses to be addressed generically, refusing the rhyme Baldwin builds between "I, historically" and "you, historically":

> BALDWIN: The difference is that you, generically, historically, write the facts which I am expected to believe. The difference is that you, historically, generically, have betrayed me so often and lied to me so long that no number of facts according to you will ever convince me.
>
> MEAD: If that's so, the world is doomed. If we can't reach a point where everybody *in this world can understand facts*. …See, that's it—
>
> BALDWIN: But that's not.
>
> MEAD: —about me.
>
> BALDWIN: But I'm talking to you.[23]

Even in its absence, we can see how the apology emerges as an essential tool for capturing the difficulty of addressing large scale structural violence first-personally at the level of the individually instantiated microaggression, while preserving the positional context of the

22. James Baldwin and Margaret Mead, *A Rap on Race,* 251.
23. James Baldwin and Margaret Mead, *A Rap on Race,* 251.

individual interaction at which racial violence nonetheless occurs and is perceptible. Notably, this conundrum is not solved by the apology, rather the problem is held open in both performance practices as such, as an unhealed wound. Though Piper and Davis use the apology to effect different experiences and leverage different criticisms of their recipients, both performances could be capped by the end card to Adrian Piper's video installation, *Cornered,* which reads: "welcome to the struggle!"[24]

I. The Calling Card and Semi-Public Politesse

In Piper's *(Calling) Card*, the terms of the apology are both binary and—at first glance—fairly straightforward. They are in fact included in the form. A calling card is a card that contains identifying information, such as a name or address, which can be sent or left with someone in lieu of a full social interaction, usually in order to facilitate following up or further communication. "Dear Friend" the card begins, calling the recipient into an—at least allegedly—pre-existing relationship with her on amicable terms. The term "friend" thus brings the recipient into relationship with the Adrian Margaret Smith Piper who is physically standing in front of them, and to her name at the end of the card, in terms of being responsible for a possible *friendship*, or at least, the two of them are named as being involved in and responsible to the project of being friendly with one another.[25] This gesture is, on one level, protective: in the way that apologies are interpersonal, occurring "between" the person who apologizes (or, who structures the apology by virtue of accusation, expectation, representation of the wronged party, etc.) and those who are apologized to, apologies often

24. Adrian Piper, "Cornered." Video installation with birth certificates, color video, monitor, table, and chairs, dimensions variable, 1988, Collection Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Installed for *Enter the Mirror.* September 10, 2022—July 23, 2023.
25. Adrian Piper, "My Calling (Card) #1: A Reactive Guerrilla Performance for Dinners and Cocktail Parties", 219.

explicitly engage the speaker's sense of who they are, and their aspirations for who they want to be in relation to the recipient of the apology. Naming friendship as a common project and identification establishes the terms of relationship that the apology is attempting to repair, and which the "wrong" threatens. The next gesture of self-identification on the card, "I am black" further and mutually activates the identities of those in this apologetic scene. However, both the form of the calling card as an introduction, and the context of the cocktail party setting, point to a tension in hailing a relative stranger or acquaintance as a friend—perhaps a closer structure of relation than they might prefer, particularly if this person might not have knowingly chosen to have black friends.

At the titular dinner or cocktail party in which a white guest has made a racist remark, and in which Piper decides to deploy the card, the recipient likely presumes that there are no people who identify as black present. They also likely do not think of themselves either as racist, or in fact, as "raced" at all: thus the assertion of "I am black" racializes both parties in the scene as black and white.[26] This gestures towards the possibility of subverting the histamine-like response of racial anger—a dominant white resistance to socially imposed identifications that are foreign to the subject's self-understanding—by naming those parties in the apology as differently racialized "friends."[27] That the interpellation of the addressee as "friend" parallels the interpellation of that same addressee as racialized creates a jarring intimacy: friendship is a reciprocally constitutive category, one calls someone a friend because you aspire to that relation. "Friend" thus also serves as a reminder or the failing of the friendly, becoming a pointed and even threatening way to address unfriendly, or immoral,

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26. Or perhaps at least "not black," although within the terms of Piper's materials and interviews on the project she refers to her interlocutors as white.

27. For a deeper sense of how formations of whiteness figure themselves as non-racialized and individuals who identify as white are often thus resistant to seeing themselves explicitly as white, see Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination,* (1992) David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness*, (1991) Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White*, (1995) Richard Dyer's *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (1997), Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, (1998) Nell Irvin Painter's *The History of White People.* (2010)

behavior. Piper's racialized hailing establishes the terms of friendly communication as requiring reciprocal racial awareness. That intimacy undergirds a cutting possibility of irony.

In her process of composing the text of the card and deciding how she could best intervene in racist behavior that occurred in her presence, Piper reflected that she could "reprimand [the offenders] abstractly, that is, without identifying myself as black." That might allow the offenders to not feel personally implicated, and therefore, not activate their anger or defensive responses. As she writes, however, she rejects that possibility as ineffective: "The consequence is that we have an academic discussion about the propriety, meanings, and intentions of these remarks that leaves fundamental dispositions untouched and self-deceptive rationalizations inviolate, and I again feel offended, compromised, and deceptive."[28] Leaving the harm in abstract—unracialized—terms would have opened up discussion about what occurred, but left Piper's feelings and the harm unnamed, and she posits, would have left the emotions and racism of the individual untouched. Additionally, the individual's reflective movement from the abstract or generic to the personal is not entirely controllable by the structure of address alone, as Mead's repeated denials indicate that she clearly feels personally implicated by Baldwin's abstract addresses. While Piper rejects what she calls the "academic" register of the abstract conversation, she does seem invested in the pedagogical—but a kind of learning that toggles the "student" between the first-personal and intimate and the conceptual or generic problem of their racism. This toggling is accomplished largely by the linguistic means of indexicality.

An indexical is a linguistic expression that refers differently when deployed in different contexts. For example, who exactly is indicated by the words "I," "you," and "we" changes depending on who uses them, and words like "here," "there," and "yesterday" index

28. Adrian Piper, "My Calling (Card) #1: A Reactive Guerrilla Performance for Dinners and Cocktail Parties," 1990, 219.

or indicate different places and times based on when and where they are used. The indexical present, now, can thus comprise the speaker or hearer in relation to a shared or individual past, and also position, orientation, and identity—in time, space, and significance. In Piper's *(Calling) Card #1*, the "you" is addressed in as far as they are white, and racist, and in relationship—consciously or unconsciously—with a person, Piper, who identifies as black.[29] In the 2018 exhibit at the MoMA where copies of all three of the cards in the series were printed and distributed, including *My Calling (Card) #2 (Reactive Guerilla Performance for Bars and Discos)*,

> Dear Friend,
> I am not here to pick anyone up, or to be picked up. I am here alone because I want to be here. ALONE.
> This card is not intended as part of an extended flirtation.
> Thank you for respecting my privacy.

And *My Calling (Card) #3: Guerrilla Performance for Disputed Territorial Skirmishes*,

> DO NOT TOUCH, TAP, PAT,
> STROKE, PROD, PINCH, POKE,
> GROPE OR GRAB ME.

The cards were displayed on a plinth below a sign that instructed viewers in red, capitalized letters to "join the struggle" and "take some for your own use," resulting in encounters wherein the cards would read differently depending on where they were used and by whom. An individual would not be able to deploy *Calling Card #1* without thus identifying themselves as black, and that performative gesture that would have different jarring impacts if they did not in fact or practice otherwise identify as such.[30]

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29. Adrian Piper, Xenophobia and the Indexical Present, Talking Art: Public Lectures. Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, England, March 26, 1992. Recording Accessed via the British Library Sounds Online.
30. Adrian Piper, *Calling Cards* Exhibit Installation, *Adrian Piper: A Synthesis of Intuitions, 1965–2016*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, March 31–July 22, 2018.

The articulation of this relationship, the answer to the foundational question of the apology (who apologizes to whom, and for what?), is underscored by Piper's choice to bracket the word "Calling" in the title of the performance piece, an emphasis that resonates with the more recent phrase "calling out" as well as Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation—the process by which a subject is hailed and thus installed in and recognizes themselves in the context of a social order.[31] As an indexical hailing, the "you" is also generic, indicating a type of person and a type of encounter. Equipped with a procedural arsenal in the copies of the prepared response that she literally carries with her, Piper's performance extends beyond the frame of the deployment of the card and its immediate consequences: Piper lives in anticipation of the next encounter with racism, and the next present that can be described by this card. In their original usage, calling cards often bore the names and addresses of an individual and were left or sent along in lieu of a social interaction, or as a way of introducing oneself for a future one. Colloquially, this practice of leaving a calling card broadened into a figurative usage to indicate any sort of characteristic signature, action, or object left behind that identifies someone, or which serves as evidence that a particular individual was once present.[32] The calling card delivered by Piper retains these traces of identification and perhaps even the possibility of future interactions with the recipient, though those terms of address and identification are also importantly distant and impersonal. The "calling card" as corrective here is establishing a racialized relationship between Piper—in as far as she identifies as black—and the racist recipient who has harmed her. The possibility of the repetition of such an interaction, implied by the offering of a calling card, thus also serves as a threat: the recipient of such a card should *not* hope to call

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31 Louis Althusser, Trans. G.M. Goshgarian, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 1970*, On the Reproduction Of Capitalism: Ideology And Ideological State Apparatuses,* (New York: Verso. 2014.) Also, see Frantz Fanon: "To speak is to exist absolutely for the other," from: "The Negro and Language." *Black Skin, White Masks*. 1967. 127.
32. Oxford English Dictionary. "calling card, n." Accessed July 18, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/calling-card_n?tab=meaning_and_use#305041825

upon whoever delivers the card in this way again, nor to repeat this particular genre of social action. In as far as a recipient might not address their racism, or might refuse to see Piper as black, the repetition of such a future interaction always hovers as a possibility.

The staging of the apology on the card as a relational form allows Piper to specifically control—and name—the relationship, and to refuse the ways that an individual confronted with this card might attempt to avoid being held responsible for the harm that they caused. Piper diagnoses this avoidance as the 'Who, me?' syndrome, a kind of delay in identifying with, or an outright refusal to accept the hailing of a claim or statement as being relevant. It is the progression of exactly this dawning recognition that causes the audience's laughter to peter out in response to Davis's apology in NYC: accepting the interpellation of the apology, as a person to whom the apology is addressed, becomes increasingly an increasingly unpleasant as the apology names how that person perpetuates racist expectations. Piper explains that she often uses the slipperiness of identification to pedagogical effect, turning her audiences towards self-reflection:

> I am particularly interested in grappling with the 'Who, me?' syndrome that infects the highly select and sophisticated audience that typically views my work… However, different individuals respond in different and unpredictable ways that cut across racial, ethnic, and gender boundaries: some people align themselves with the standpoint from which I offer the critique. Others identify themselves as the target of critique. Yet others feel completely alienated by the whole enterprise. There is no way of telling in advance whether any particular individual is going to feel attacked by my work, or affirmed, or alienated by it. So people sometimes learn something about who they are by viewing my work. For me this is proof of success.[33]

Piper explains that she uses the slipperiness of interpellation and identification to pedagogical effect, hailing her individual interlocutors into a kind of intimate semi-private conversation that encourages a kind of self-reflection. Of the usual progression of her performance, she reflects:

> I present the individual(s) who made the remark with my card. Some consequences: It established the possibility of dialogue between me and this individual without

33. Adrian Piper, "Xenophobia and the Indexical Present I: Essay," *Out of Order, Out of Sight,* 249.

> disrupting the group as a whole (the only evenings that are ruined are mine and the offender's). It allows me to express my anger in a semiprivate context that has already been established by the person who made the remark. This means I can assert my identity without being accused of being manipulative, etc. The general character of the statement and the rule-governed policy that governs its presentation convey the message that the offending individual is behaving in typical and predictably racist ways. It fights a stereotype by giving the offender a concrete experience of what it is like to be the object of one.[34]

The performance, inaugurated by the presentation of the card is structured by rules for the card's deployment—the cards are prepared in advance, delivered when circumstances meet the criteria, and though the card opens a relationship with a particular individual, the cards are generic in their anticipation of the event. When Piper responds, personally, to the unintentional hailing of the racist remark, she is stepping in to respond to what was perhaps only meant to be a rhetorical comment or an in-joke between presumably white participants, as a particular black individual indexed by the stereotype, racist comment, or joke. The responsive performance thus illuminates and concretizes the public space of the social event into what she calls a "semiprivate" conversational context, one that "has already been established by the person who made the remark." Ellen Rooney, in her article on the "semiprivate," cites the hospital room and the classroom as paradigmatic examples of spaces that trouble the distinctions between public and private space, as well as personal and political discourses.[35] A semiprivate room is a public space that also necessarily excludes others from it, in the way that theoretically anyone could enter a hospital room as a patient, but the room is reserved for the patient within it, whose privacy is thus preserved, at least from nonmedical visitors, but whose medical information is also included on a clipboard at the foot of their bed. Rooney describes the semiprivate as a contingent social structuring that

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34 Adrian Piper, "My Calling Cards #1 and #2." 1990, *Out of Order, Out of Sight,* 220. Note that in the paragraph she remarks parenthetically "(the only evenings that are ruined are mine and the offender's)," which implies that the offenders' evening would *not* have been ruined if they had not received the card.
35. Ellen Rooney, "A Semiprivate Room," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1. 2002, 128-256.

brings strangers together who have a common need or interest—medical care, education, conversation—and thus regulates and facilitates a certain mode of attention, such as that between student and teacher or doctor and patient. “The semiprivate figures neither an inside, nor an outside, but the conscious practice of drawing boundaries in a field neither the private nor the public can anticipate or guarantee.” Rooney, in line with Piper’s usage, highlights the semiprivate space as a space that is both regulated and procedural but also open, explicitly, to change and surprise in the form of learning or healing, as in the classroom and the hospital.[36] In the semiprivacy of Piper’s performance, affirmed by the reciprocal delivery of the calling card, the parties involved are pulled out of the general “public” into a separate conversation, as participants in several genres of interaction: the performance of a racialized and stereotypical hailing, the exchange of the admonitory calling card, and the apology. The recipients are called to account for the content that they produced or left unchallenged—the racist remarks, jokes, and slurs they offered—and how that impacted the relationship between themselves and Piper. The outcome or change that this semiprivate space might enable is more ambiguous than that enabled by either the hospital or classroom because it is generated by a speech situation rather than a physical institutional architecture.

The apology that occurs in and indeed contributes to the creation of this semiprivate paired space retains a third category of the audience it separates the individuals from as a watching but always implicated public, a scrutinizing gaze and source of a variety of opinions from which the interaction gains its salience, concerns, and disciplinary contours. The semiprivate confrontation with racism matters because of the way in which racism matters to the public. That the recipient is being reciprocally hailed as racist matters because of the ways that the individual might feel about being seen as racist by others, how they may or may not understand themselves or their personal feelings and biases to be publicly recognizable as

36. Ellen Rooney, “A Semiprivate Room,” 128, 132.

racist, and how their racism as such changes or challenges the conventions of the dinner party as friendly, open, and available to those invited regardless of their race. This set of concerns corresponds with the way that Piper's acceptance of the racist hailing as pertaining to her, and Piper's being seen as black by the recipient of the card, activates a whole potentially shattering network of how the public understands and treats blackness. In the same way that the classroom enables a kind of pedagogical critical practice, structuring a circling eddy apart from the main stream of public discourse in which members of the public can critique and examine the public practices of which they are a part, Piper's semiprivate calling card triangulates and troubles a relationship between private individuals, their senses of themselves and their public actions, and the watching audience—white, black, and variously responding to the scene. Those individuals and their interactions in semipublic space are thus both personal and exemplary, unique utterances and actions framed by socially recognized forms into conversation.

The semiprivacy of this conversation, and the singling out of the pair from the public into a semiprivate apologetic exchange, does not make such an encounter necessarily easier or less emotionally fraught, in fact it sets rather high stakes for the encounter. The possibility of shame and embarrassment enter what Rooney calls "a site of fundamental individual (and indeed individualizing) urgency and crisis where a certain impersonality and vulnerability to public scrutiny is the structuring principle of even the most deeply felt personal experience; a temporary enclave where everything that happens is overheard."[37] The apology delivered on the card is not thus delivered to defuse defensive anger, achieve forgiveness, close the harm in the scene up so as to heal it, or perform any of the ameliorative functions that people often expect of apologies. Rather, the gesture is turned to facilitate something more like opening up a wound, or naming a harm for discussion: here, in a way that prompts self-reflection, at least

37. Ellen Rooney, "A Semiprivate Room." 132.

on the level of identifying with a description (you performed the racist action) or disavowing its applicability to oneself, or perhaps by identifying with Piper in the situation or identifying with the other "standpoints" of the scene in which the harm occurs. This expository rather than ameliorative action of the apology is what allows Piper to pursue her pedagogical project: it is also the source of its controversy and the heated violence of some of the responses to it. The pedagogical affordances of the apology as "semiprivate" space—and as a space of risk, shame, and anger—are underscored by a subsequent series of "meta-performances" or public discussions that took place in art institutions in the late 1980s, and to some extent even in Piper's museum exhibitions featuring her *Calling Cards* well into the twenty-first century.

The first meta-performance, at the Randolph Street Gallery in Chicago, 1987, featured what Piper defined as an all-white audience, who responded to Piper's description of her experience performing the exchange of the card with defensiveness, nervousness, and aggression just at the thought of Piper handing out one of these cards to *them*.[38] This audience's discussion was filmed, and subsequently shown to another audience—a mixed but predominately black group at the Studio Museum in Harlem—for discussion, resulting in a second meta-performance. Piper suggests that documentary footage of both of these discussions, engaged by a "third" audience, structures a third level of "self-conscious meta-performance" allowing the binary exchange of the card to reverberate out as a critical object.[39] The iterations of meta-performances about the piece constitute an ongoing conversation in which this paper participates. At the performance at the Randolph Street Gallery in Chicago, when Piper showed *My Calling (Card) #1: A Reactive Guerrilla*

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38. Adrian Piper, *Documentation of the January 30, 1987 performance and discussion of "My Calling (Card), No. 1 & 2."* Video 8, 1:31:54. Sound, Color, Randolph Street Gallery Archive, Flaxman Library, Accession Number RSGA 148. School of the Art Institute of Chicago Library & Special Collections. Digital Collections. https://digitalcollections.saic.edu/islandora/object/islandora%3Arsga_6456
39. Adrian Piper, "My Calling (Card) #1 Meta-Performance," 1987-88; 00:58:00. http://www.adrianpiper.com/vs/video_cc.shtml

Performance for Dinners and Cocktail Parties, a person in the audience angrily asserted that it is precisely the iterability of the cards which is problematic, namely, the fact of her creating a series of cards that she carries with her constitutes a kind of discriminating or antagonistic stereotyping of white people. Another speaker chimed in, agreeing with the first speaker. According to this interlocutor, while Piper saw her cards as an attempt to "codify" a response to the repeated experiences she has had, this iterative structure is problematic:

> I disagree with the uniform way of viewing all those situations, that's where I see racism, not in… just having the cards, in the expectation that you could get those comments, but [I think] that the solution can't possibly be pragmatic, perhaps each case has to be dealt with completely individually.[40]

The speaker appears to object to the scale of address: the card in its generic language, plurality, and procedural causality, marks the recipient as such only insofar as they perform and perpetuate a larger social harm, eclipsing their individual intention and identity as irrelevant to their racism. The generic address in the apologetic structure, not unlike Baldwin's "you historically," infuriates recipients as it operates here fused to the personal address. The genre of the apologetic—especially the intimate narration of a binary relationship between a 'you' that harmed 'me'—particularly in the semiprivate form of the calling card that the apology takes, refuses to let the recipient evade any of the first-personal responsibility for what occurred even as that interaction is critiqued on the scale of the both the individual interaction and the larger social sphere. The slide between the generic and the first-personal is arrested here at the intersection of both. Piper uses the card to respond to an unintentional naming, to mark herself as addressed by the linguistic injury and thus able to respond to it first-personally, acting on an affordance of offensive speech or slurs that Judith Butler outlines as follows: "If to be addressed is to be interpellated, then the offensive call runs the risk of inaugurating a subject in speech who comes to use language to counter the

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40. Adrian Piper, "My Calling (Card) #1 Meta-Performance," 1:30:36—1:31:11.

offensive call."[41] Piper uses the apology to take up the racist remark as one addressed by it, she 'takes it personally' to political and social effect: deliberately refusing to discuss the harm in general, abstract terms during the conversation. Her decision to deploy the calling card—to keep things personal, rather than generic, was informed by prior experience. As she reflects, impersonally pointing out that some remark 'is racist' rather than using the language of the card to point out that the recipient made a racist remark *to her*,

> feels self-deceptive and also feels hypocritical, it keeps the issue at an abstract level where it can degenerate into an academic discussion about whether any particular remark is really an expression of racism, or just a passing remark that had an innocuous meaning or perhaps no meaning at all…[42]

Despite Piper's insistence that she chose the form and wording on the card deliberately for the ways that it arrests individual self-justification or evasion of responsibility for the fact that—whatever the intention or context—the statement was racist and harmed her, specifically, the audience proceeds with defending the good intentions of the hypothetical individual receiving the card, and pushes her to rephrase her card, and the interaction, in less implicating and more comfortably generic terms. The cards are critiqued both as "too forward" and directed, constituting a personal attack, and also as too abstracted from the individual. One audience member has a recommendation for how Piper could deploy the card effectively, advising Piper: "to first of all inject some humor into it, to say something like…" At this point, the speaker laughs and lowers their voice, speaking in a giggling and amused way as if telling a joke:

> "Stop! You have just made/agreed to/laughed at a racist remark in the presence of a certified black person. You are not irredeemably lost. To redeem yourself you can…" And give them something to do, something they can say to you, something so that they can respond to you and they can say, "I am better than that remark."

41. Judith Butler, "On Linguistic Vulnerability," *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative,* (New York: Routledge) 1997, 2-3.
42. Adrian Piper, "My Calling (Card) #1 Meta-Performance," 00:57:50—00:58:18.

These suggestions to adjust the card, as well as the frankly hostile responses from several audience members, reveal the ways that her apology is in fact received as a threat: these speakers identified with the position of the racist possible recipients of one of these cards. But these responses are importantly and strikingly *not* versions of the "who, me?" questions that Piper attempted to cut off: the white people in the room are renegotiating the scope of the potential harm that might occur between themselves and Piper, they are not denying that they are responsible for what she said. Piper's card thus reveals an aggressive affordance of the apology: the relation that it frames holds those interpolated in the grip of the speaker's perception and understanding. The recipient of the apology can certainly reject or respond to that account, but prior to their response the apology is an active tool that holds them in a particular position of responsibility and accusation. As Piper reflects, she is in fact using the apology more in the spirit of warfare than reconciliation: "The idea behind this series of performances, which I call *reactive guerrilla performances*, is intervention in order to prevent co-optation."[43] Her language here is precise. Her performances are not the first volley of a conflict, rather they are re-actions, which illuminate the prior actions of the card's recipients—continuing to attempt to proposition a woman at a bar after she has said no, making a racist comment or joke, or touching, patting, stroking, pinching or performing any of the other verbs listed on Calling Card #3 on someone's body—as violent instances of indirect, subtle or unintentional prejudice, rather than quotidian, acceptable annoyances. These performances name ongoing conflicts. The apology, aggressive and reactive, also verbalizes and thus offers the possibility of recognizing that conflict between the parties with an eye towards ending it. However, any consensus concerning the reparative generic possibilities opened up by an apology—agreement, acceptance, and repair—fracture along the lines of the harm. Is the conflict of racialized violence and the racist microaggression a

43. Adrian Piper, "My Calling Cards #1 and #2," *Out of Order, Out of Sight,* 219. Italics in the original.

question that her audiences understand themselves to be fighting *with* Piper against? Or are they defensive of their relationship to racism—in as far as they performed the action delineated on the card—and thus fighting *against* Piper? By structuring her disclosure of "I am black" aggressively in the conciliatory genre of the apology, Piper's apology both figures a defensiveness and anticipates the aggressive responses of the card's white recipients—but gestures towards possible structures of alliance and mutual responsibility.

The defensiveness of the apology illuminates the fact of white racist violence as omnipresent and likely to manifest itself, and recalls Piper's video installation, *Cornered*, where she discloses her race in a looping pre-recorded video displayed on a screen placed on a table in the corner of the gallery. The screen is positioned behind an upended table, which stands like a barricade between the filmed version of Piper and her audience. She begins:

> I'm black. Now, let's deal with this social fact, and the fact of my stating it, together. Maybe you don't see why we have to deal with them together. Maybe you think that it's just my problem, and that I should deal with it by myself. But it's not just my problem. It's our problem.[44]

She unpacks the shared nature of the problem across a number of modalities: the screen itself is framed by two birth certificates that were issued for her father, one which names him as "white" and one which marks his race as "octoroon," which illustrate the constructed and historically changing nature of race as emphatically constructed—not naturalized—identities. She ultimately extends that identification to her audience, who would be seated in the chairs that are arrayed in a triangle or arrow pointed accusatorily towards the screen, towards Piper:

> It's a genetic and social fact that, according to the entrenched conventions of racial classification in this country, you are probably black. So if I choose to identify myself as black whereas you do not, that's not just a special, personal fact about me. It's a fact about us. It's our problem to solve. Now, how do you propose we solve it? What are you going to do?

44. Adrian Piper, *Cornered,* Video installation with birth certificates, color video, monitor, table, and chairs. Dimensions variable, 1988, Collection Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Installed for *Enter the Mirror.* September 10, 2022—July 23, 2023.

The self-accusation of Piper's arrangement of the chairs (or rather, her formal anticipation of the confrontational audience) would be encountered differently to black-identifying audience members, opening up the question of how the accusation (and other forms of affectively charged address) can operate on multiple levels at once, staging sotto invitations of co-responsibility and solidarity across multiple audiences in the same space.

In the card series, one of the central performative gestures of the printed text is an expression of regret, and an extension of that emotion to the recipient of the card: Piper is "sure" that both she and the "friend" who might receive this card are (differently) sorry that they are in this apologetic situation together. And they *are*—that is, through the present tense narrative that the text offers, both Piper and the recipient are called and described into a situation of mutual relation to the event as one that should be regretted. And that event is the differentially affective situation of harm through processes of racialization and racism. As she writes on the card: "I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me."[45] Apologizing thus arises as a scene and a strategy in relation to contours of white supremacy, and how expectations of who might apologize and for what arise unevenly in relation to norms and the presumptive performance of whiteness in a space. She provocatively and generously narrates her interlocutors as having good intentions, namely, she asserts that they must regret the harm that they caused her, which was almost certainly not always true, and articulates the possibility of her audience's racist discomfort with her presence as a black woman. In this way, by offering an apology, she opens up the apologetic relationship as a two-way interaction, one haunted by the possibility that an apology is owed by the recipient *to* the apologizer. The signals of the apology—establishing a binary of interaction, delimiting responsibilities, expressing regret—

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45. Adrian Piper, "My Calling (Cards) #1 and #2," *Out of Order, Out of Sight. Volume 1: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968-1992.* 219.

are marshalled not as a way of facilitating the movement of an apologetic scene into closure or forgiveness; instead they place the participants at a standstill in an articulation of the past harm and activate the watching audience into the possibility of taking up apologetic positions of responsibility as well. The harm is shared throughout the space. This written apology, transmitted as completed, freezes other apologies which might be issued (such as, "I didn't know you were there") as being already known and effectively (generically) said before in such racist encounters, and still inadequate to the full scope of the violence of the scene. As the card reads, Piper is "sure that you did not realize [that she is black] when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark," but that she believes the best, namely that it is her "policy is to assume that white people do not make these remarks, even when they believe that there are no black people present, and to distribute this card when they do."[46] In the aftermath of the card, the "racist remark" having already been issued and named as such, whether or not the recipient knew Piper was black has just been identified by the card as irrelevant to the racism of the statement, and everyone is positioned as if they are sorry that it occurred. Thus, while the conversation might continue between Piper and the recipient, the basic contours of what happened to merit the exchange, and the individual's being sorry that that they caused her discomfort (or that they were caught) becomes a starting point rather than the end of the conversation. A quick "sorry" here cannot be used to brush off the fact of what occurred: the situation is structured by a regret that does not release from responsibility.

Vaginal Davis's "public apology" at the outset of her performance marshals the same relational valences of the apology apart from questions of closure—even more radically, if possible, leaving that up to God—a warrior god, in fact. As she begins, "I can only pray to god Jehovah of Armies, that you can forgive me for having led you astray for so many years,"

46. Adrian Piper, "My Calling (Card) #1: A Reactive Guerrilla Performance for Dinners and Cocktail Parties," 219.

she mixes the registers of forgiveness with forcefulness, invoking the martial deity of Psalm 46:6-7, whose potent speech and divine power over conflict is only conciliatory in being final, resulting in peace through ultimate defeat: "Nations rage, kingdoms topple; the earth melts when he lifts his voice." Forgiveness, and the apology itself, are revealed as having a coercive valence, characterized as moves in an ongoing battle. Like Piper's card—which, at least for the duration of being read, invites no negotiation—Davis's apology does not invite response in real time or direct address to her. Its issue structures the questions of responsibility and accountability, ultimately suggesting that the presumptive (ironized) listener might actually be the one responsible for harm, and who ought to apologize. The first personal form addresses her audience in as far as they see her as black and as they are involved in constructing that identity with her, judging the "realness" of her blackness, her performance, and her passing. As Piper's apology structures a likely uncomfortable conversational intimacy between herself and her recipients insofar as they were part of a regrettable scene of racialized violence and received the card, Davis's apology stays firmly in the mode of a public address or statement. But both use the material of the apology itself—rather than what the apologies might result in—to political ends. The relationship articulated by the apologies, however unevenly or uncomfortably received by their audiences, stand for the duration of the performance.

In as far as these two interlocutors are written into apologetic relationship, they are in relationship to the harm described—regardless of whether the apology is felicitous. Effectively, both Piper and Davis are setting up a productively accusatory apologetic situation where their audiences' and recipients' knowledge of and differentially racist treatment of black people (or in the case of Davis's apology, their perception of her being articulated in ironic relation to the accumulation of racial slurs) becomes available for reflection, though in both cases variously at a remove from the immediate emotional response at the scene. The

apology that anchors both of these performances constitutes an accusation: though tonally controlled by the respective conventions of the calling card and the public apology, the apology makes a claim.[47] Each listed apology articulates something like regret for the scene—provocatively and proactively apologizing for something that they posit their audience might want an apology for, thus articulating the bias that structures the harm by saying something along the lines of: "I am sorry about what my being black means to you." These apologies are emphatically apologies—the form is a deliberately chosen narrative tool for the way that it establishes relationships of responsibility and complicity—but the emotional work that the apology does is, in fact, more explosive or expository than reparative: here, it brings the card-giver's discomfort into public experience as a shared social responsibility. As Piper reflected in her meta-performance: "When I actually give out the card it's just awful, it just tears me apart because I know that the other person is going to feel terrible, and I'm going to feel terrible because I made them feel terrible—their evening is going to be ruined, my evening is already ruined. It's awful, it's really awful, but I just don't see any alternative."[48] The reflective tense of the narration here draws attention to the fact that the apology surrounds not just one moment of encounter but intervenes in an entire ongoing social existence: the tense of her personal experience of racism, and her sense of its iterability, surrounds the tense of the card recipient's more temporally limited irruption of emotional discomfort at the individual moment of their erring in public.

Apologetic forms are also deferential forms, especially in as far as the speaker has taken responsibility for their part of the harm articulated. This deference is modified by the socially

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47. An interesting tonal contrast would be Diane Keaton's screamed apology from the 1996 film *The First Wives Club* when she discovers that her husband has been sleeping with her therapist. She shouts at both of them a litany of apologies that narratively undoes the entire history of the relationship between all of them, a revision by retraction: "I'm very sorry I ever met you! And I'm sorry that I allowed myself to love you for all those years! I'm sorry that I did nothing but be there for you every minute of every hour and support you in your every move! I'M SORRY!"
48. Maurice Berger, "Styles of Radical Will: Adrian Piper and the Indexical Present," *Adrian Piper: A Retrospective,* Issues in Cultural Theory 3, Fine Arts Gallery, (University of Maryland Baltimore County) 1999.

conventional deployment of polite automatisms: when we receive an apology, it is often a friendly gesture. As Piper reflects of this kind of automatic response or expectation, these forms of convention create an emotional pause.

> "One of the benefits of automatic pilot in social situations is that insults take longer to make themselves felt. The meaning of the words simply do not register right away, particularly if the person who utters them is smiling. You reflexively respond to the social context and the smile rather than to the words."[49]

This reflexively polite response recalls the fading laughter in Davis's audience as her catalogue of racialized slurs continues: the apology in this moment served to structure a strategic delay, the proverbial spoonful of sugar that allowed the audience to swallow the medicine. The ease that the apology offers through expectation is a result of a quotidian deferential apologetics, a form of apologizing that characterizes structurally apologetic subject positions, e.g. customer services, where employment/pay structures creates expectations of deference, and someone symbolically and effectively (but not sincerely, authentically, etc.) takes up the emotional difficulty of any error or discomfort. This is a form of what Arlie Hochschild calls emotional labor, which occurs at the site of the "pinch" or conflict between what someone actually feels and what feeling they are attempting to project or think they should feel, for example, when one manages feelings of anxiety, fear, ennui, resentment, or even a desire to serve or please, and then smiles through those feelings in order to provide a particular experience of customer service. In her proto-affect theory in *The Managed Heart* (1983), Hochschild included descriptions of flight attendants trained to apologize for mistakes caused by the passengers in accordance with the motto: "The passenger isn't always right, but he's never wrong."[50]

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49. Adrian Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black," *Transition Position*, No. 58, 1992, 4-6. Reprinted in *Out of Order, Out of Sight*, 275.
50. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling,* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press) 1983.

In apologizing, Piper and Davis are both taking up (askance) a gendered and deferential position, offering an apology as if it is expected or demanded. This dynamic of deferential and often feminized apology can be automatic: offered and received without thought. It can also structure a dynamic of dominance, making apologies a possible tactic for survival for the individual using it, to make oneself unobtrusive or minimally threatening to the status quo. Apologetic and deferential behavior often takes the form of taking responsibility for any discomfort in a scene. However, in their apologies, Piper and Davis are disidentifying from the power dynamics of the scene that the dominantly white audience expects to navigate by apologizing for their part in creating it—a scene in which white comfort is prioritized, racism is effectively permitted, and unnamed, and racialized bodies do not call attention to themselves as such. When both Davis and Piper apologize for not informing their audience about their race in advance—Davis ironically, and Piper with a deadpan and wry conceptualism, they call attention to the emotional labor that they usually perform in white and dominantly racist spaces (including cocktail parties, dinners, academic lectures and performing arts institutions) to make their racial identification palatable and non-confrontationally unobtrusive. When that labor fails to preserve white expectations of insulation from their own sense of whiteness—their desire to just be seen as "human" rather than racialized as white—black people are most often held responsible for racializing the space and making it uncomfortable. As Piper observed on the card, telling her white interlocutors that she was black before they did anything racist "invariably causes them to react to me as pushy, manipulative, or socially inappropriate."[51] Piper's and Davis's apologies are instances of Muñozian disidentification, a drag performance of an apology: a tactical misrecognition of the structurally apologetic position they are in (as they are always held responsible for white discomfort). By deploying the social norms of the apology (as it might

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51. Adrian Piper, "My Calling (Cards) #1 and #2," 219.

smooth over an uncomfortable situation) Piper and Davis illuminate how their racial identification causes white discomfort, and that is to be regretted—with drastically different stakes and impact—by everyone in the scene. Piper similarly probed and staged confrontations with negative emotions to racialized and gendered presentation in her *Mythic Being* series (1972-1975) a collection of drawings, photographs, advertisements, and documentation of her performances in public as the socially threatening "mythic being." Donning a black afro wig, men's clothing and sunglasses, she staged various coded performances on the streets in New York (and later, Harvard Square in Cambridge, Mass.), staging a mugging of a friend, cat-calling women, and performing various visual signifiers of a kind of black hetero-masculinity that is read as hard, dangerous, and aggressive. In becoming the "mythic being" she insists she is embodying "everything you most hate and fear," bringing into conflict the performability of stereotypes and—through documentation linked to her artistic practice—allowing the visceral emotions in her audiences surrounding those visual signifiers and performances to become artistic material.

II. The Pedagogical Apology

What the indexical encounter—through the apology—aspirationally teaches an individual to see is both an immediate sense of responsibility to the present individual in front of them, and a larger sense of undeniable enmeshment in the historical. Margaret Mead's refusal to allow the conversation with James Baldwin to be about her recalls Piper's description of why she, around the same time, ultimately decided to start her apologetic calling card with the statement, "I am black" rather than reprimanding the offenders abstractly. If Piper did not include her first-personal identification as black, and activate the generic expectations of her whiteness as white supremacist and problematic, she would have been left with precisely the

genre of “fatuous” conversation that did occur between Baldwin and Mead: “an academic discussion about the propriety, meanings, and intentions of these remarks that leaves fundamental dispositions untouched and self-deceptive rationalizations inviolate,” a conversation that left Piper feeling “offended, compromised, and deceptive.”[52] Mead is trying to put a wrap on “race” as a concept, as if no part of it touches her body, as if it does not penetrate into her own sense of who she is. Mead wants logical parameters and clear delineations of guilt and a level-headed academic conversation. She wants, clearly, to talk with Baldwin about the situation in a non-indexical way, abstractly, without the intrusion of both of their racial identifications getting in the way. As she complains to Baldwin, “You are being racial. I present you with human situations and you make them racial.”[53]

This opens up another reading of the conversation: Mead’s answers seem to indicate that whenever Baldwin brings up race, he is implicitly accusing her of racism. Mead thinks that when Baldwin discusses racial harm, he is asking her—Margaret Mead—for an apology, despite the fact that he never, directly, does. She pre-emptively interrupts this projected apologetic relationship with her version of “who, me?” Baldwin metonymically represents all black people to Margaret Mead, but she refuses to extend her own metonymic analysis to herself qua white woman. Here we have found the ghost of the expected apology that Davis is disidentifying with and parodying, and which Piper names with the line “I regret the discomfort my presence is causing you”: the guilt that white people feel in the presence of black people. While Baldwin is discussing an attitude of resentment in the younger generation towards their parents after the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Mead interrupts Baldwin to assert her first-personal innocence: “Now I am absolutely certain that if I had been asked I would have said not to drop it. I have no doubt

52. Adrian Piper, “My Calling (Card) #1: A Reactive Guerrilla Performance for Dinners and Cocktail Parties,” 219.
53. James Baldwin and Margaret Mead, *A Rap on Race,* 233.

and therefore I have no guilt… None at all, you see. This is a Northern or Western view of guilt. I don't say because I'm an American I share the guilt of what the American government did when I didn't know it was doing it."[54] Baldwin returns the conversation from whether or not Mead feels guilty back to the terms of the address: the generic, racialized positions that imply and create other scenes and situations of harm, and by admitting his own sense of his culpability and implication, invites Mead into a project of imagining what they might do in response to these repeated, generically violent relationships between the binary pairs of white woman and black man, black man and white supremacist nation state. He re-aligns himself with the position of what Mead describes as "these fifteen-year-olds you just made up":

> BALDWIN: I have to understand that, despite the fact that I'm twenty-five years older, I'm still in their shoes. Because the police in this country do not make any distinction between a Black Panther or a black lawyer or my brother or me. The cops aren't going to ask me my name before they pull the trigger. I'm part of this society and I'm in exactly the same situation as anybody else—any other black person—in it. If I don't know that, then I'm fairly self-deluded. What I'm trying to get at is whether the question of guilt—*I'm not interested very much in the question of guilt. What I'm trying to get at is the question of responsibility. I didn't drop the bomb, either. And I never lynched anybody. Yet I am responsible not for what has happened but for what can happen.*[55]

Baldwin resists the apology that Mead pre-empts by over-reading the racialized conversation as an always-apologetic situation that she could have then refused. She provided evidence and attempted, after all, to assert that the felicitous conditions for her apologizing are not present: he simply has the wrong person. He then responds by rephrasing the conversation in terms of responsibility, rather than guiltiness, and by refusing to discuss the question of race abstractly, as if he and she are not first-personally constituting the scene. He also brings the conversation out of the past and into the conditional future, then drawing attention to the affects at work in the room, in the situation or the indexical present. For

54. James Baldwin and Margaret Mead. *A Rap on Race.* 57-58.
55. James Baldwin and Margaret Mead. *A Rap on Race.* 59.

Baldwin, dealing with the weight of history, and finding ways to move forward, requires shedding a light on how people actually react to the facts of history. Rather than get caught up in the semantics of whether or not Mead is herself guilty of dispossessing people, Baldwin argues there are people who feel dispossessed by her, historically as a white woman, in their city. Baldwin shifts the register repeatedly into a narratology of history, and refuses the apologetically defensive invitation to address Mead on common (unracialized, human) ground by shifting the frame to terms that she does not expect. That Baldwin refuses one apologetic scene and offers another, which Mead does not take up but dodges again and again does not mean that otherwise the conversation would have perhaps ended—or been definitively "wrapped up"—with the *right* apology for the *right* wrong between the *right* people, but it does mean that a different conversation could have begun there. It is certainly a skillfully "fatuous" play on both interlocutors' parts: neither really put pressure on the conversation enough to break the progression of the friendly exchange into something like outright anger or explicit accusation.

That is why the joke of Davis's apologetic (w)rap is important: such conversations, like apologies, purport to close a topic down or establish who was responsible for a harm, when really, these forms of discourse are all about opening up a problem for conversation. What Davis and Muñoz refer to as the "fatuousness" of the conversation between Baldwin and Mead is perhaps part of the form of the "rap": both keep the conversation light, move through anecdote, and never (w)rap up anything into a neat equation of guilt or causation.

> BALDWIN: You see, what I am trying to get at, too, is that whether I am always rational or not is not as important a question as I used to think it was. I would like to think of myself as being an exceedingly rational human being. However, trying to think of myself as rational is what gives me my sense of humor. *What is important, and one of the elements that makes history, is the reaction of human beings to their situation. And that reaction, when it is a real reaction, is always excessive and always a little blind. You simply find your situation intolerable and you set about to change it, and when you do that, you place yourself in a certain kind of danger: the danger of being excessive, the danger of*

> *being wrong. That is the only way you ever learn anything, and it is also the only way the situation ever changes.* One has to deal with that, too.[56]

Baldwin's rejoinder to Mead, for whom rationality is crucial, and his refusal to engage the project of forgiving her or rejecting her, resonates again with Piper's refusal of the non-racialized "academic" conversation by insisting on her race and slipping into the emotional register of the apology, and with Davis's apology drag. Apologies in this sense emerge as tools that are realist, as opposed to positing an ideal world of racial harmony, interested in provoking and examining the fact of reaction. Apologies are present-tense, first-personal forms of relating to others through narrative histories: "indexical" tools in Piper's terminology which might be able to help both her and her audience "get clear about the subtleties of who in fact [they] are," and a conversational and social form that Davis uses to address and interpellate her audience and open up the racialized situation between them for conversation.[57] Piper and Davis's brilliant and provocative uses of apologetic form—and Baldwin's resistance to Mead's defensive refusal to apologize to him—reveal how apologies are not reducible to whether they establish culpability or provide closure, they are invitations into articulated and semiprivate relationship: where larger forms of social and structural harm can be named even in their individual micro-social instances between "you" and "me." This dimension of considering the apologetic as a genre adds a new heft and significance to the most pesky and quotidian of apologies that apology theorists often do not know what to do with, or dismiss as if they are not really apologies: for instance, when someone says "I'm sorry" in response to a friend recounting harm for which their interlocutor is not directly responsible, but for which the interlocutor would like to commiserate by bringing themselves into relationship with it. Piper and Davis both use this expressive, emotional aspect of

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56. James Baldwin and Margaret Mead, *A Rap on Race,* 94. My emphasis.
57. Adrian Piper, "Whiteless," *Art Journal* 60.4, Winter 2001, 65.

apologizing to double-edged and ironic effect. Their apologies bring their experiences of discomfort because of racism—experiences which are often socially ignored or even tacitly expected in racist social spaces—into conflict with their audiences' experiences of racist discomfort, refusing to allow that latter white discomfort to dissipate or be assuaged in the name of politeness at the expense of the black safety, comfort, and life. Apologies are thus powerful historical narrative tools, just as potent when resisted, refused, and insincerely performed. Regardless of their successful issue and acceptance, they illustrate Piper's insistence that "we are transformed—and occasionally reformed—by immediate experience, independently of our abstract evaluations of it and despite our attempts to resist it."[58]

Apologies are a present tense, narrative form which brings past harms into conversational presence. When those past harms—and issuing and receiving subject positions—explicitly index larger harms and histories than the individual against the grain of usual power dynamics, they perform a potent critical gesture of juxtaposition even in their articulation. These habitually deferential and reparative forms can reveal a harm as presently unaddressed and unhealed between apologetic parties, rather than relegating that harm to the past. In *Rap on Race*, Baldwin's understanding of apologies figures them as a crucial interaction with high stakes, bearing on his ability to live in relation to others, precisely because of their and its present-tense character. In a tactic similar to the ones employed to critical effect by Davis and Piper, late in the conversation Baldwin in fact offers Mead the possibility of apologizing *by offering a hypothetical apology himself*, when she contests his attempt to continue a discussion of historical facts of the slave trade when talking about contemporary racism—a move that Mead dismisses as carrying on "crimes in the past" and wants to conversationally "dispose of."

BALDWIN: The only time we have is now.

58. As quoted in the catalogue published on the occasion of the exhibit: *Adrian Piper*, *September 14-October 21,* (New York: Lévy Gorvy. 2017.)

MEAD: Right. But you keep talking about crimes in the past. I think we need to dispose of them.

BALDWIN: My dear Dr. Mead. My dear Margaret. I will even call you Mary… My point about it is that I don't think history is the past. If it were the past it would not matter.

MEAD: Ah, this is another way of doing it.

BALDWIN: History is the present.

MEAD: It's what we know about the past, but in the present.

BALDWIN: No, no, no. I don't mean that… What I was trying to find out: How in the world is it that there are still anachronisms? If history were the past, history wouldn't matter. History is the *present,* the *present*. You and I are history. We carry our history. We act in our history…. If I have offended you, I have to come to you and say, 'I'm sorry, please forgive me.' I'm only talking about that, and if I can't do that, then I cannot live. I'm not talking about crime and punishment."[59]

Baldwin figures the offering of an apology as part of necessary interpersonal (and historical) work, but not one that will necessarily result in anything like closure, nor material change. Baldwin is not interested at the moment in the carceral question of guilt, of how one apportions blame. If one is preoccupied with the question of whether one is pure of blame or intention, one is still imagining a world where purity is possible. Instead, Baldwin insists on the mutual implication and involvement of the past with the present, and with what is possible in that indexical present, which is a different point of emphasis. The apology Baldwin offers structures a problem where if the apology changes anything at all, what changes will *not* be the history narrated or the people implicated in telling it in the indexical present. On the other hand, Meade is thinking about the apology as a practical structure where it matters whether one can identify the proper guilty party, and it often does in non-trivial ways: in Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, trials, and reparative procedures. Baldwin's position is more philosophical and aesthetic, intervening in the conversation more

59. Baldwin and Mead. *Rap on Race*. 188-190. Emphasis in the original transcription.

subtly in ways that are akin to Piper and Davis's wry apologetic performances: he does not respond by trying to convince her of her guilt, rather he insists that he does not care whether Meade is, or understands herself to be, guilty or not. The apology nonetheless structures them together—first personally—in relation to the problem they are abstractly "rapping" about.

CHAPTER THREE:

"IN SPITE OF OUR KNOWLEDGE OF OUR OWN MEANINGS": MANIC REPARATION AND WHITE APOLOGETICS IN *LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN*.

> "I might say, in short, but emphatically not in self-excuse, of which I wish entirely to disarm and disencumber myself, but for the sake of clear definition, and indication of limits, that I am only human."
>
> — James Agee [1]

In the previous chapters, we saw various ways that the apology—along its three components of identification, narration, and transformation—can structure forceful kinds of misrecognition and activate friction between senses of self and other, as well as create new possibilities for social worlds and recognition. We have considered several ways in which artists, writers, and activists have put these apologetic possibilities, and the emotions that they activate, to political, personal, and artistic use. In this chapter, I move to consider the varieties of emotions internal to the apology that bring us closest to some of the more traditional vectors of consideration—guilt, grief, and a desire to repair—as they relate to the impossibility of undoing whatever was done. Certainly, we can take something back, we can change our minds or behave differently, but when we make any decision or take any action, we can never *not have done* what we did. That rather basic underlying point about time's forward momentum motivates rather a lot of reparative gestures like apologizing, but opens up questions about how those gestures that we make to find ways to live with the past in the present—might actually be oriented towards fixing something other than the harm done in order to make that happen. The question I ask here is about how the tools we reach for, and which we expect to help us address harm, can also themselves narrate evasion from and therefore perpetuation of harm; or, as Lauren Berlant asks in *Cruel Optimism*, "how would

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1. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.* 1941 (Boston: Mariner Books, 2001) 8.

we know when the ‘repair’ we intend is not another form of narcissism or smothering will? Just because we sense it to be so?”[2]

James Agee’s apologies are ambitious in their scope and intent, as he reflects after deciding one is due: “I wanted only that they [who I harmed] should be restored, and should know I was their friend, and that I might melt from existence.”[3] These three desires might be reframed as such: Agee wants to restore those he harmed to their prior state, repair the relationship between himself and those he harmed, and to disappear or disavow himself as the person who has done the harm. That last part seems to me to be a flailing gesture at an inability to resolve his sense of himself—which has been damaged by his participation in a scene that he regrets and wishes to disavow—expressed metaphorically. The apology—with its tripartite structure that identifies participants and their relationship to one another, narrates (or otherwise indicates) a history in the present, and transforms the participant’s relationship to and understanding of the events that transpired—is perhaps an ideal form for such an effort. While the apology can touch through articulation all the objects of Agee’s intentions, whether or not it can actually achieve or assuage his world-shifting, self-obliterating and impossible reparative desires is less clear. I do not read Agee’s language and expressed fantasies as merely hyperbolic. The intensity of the emotions and fantasies that can undergird and motivate apologetic gestures—guilt, grief, fear of retaliation—can motivate a variety of creative responses and amends-making oriented towards repair, but can also motivate defensiveness, refusals of guilt and responsibility, and concatenations of further harm. Indeed, as the prose of James Agee and photographer Walker Evans’ sprawling documentary *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* shows, the emotions of guilt and shame about self, other and

2. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, Durham, NC and London, UK: Duke University Press, 2011) 124.
3. James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 1941, 38.

situation that provoke a gesture of apology might also structure a kind of harmful echo chamber within the contours of a form that promises to ameliorate or alter that situation.

In this chapter, I read James Agee and Walker Evans' *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* published in 1941, and Agee's posthumously published essay, "America, Look at Your Shame," composed in response to the Detroit race riots in 1943, as compositions that prominently feature—and reflect on—apologies. The apologies stage questions of how to address oneself to harm in which one is regretfully implicated, both as an individual and at a systemic or structural scale along the seams of racialized and classed identities. Agee's apologies tell a story about his self, a story about the other harmed, and a story about who each is to the other. They also reveal something crucial and ambivalent about how the genre of the apology structures a relationship to time—which can include counterfactual reparative desires for reversal or undoing or even never-having-done—into kinds of omnipotent stasis or mutually implicated relationship. These desires are especially important when the accounts of what happened, who was harmed, and how, are in structural or positional conflict. The proffering of an apologetic story or explanation can serve to naturalize harmful fictions or concretize the speaker's opinion as fact. Agee's work activates questions about when white speakers and writers offer apologies for harming Black subjects, and when those apologies attempt to include accounts of that racialized difference as it impacted or constituted part of the harm being apologized for—at the level of identification, narrative, or proposed transformation—to various effects. The content and impact of such apologies attenuate the apologetic relationship to scales of address and subject positions, individual and structural, and thereby ultimately reveal the various breakdowns of white apologetics. White manic apologetics are ultimately deployed to prioritize white comfort, and encapsulate failures to connect individual and structural violences. We encounter this problem of scale in attempts to disavow responsibility for structural privilege or harm, in conversations around monetary and

other forms of reparations for the histories of enslavement, colonialism, and harm done to large populations, in practical discourses of transformative justice, and so on. The experience and management of these psychoanalytically rich emotions—hatred, shame, fear—in racialized interactions can have deadly implications for those caught in them.

I turn at the end of the chapter to two texts written in the 2000's— Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* and several reflective fragments included Christina Sharpe's *Ordinary Notes*. Both feature apologies offered by white interlocutors to Black people, and provide a perspective on the impact of these apologetic scenes outside of the self-effacing white perspective. It might seem unintuitive to pair James Agee and Walker Evans' documentation of white rural poverty in the early 1900's American South with Sharpe's collection of 248 fragments, or notes, about loss, memory internal to Black life, or with Claudia Rankine's *Citizen:* a work of lyric poetry, video footage, and visual artwork about the ordinary violence of racism and the self-invisibility of whiteness and white supremacy to itself in the 21st century.[4] However, for the purposes of examining two sides of the binarizing experience of issuing and receiving apologies in situations of racial violence, they are remarkably well suited to comparison. All are meticulously introspective projects that engage a kind of politics of looking, and involve the author taking responsibility for their positionality and writing about the others they relate to from within it: Rankine describes her method of attentiveness as a "conscious decision to inhabit my own subjectivity in this book in the sense that the middle-class life I live, with my highly educated, professional, and privileged friends, remains as the backdrop for whatever is being foregrounded."[5] Similarly, Christina Sharpe's *Ordinary Notes* attends with a

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4. There are even further similarities of methodology between the two books which are as provocative in their overlapping as they are in their differences. Both are projects that resist generic conventions: a finalist in the National Book Critics Circle Awards' category for "Criticism," the contents of *Citizen* include edited photographs and reproductions of paintings alongside the text, and have been described as poems, essays, lyric essays, stories, as well as prose poems and prose representations. So too, Agee and Evans' sprawling work contains photographs and prose that unravels into dialect, lists, personal reflection, stage directions and imagistic prose poetry. Both works explicitly take up a fascination with the promises and failures of camera technology to capture objectively 'what happened' as contrasted to the internal experience of an event.
5. Claudia Rankine, Interview: "Claudia Rankine by Lauren Berlant," *BOMB Magazine*, October 1, 2014.

nonfictional, but hybrid literary, critical, memoir and documentary approach to cultural material and moments, and in the scene that I read, features the author's careful response in terms that are both political and pedagogical, and diagnose what she understands as an error in identification at the level of the apology.

I consider how the different components of the apology—the identification of doer and done-to, the narrative of what happened, and the transformative operation—serve a variety of social purposes in relationship to those components, and how their various failures to achieve the desired repair reveal crucial information about the apologizer's sense of self, subject, and world. I use the psychoanalytic concept of reparation, here, as a value-neutral descriptive tool that names the motivation for putting things that we've broken back together—to help us attend to some of the ways that gestures and desires of fixing and transformation can be thwarted by various failures of identification, narration, and transformation as they are articulated in the apology. What analyst Melanie Klein identifies as the reparative position (which wants to put things back together) and the paranoid or position (which seeks to separate out the bad from the good) always already intersect, sometimes veering into what I call manic (or paranoid) apologetics. This is the moment when realizing that one has done harm, and that harm cannot be undone but might be made better, motivates an obsessive attempt to separate out exactly what went wrong from the good (or for Agee, a despair whose only emotional resolution might be to melt from existence) when the apologizer is unable to tolerate and grieve from ambivalence. This is emphatically not to say that getting the components of the apology right, or selecting a different gesture, would have resulted in a successful repair. I am not—again—interested in troubleshooting the mechanics of apology to produce better ones, or in prescribing what I think anyone ought to have said. Rather, a failed, incomplete, or dissatisfying apology in this reading functions as a barometer of sorts: reparative creations that we can read for insight into how the individual understands

themselves in relationship to their world, how they want to be, and where breakdown and confusion indicate other kinds of damage that must be addressed. And indeed, given that an apology is the subjective articulation of sense of self (or speaker represented) in conversation with a sense of the recipient, a story of the past, and a desired transformation, there is no abstractly right apology determinable outside of the relationship between all the joined parts in context. This chapter opens up the central claim of the dissertation—that while apologies are often read as a way that produces closure, that reorient and repair rupture into continuity, apologies do not only or even often suture: they bring our wounds into language so that others might help us. This chapter begins the work of articulating some of those wounds.

I. A Horror of Error

At 470 pages, accompanied by thirty-one photographs (the 1960 second edition containing twice as many photos and an accompanying memoir from Evans), James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* sprawled beyond the generic requirements of the article on Southern sharecroppers commissioned by *Fortune* in 1936. The book, part-documentary, part-photographic portraiture, part-theatrical script, part-inventory, part stream-of consciousness novel, was withdrawn from inclusion in the "Life and Circumstances" series by the authors and eventually printed by the Riverside Press of the Houghton Mifflin Company, only selling about 600 copies. One reason for the unwieldy and, initially, unsaleable size of this text is Agee's commitment to an exhaustive interrogation of his own person in the scenes he describes—as observer, reader, interloper, spy, as a well-educated white man from an urban area entering into a recession-racked rural area on a commission, and as the "governing instrument" that lifts the pen and points the camera lens towards its

subjects.[6] Indeed the book is almost claustrophobic in the self-consciousness of its prose, and consists in large part of the author's attempt to articulate and get a grip on the various positions he holds as an individual, and as part of larger regional, racial, and structural groupings. In addition to poems and songs, inventories of the farming families' possessions, conversational anecdotes, descriptions of labor and circuits of employment and payment, he includes agonizing circuits of hyper-self-awareness and assessments of comparative guilt as he interacts with the families making their living in a situation of intense environmental and economic precarity.[7] Agee articulates and justifies his methodological neuroticism—often manifesting as what Evans calls "paralyzing, self-lacerating anger"—as an affect arising from his interest in non-interference in the life he is so passionately recording.[8]

This ambivalent fantasy of observing without being observed drives a meticulous attempt to distinguish between self and other, between the first-personal I (and Emersonian "eye") and object of sight, between author and audience. Much ink has been spilled on parsing the tension between what is characterized as the book's documentary project—an attempt to record the conditions in rural Alabama as realistically as possible "with no detail, however trivial it may seem, left untouched" for the purpose of motivating a readership to ameliorate those conditions—and the "artistic" technologies of perception, presentation, and description Agee uses for that endeavor, which reveal Agee to be immersed in and influencing the world he describes.[9] This oscillation between stances of identification with

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6. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* XI.
7. Indeed, despite the dizzying beauty of the prose, I find James Agee's texts to be borderline unreadable at times—the heat generated by the ruthless spinning of his self-critical analysis and self-loathing is difficult to engage with critically or otherwise. I often find myself either reading through the paragraphs at a breakneck pace, or catch myself looking away from the book, staring out the window or really anywhere else. As Paul Hansom wrote of his first-personal experience of the existential and neurotic knot of the text: "It makes me nervous just to think about it." This readerly agitation, and indeed the variety of other attitudes and emotional responses to the text that are registered by its critics, marks a text that is in fundamental ways at odds with itself. Hansom, Paul. "Agee, Evans, and the Therapeutic Document: Narrative Neurosis in the Function of Art." 105.
8. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 1941, (Boston: Mariner Books.) 2001. XI.
9. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* XI. See, especially, John Dorst "On the Porch and in the Room: Threshold Moments and Other Ethnographic Tropes in *Let Us Now Praise Famous*

and distanced observation of his audience, his subject, and himself, produces what Margaret Olin calls a kind of "modernist *aporia*" for Agee, where the author ultimately and copiously laments having to write at all, fantasizing instead about corporeal dissolution: "If I could do it, I'd do no writing here… A piece of the body torn out by the roots might be more to the point."[10] That he often reaches for apology, a mode of speech (and writing) that can split the self into two, is not surprising. As sociologist Erving Goffman describes: "apologies represent a splitting of the self into a blameworthy part and a part that stands back and sympathizes with the blame giving, and, by implication, is worthy of being brought back into the fold."[11] As Agee attempts to hold himself—and his sense of himself as an individual—variously apart from his positions, he is equally horrified both by how he must translate his subjects into abstraction, and split them into their participation in relevant attributes and structures, in order to speak of them at all: on the register of both the "historical" and the "personal.[12] He asks, rhetorically in the text: "how am I to speak of you as 'tenant' 'farmers,' as 'representatives' of your 'class,' as social integers in a criminal economy, or as individuals, fathers, wives, sons, daughters, and as my friends and as I 'know' you?"[13] The dispassionate documenter minimally disrupts the world he records, but also in the process of the work of photographing, asking questions, and composing narratives, cannot help but know and be known personally and impersonally, must be there, disruptively both outside and inside the world. This foundational unsettledness is not just a by-product of the process of composing stream-of-consciousness prose, but a practical investigative methodology employed on-site.

Men," 2010, and Jeff Allred's "Moving Violations: Stasis and Mobility in James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941)" in *American Modernism and Depression Documentary*. 2010.

10. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 10.

11. Erving Goffman, *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order.* 113-114.

12. James Agee's interest in articulating the relationship between the individual and how they embody, or can be read through their visual (indeed, photographic) representation as historical subjects was a repeated preoccupation or fascination, not always negative, as he remarked approvingly of the subjects of Helen Levitt's candid photographs of New York that they embodied "with great beauty and fullness not only their personal and historical selves but also, in fundamental terms, a natural history of the soul." See: Helen Levitt, *A Way of Seeing,* 1946, (Salt Lake City, UT: Film Documents LLC), 2019. 110.

13. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 100.

Agee tried his hardest to disappear from view and yet found himself variously and perpetually in the way. His photographer-companion on the project, Evans, on loan from the Farm Security Administration where he was best known for his photographs documenting the Great Depression, reveals some of the artifices with which Agee attempted to smooth his particularities into a generic "likable American young man" that might disappear into the background during their investigations. Evans writes affectionately in the preface: "[Agee's] accent was more or less unplaceable and it was somewhat variable. For instance, in Alabama it veered towards country-southern, and I may say he got away with this to the farm families and to himself. His clothes were deliberately cheap, not only because he was poor but because he wanted to be able to forget them… on the other score, he felt that wearing good, expensive clothes involved him in some sort of claim to superiority of the social kind."[14] In fact, the ethics of Agee's entire methodology—anthropological, artistic, romantic, interpersonal—are explicitly tied up in what he calls a "horror of error" and a desire to not disturb anyone.[15] As Janet Holtman observes, these attempts at advocacy through identification relied on an effort to reconstitute "poor white subjectivity as a sort of thwarted middle-class subjectivity… to glorify squalor, to beatify suffering in order to place poor white otherness in a different social register. But the otherness is still presented as a set of lacks, bound to be understood by a middle-class audience as a catalogue of depletion, not merely as a symptomatic material depletion, but as a subjectivity of lack."[16]

Perhaps, unsurprisingly, the text as composed is studded with drawn-out apologies for what Agee depicts as failed interactions, as in: moments where the narrator becomes visible in particular signifying ways he did not intend to those individuals he is studying. These are

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14. Walker Evans, "Foreword: James Agee in 1936." New York, 1960. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.* 1941. (Boston: First Mariner Books Edition) 2001.
15. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 1941. 2001. 255.
16. Holtman, Janet. "'White Trash' in Literary History: The Social Interventions of Erskine Caldwell and James Agee." *American Studies*. 53:2. 2014. 43.

moments when Agee narrates a kind of becoming-conscious of his own presence in lived time, when in the various positionalities he inhabits—of writer, upper-class outsider, white person, and man—seem to interrupt or pull him out of his fiction of invisibility, or is read in ways he doesn't intend, which is to say at all. his paradoxical horror of being read or perceived as he is (and thus as a documenter of life, interrupting the flow of life as it is being lived immediately to record it, another "error" of sorts) bleeds through the book's modes of narration as well as Agee's recounted memories of interpersonal encounters during the investigative process, and it reaches a peak in scenes of racialized visual difference, where the white documentarian encounters Black subjects who catalyze an acute version of apologetic self-awareness and textual narration beyond the scale of the individuals immediately harmed. When it comes to narrating such encounters, Agee's authorial dance of avoidance, immersion, and guilt at including anyone at all in his narrative—as their presence makes his presence as author visible— cascades into long, drawn-out apologies. While Agee apologizes several times throughout the text to a variety of white tenant farmers, owners, and family members, these apologies are seeded throughout the text as part of a larger more complicated relationship; here we see Agee reaching for the genre of the apology as a way of writing about, and thus, controlling himself, but there is something further unresolvable about his sense of self in relation to conspicuous markings of race. Rather than Agee's usual articulation of a vain hope that he might be able to allow life to continue as-it-might-were-he-not-there, the apologies that he offers at moments of racialized harm often read more like a fear of having made a mark for which he cannot or does not want to take responsibility, a mark for which he cannot in good conscience parent. This is in contrast to his otherwise continuous understanding and erasure of his stark class privilege, manifested by his attempts to obscure the "faint rubbing of Harvard and Exeter" by wearing out his suits and changing his regional speech patterns, and his enthusiastic and uncritical taking up of his understanding

of himself as male (in relation to the women around him).[17] In scenes wherein his sense of his own whiteness is an operative force in the "failure" of his ability to melt into the background, he seems acutely stuck in a sense of his own identity, and since he feels unable to separate himself from his narration and from the violent histories of white supremacy in the United States that materially structure the scenes he is a part of, he is unable to find a way to separate himself from the harm that he recounts. These desperately pitched apologies reveal the limitations of the apology for racialized harm as deployed from within a perspective of a self-effacing whiteness: Agee cannot decide what relationship the apology is suturing.

Apologies of all registers—even the more unobtrusive ones—negotiate senses of self and bring the relationship between them into conversation. Agee's repetition of "I'm *awful* sorry to give you all this bother" to the white Gudger family when he knocks on their door in the late evening serve as a kind of social lubricant, a marker of an intimate, polite, neighborly exchange which over the course of the recounted late-night meal and provision of sleeping arrangements serves to bring the apologizer and recipient together in an explicit friendship, and relatively reciprocal relationship of host and guest. Throughout the encounter with the Gudgers, Agee apologizes whenever he feels guilty as a way of seeking reassurance and expressing good intent, and notices that each apology "they received so genuinely, so kindly, that even in their exhaustion I was immediately healed, and held no fear of their feelings about it…"[18] These apologies do not leave much of an imprint on the text and are often in the service of building or maintaining a reciprocal relationship between the parties, while the apologies that Agee offers a band of singers forced to perform for him and Evans, and a couple that he frightens outside of a church (all of which Agee identifies first by their race as "negroes") become the full content of the author's reflection on those individuals, and the

17. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* "Preface," X.
18. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 414.

sum total of those figure's presence in the text. These apologies, often accompanied by a granular recounting of the events that transpired, attempt instead to smooth back over the social intrusion at the level of the narration—the text of the apology that he authors—rather than as a reciprocal relational exchange between himself and the recipient.

Rather than read Agee's contradictory stances and conflicted attitudes towards his own writing and documentary work as purely hypocritical, it is generative to read them generously as psychoanalytically symptomatic and in as far as they impact the text. By this I mean symbolically reflective of a complicated process of subject development, and overlapping with a political sense of who Agee wants to be, his sense of the ambit of his project, and his sense of who his audience is. The difficulty, and I believe, the potential, of interpreting these protracted apologetic scenes lies in their thick description, and the articulated intensity of the emotional responses they attempt to track. Agee's writing through and dwelling in the apology articulates and prolongs the violence of the white supremacist structure in which these apologies are set, both within the prose itself and, presumably, within the live scenes and situations that inspired these anecdotes. As such, the text also allows the contours of the apologetic relationships to be inhabited and questioned, prolonged as an unsolved and unsolvable scene. Agee deliberately makes conspicuous—and offers *ad nauseam* to his readers—his emotional experiences of regret for having acted irrevocably, and charts in minute detail how exactly his apologetic "horror of error" and various other senses of his own inadequacy and incompetence overwhelm his ability to act in the face of present harm at all. Agee encounters the impossibility of his fantasies, and responds to that impossibility through a creative act: writing a novel. Agee is aware of the failure of his apologies to achieve what he desires, but cannot diagnose the nature of the failure. However that does bring him forward: the failure of the fantasies is in fact the occasion—and the material context—of his act of writing at all.

In what follows, I proffer an account of the various Agee attempts to use a reparative form of interaction—the apology—to address himself to, and ameliorate, moments when he perceives himself as doing harm to others, and ultimately gets stuck in a cycle of harm where the situation repeats itself ad infinitum. The mechanics of this failure are worth analyzing instead of merely describing and dismissing these phenomena, especially given the narrator's determined attentiveness to ongoing structural inequalities. A self-avowed communist "by sympathy and conviction," he seems to want, rather sincerely and desperately, to do good by others.[19]I am interested in how the apology fails to navigate or repair his sense of himself, and what these incomplete apologies allow us to see: how the emotions of guilt and shame that provoke a reparative gesture (and structure political movements of reform) might also structure a kind of harmful echo chamber within the contours of a form that promises to ameliorate or alter that situation. I am interested in how he gets stuck—and how ultimately the ways that Agee sees himself doing good, and the form of the apology as a mode of address that puts his unresolved senses of self and subject in relation, are in fact entangled with upholding the violence he wants to address and apologize for.

II. Fantasies of Undoing and Manic Reparation

Henri Rey's work on the subject of reparation begins by discussing the process as he sees it appearing in nature: reparation occurs when "spring repairs winter's destruction," when "the salamander repairs and produces a new tail," or whenever "new life is created to replace the dead."[20] For humans, in addition to experiencing life and death through anabolic and catabolic processes at the cellular level, he argues, the practice of medicine can be understood

19. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 1941, (Boston: First Mariner Books Edition, 2001).
20. Henri Rey, "Reparation," *Universals of Psychoanalysis in the Treatment of Psychotic and Borderline States: Factors of Space-Time and Language,* Ed. Jeanne Magagna, (London: Free Association Books, 1994) 207.

as a reparative intervention into the body, and psychologically, acts of reparation are also symbolically carried out through sacrifice, punishment, and penance, and various "doing and undoing" aspects of rituals.[21] Abstracting reparation to the level of biological processes might seem absurd, but understanding apology as a reparative process at this scale illuminates several characteristic aspects of the form: (1) reparation involves the elimination or rejection of something that has failed in order to facilitate and make space for (2) new growth or life that replaces what must be abandoned. At more symbolic levels, when what has to be let go of is something crucial to the sense of self—. [22]

In her psychoanalytic writings about what she called the "sadistic" impulses of young children, which manifested in her patients by biting, breaking toys, and provoking responses through antagonistic misbehavior, Melanie Klein showed that those primitive impulses were invariably followed by anxiety and a deep crisis of self, and by performances of contrition and experiences of guiltiness oriented towards the same three subjects of Agee's apologetics:

> "Sometimes *he tries to mend the very same men, trains and so on that he has just broken*… one moment after we have seen the most sadistic impulses, we meet with performances showing the *greatest capacity for love* and the wish to make all possible sacrifices *to be loved*."[23]

It was in relation to these responses to experiences of harm that Klein formulated her account of the reparative position, an orientation that is central to apologies. The child, surrounded by the impact of their actions, encounters the melancholy facts that undoing harm is not actually possible, that toys can be repaired but not *unbroken,* and that though they might think of

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21. Rey, Henri, "Reparation," *Universals of Psychoanalysis in the Treatment of Psychotic and Borderline States: Factors of Space-Time and Language,* Ed. Jeanne Magagna, (London: Free Association Books, 1994) 208.
22. The connections between Agee's sense of self and his whiteness—experienced as something that causes harm, but also as an attribute and position he holds which unconsciously but materially insulates him from and racialized harm, indicates the need for a more copious account of what that whiteness and how it operates in these scenes, as distinct from other senses of his difference from his interlocutors including class, regional provenance etc, which he seems to repeatedly erase or jettison when it suits him. He can disavow, but seems unable to jettison, his whiteness.
23. Melanie Klein, "Criminal Tendencies in Normal Children," (London: British Journal of Medical Psychology, 1927) 175-176. My emphasis.

themselves as good they are still also the bad person (or object, in Kleinian parlance) that did the bad, harmful thing. How well the child copes with this necessary ambivalence—and the paradox that their desires to undo the harm, to restore the relationship, and to be the person they thought they were before their action came into conflict with their sense of self, are not practicable—enables the child to hold the reparative position. The child then has recourse to the creative, and always inadequate, gestures of repair: facing up to the harm done, recognizing and grieving that they are guilty and responsible, but wanting to do something about it. This reparative experience of guilt is importantly future-oriented: one does not desire for things to remain broken, thus this guilt is crucial for making possible future relationships with other whole-object human beings, and for feeling reparative emotions like concern and hope. Being able to engage in processes of repair, or offering to make amends for a wrong, is an achievement according to Klein: an individual has to be able to understand themselves as responsible for the harm, but not be so totally overwhelmed by their understanding of their guilt that they despair. Someone who is unable to face up to the facts of loss and damage might withdraw from the scene entirely, or fall to pieces in a more destructive way. Unable to support the experience of their sense of their own guilt or responsibility, they might project it outward: blaming others, circumstances, or even the victim for experiencing the harm that occurred, so that their own sense of self as innocent remains intact. In Kleinian parlance, this acrobatic emotional squirming is called "splitting" and is part of the drama of oscillation between the positions of the paranoid-schizoid and the depressive positions. An individual holding or caught in the paranoid-schizoid position splits their guilt into good part-objects and bad part-objects which they can then either externalize or internalize as part of themself. These part-objects hold the individual's sense of guilt and sense of goodness for them, separately, and therefore untainted. In the depressive position—which is the purview of the reparative—one is able to tolerate ambivalence and reconcile those part objects as a whole.

One faces up to the harm done, recognizing and grieving that they are responsible, but can do something about it. In psychoanalytic parlance, they recognize that they are both the bad object who has done the bad thing, and the good object, just as others are similarly neither wholly good nor wholly bad. The subject can move forward.

> An essential corollary of anxiety, guilt, and depressive feelings is the urge for reparation. Under the sway of guilt the infant is impelled to undo the effect of his sadistic impulses by libidinal means. Thus feelings of love, which co-exist with aggressive impulses, are reinforced.[24]

The reparative is motivated by fear, an internalized sense of the harm that one might visit on external objects being turned towards yourself. When one of these is too strong in relation to the sense of self, the reparative does not open up relationship but defends against it—a position that can be both manic (paranoid/schizoid) and reparative (depressive) at once. A manic reparative gesture, then, is one that is less interested in repairing the situation or the person harmed, but in splitting away (through gesture, excuse, explanation, and denial) what has been done from the repairing subject, so that the subject is no longer culpable for the harm at issue and repair is no longer needed at all. As Henri Rey discusses, "manic reparative" impulses drive attempts to recuperate individuals, symbols, and situations that have done harm from their ambivalent legacies not by admitting or dealing with the harm, but through purification or control:

> "a defensive repudiation of reparation—a manic reparation—which is insidious because it looks just like reparation, and, as an action, contributes to a self-serving satisfaction with one's deeds. A pairing of reparation and manic reparation occurs in memorials and commemorations, the ambiguity of which provides occasions for extremist protest next to mourning at the losses caused by the perpetration. The test of reparation as opposed to manic reparation is whether there is pressure to see the end of it, an obligation fulfilled a debt paid off. Reparation does not operate in that mode."[25]

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24. Melanie Klein, "Love, Guilt, and Reparation," *Love, Guilt, and Reparation: And Other Works 1921-1945; The Writings of Melanie Klein Vol. 1.* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Free Press, 1937) 310.

[25] Figlio, Karl. *Remembering as Reparation: Psychoanalysis and Historical Memory.* London: Palgrave MacMillan. Studies in the Psychosocial. 2017. 16.

I intervene both in a growing body of psychoanalytic work on the "manic reparative" by providing an account of the apology as a creative reparative act, and provide an additional consideration for those who, post-Sedgwick, consider the potential of the reparative as a mode of political and literary engagement. The point that the reparative position—and apologies—do not themselves constitute the work of repair, or reparation, is often missed in the legacy of post-Sedgwick interventions for and against reparative approaches to engagement with texts.[26] In her essay "Obsessional Neurosis and Super-Ego," Klein observes that while it is easy to grasp how bad things can pollute good things, the mechanism of *repair* itself is opaque, as adding "good" to "bad" does not restore purity, and in terms of material objects such as toys or people, sometimes restoration is impossible. In a footnote, Klein emphasizes our dissatisfaction with repair:

> "the child's impulse to restore things is also hindered by its early experience of the fact that it is easy to break things but exceedingly difficult to put them together again. Factual evidence of this kind must, I think, contribute to increase its doubts about its creative powers."[27]

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26. Attending to this nuance the polemic (but fictional) choice between the reparative or the paranoid position as more or less politically efficacious, for example, contra Patricia Stuelke's *The Ruse of Repair*, which rebukes the embrace of what she diagnoses as reparative modes of engagement as adequate critical or ethical responses to US imperial formations by characterizing "Kleinian reparation" as if it were a program of action and not a description of an orientation towards harm that could produce both outcomes of real violence as well as the future-oriented collaborative projects that she wants to preserve: de-colonialization, anti-capitalism, etc. To her subsequent use of this argument as evidence to support her bland anti-emotional, anti-affect-theory stance, I would argue that those racial and capitalist formations she seeks to undo through paranoid critical action cannot be made legible, evident, or even critically available as such, *without analysis of* the emotional connection to those structures. For example, the "ag-gag" laws which emerged in the 1990's in the United States but are now a global phenomenon, which make it a felony to take photographs and recordings inside of slaughterhouses and food processing factories operate on a number of levels: effectively preventing people from literally seeing features of an industry (illegal migrant labor, unsafe labor conditions, class disparity, inhumane treatment of animals, mass death of animal life, gore), and also preventing people from seeing something that would upset them or disgust them emotionally and make them less likely to consume (metaphorically, literally) certain subsidized food products. The reparative position, like the paranoid position, is a positioning framed by emotion: the latter's experience of suspicion is motivated by libidinal experience of the pleasure of shifting and projecting difficult emotions onto other objects: exactly the kind of evasion of responsibility that Stuelke condemns as reparative. As I show, articulating a programmatic tactic (for reading, research, or political action) that opts on the side of either the reparative *or* the paranoid as the solution, while perhaps satisfying, is *not* a guarantee of its efficacy or ethical outcome. That critical engagement of such laws is a matter of literal *taste* is, I think, non-trivially responsible for their relatively sparse critical engagement outside of animal rights groups, despite their manifest engagement with intersecting structural violence.

27. Klein, Melanie. "Obsessional Neurosis and Super-Ego" *The Psycho-Analysis of Children,* 1932. Footnote, 240.

That it is not possible to "unbreak" the toy we have broken is a particularly inflected source of bewilderment, but one that leads to a persistent fantasy or desire for undoing, and a recognition of its impossibility. The impossible desire is such: the object must be a) repaired exactly as it was before the event, or b) the situation must be restored through denial that the change has happened at all, so that things are as they were before it occurred. The irrevocability of reality is something that we mitigate early on through various modes of what we might broadly call repair work—most obviously in this image: putting the pieces of a toy back together with an adhesive. But such reparatively-motivated gestures could include learning (to not drop the toy, to take care, or some other preventative behavioral shift), a creative re-writing of the significance of the broken toy (it was in a car wreck, it is a brave little soldier with a distinguished wound) or some ritual of regret that allows us to mourn—such as apologizing. These latter, creative rituals of symbolic undoing, are the heart of a lot of our psychic and social worlds. These are all ways of acting "as if" the change could never have happened, even though they make different contributions to psychic life, some of them grieving the loss of that possibility by internalizing it—others manically splitting or denying that loss or change at all. The fantasy of undoing, the "as if" in this latter manic sense becomes—or is—forcibly put forward as reality. Another way of putting it: some fantasies of undoing are defensive, while others motivate creative re-working and re-pair: an apology, for example, is like looping back for a missed stitch. It requires the making of a new thing (by telling a story of a past thing in the present) as a way of moving forward. Keeping fantasies of timelessness and undoing alive is an essential part of holding space for the possibility of repair. It provides libidinal heft and power to things like apologizing (which at their best engage the fantasy of undoing as impossible, but desired). This is how we are able to dare to take action in and thus change the world around us, despite the disappointment Klein described, that we can never go back to the time before a change occurred. We take the past

in, and carry it with us, in order to tolerate it no longer being present, identifying with it in the ego—or squirreling it away into the unconscious—so that everything can be undone, everything is present all the time.

But, when fantasies of undoing manifest as resting in the fantasy of never-having-done, then we're tempted to *never do.* Fear of breakdown, fear of doing harm motivates a kind of defensive, preventative freezing. In order to avoid the fact that any decision at any scale that we make will *never* be able to be un-made—wearing a particular outfit, eating a particular diet, getting married, reproducing, living out an expression of "woman" or "man" through culturally recognized gestures, going to bed at a particular time, hosting a conference on psychoanalysis two weeks before your dissertation is due—we might be tempted to stop changing (or to encourage others to stop making changes.) Certainly, there are decisions that are easier to repair, or whose consequences can be mitigated, and certainly you can *change your mind* and do something different in the future. But the basic fact of irreversibility can be shattering—can be a source of neurotic withdrawal, can utterly freeze you in place, prevent any action (and alas, even that will not prevent the irreversible fact of reality, as in politics where the decision to do nothing *is* taking action.) In the space of the novel, Agee's fantasies of undoing, and fantasies of timelessness, spool out over pages—an investigation of his psyche in relationship to his work, but also as they copiously continue, keeping alive the gestures of the manic reparative (and obsessional reparative) which are driven by a sense of succeeding—the delusion that one might be able to "get it right" by apologizing entirely. Instead of mourning that the harm occurred as in the depressive position, and then doing something about it, manic repair is attempts to close the whole harm up and put the pieces back together again as if nothing happened.

The infant, according to Melanie Klein, is not only motivated by pleasure-seeking drives as in the Freudian account, but understands their own emotions and desires—greed,

envy—as threatening both to their envied/desired objects and to themselves. This anxiety, their primary sense of the vulnerability of self and the world around them, is what the primary defenses push against—projection/internalization, splitting, omnipotent control.

> Attaining a whole-object relationship results in the loss of an omnipotent view of the world, the loss of a feeling of possessing all the mother's good qualities, a recognition of the self's own bad qualities, and guilt about damage that has been inflicted on her in hatred. All this will cause the infant or individual to recoil and retreat back to a greater or lesser extent into the part-object functioning of the paranoid-schizoid position. A repeated to and fro between part-object and whole object relating occurs on the threshold of the depressive position.[28]

The desire to undo the harm one has done to others could also be understood as to desire to not have done the harm at all, a longing for a kind of counterfactual that results in a split between the person who did the harm (fixed, firm, marked) and the person who did not intend to do the harm and is not therefore responsible.

The apology, as a form, structures a variety of genres of self-recognition. When we say that we are sorry, we do not actually repair the world, but we do create the circumstances to address ourselves to the world-as-it-is. The paranoid/schizoid position is a position of terrible apprehension and anxiety, splitting and projection, based on an intimate knowledge of the dangers posed by those hostile projected part-objects. The depressive position is characterized as an achievement—not just depression, but the mature collection of part objects—good and bad—into whole objects. While reflecting on the process of writing *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in a letter to his mentor Father Flye*,* Agee uses the metaphor of both dissolution and development: "I feel as if I were disintegrating and 'growing up' whatever that means, simultaneously, and that there is a race or bloody grappling going on between the two in my head and solar plexus."[29]

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28. Spillius, Elizabeth Bott. Entry on "Part-objects," *The New Dictionary of Kleinian Thought.* 435.
29. James Agee, *The Letters of James Agee to Father Flye*, (New York: George Braziller, 1962) 105.

The book is filled with the horror of being gradually fixed in place, or a turning to stone in the air: the fantasy of the reversible, here, requires a kind of assessment, an envelopment in the whole scene.[30] This paradoxical fantasy of self-obliteration allows us to read *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* as a project that we can understand structurally as a text and specifically in examples, as apologetic, both on behalf of the individual subjects captured in its documentary ambit and the historical economic violence of which they serve as emblems, and on behalf of Agee as documenter and translator of these individual lives into symbols. Time is thus operating at two levels of integration, or processing, at the level of the moment or the scene, and at the level of the historical. James Agee seems throughout afraid to begin, digging the earth away from any tentatively staked claims before he has even placed them in the ground.

Indeed, the book arguably never properly begins (or perhaps only begins): it is introduced as containing two sections (called Book 1 and Book 2) that are the "beginning of a larger piece of work," and the first volume of a series that will be entitled "Three Tenant Families" which was never completed, the book includes a "Preface," a "Preamble" and three sections entitled "(On the Porch 1," 2, and 3, respectively, which begin with open parentheses which are never closed.[31] The book also "ends" on a threshold, with a trailing collage of notes and appendices, and a final third scene of Agee as part of an unspecified "we," sitting on the porch—the transitional entryway between the home and the outside world—in the sounds and muted colors of a dark summer evening: "(On the Porch: 3" ends with the promise of the story finally beginning (which is the promise of the entire book): "Our talk drained rather quickly off into silence and we lay thinking, analyzing, remembering, in the human and

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30. Obsessional neuroses and investments in avoiding action, decision-making, and "irreversible" decisions, are often enlisted in maintaining the fiction that there *is* the possibility of any choice that is reversible.
31. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 1960, xiv. These opening parentheses and colons made much of by Paula Rabinowitz in her article, "'Two Prickes': The Colon as Practice" (2010) as they thematize incompletion, repetition, redundancy, emptiness, and a lack of closure as central preoccupations.

artist's sense praying, chiefly over matters of the present and of that immediate past which was a part of the present; and each of these matters had in that time that extreme clearness, and edge, and honor, which I shall now try to give you, until at length we fell asleep."[32] The relevance of the affective orientation of repair, or the depressive position, to the project at all scales should be apparent as it takes place in the Great Depression, and was formulated as a mode of addressing the explicit aftermath of an era referred to as "Reconstruction," the period of federal reforms immediately following the American Civil War which oriented around a reparative project: to repair, to rebuild, to reconnect a sense of the centralized and unified nation.

III. Timelessness and Failures of Scale

At several points in *let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Agee expresses the wish for a medium other than words, more like water, which he holds up as an ideal for its transparency and its ability to reflect light from its surface clearly as a mirror, but also for the way it refracts light in a variety of directions and perspectives all at once. Most prominently, and importantly for this chapter, Agee seems to idealize it for how it seems to hold what it contains in literal suspension and in some cases, to preserve what it contains from erosion and decay in the air. Water is amniotic, a site of fantasies of weightlessness and also of timelessness, creating a sense of a kind of suspension as in birth or death. He experiences these moments of non-relation allows him to speak without cringing, without fear that he might say something wrong. For example, while observing the stillness of the oil in a flame lamp, Agee notes a, "holiness of silence and peace that all on earth and within extremest remembrance seems suspended upon it in perfection as upon reflective water." He continues,

32. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 1960, 470-471.

"I feel that if I can by utter quietness succeed in not disturbing this silence, in not so much as touching this plain of water, I can tell you anything within realm of God, whatsoever it may be, that I wish to tell you, and that what so ever it may be, you will not be able to help but understand it."[33] This dream proves to be ultimately unattainable, though, as Agee attempts to "reproduce" individuals as they are "actual," "living," and "instant." As Agee's narration of observations flows most easily in liminal moments: when the family is sleeping, or working, or absent, Agee's prose expands. Then, without risk of interaction or rupture, or of the time of actions moving forward, Agee can be involved seamlessly in a setting, able to observe without being seen as observing. When the three tenant farmer families are sleeping, they are described as inert and animal: "Fish halted on the middle and serene of blind sea water sleeping lidless lensed; their breathing, their sleeping subsistence, the effortless nursing of ignorant plants; entirely silenced, sleepers, delicate planets, insects, cherished in amber, mured in night…"[34] Their stillness makes them easy to consider, their suspension acts as a kind of protection, insulating them from action or definition or verbs: they simply "are" though they do nothing that the living do.

When faced with moments of shame that might require apology, Agee explicitly discusses a desire both for time to stop—and also, for something to "happen" that he cannot be held responsible for. When Agee's car is trapped on the road, and he has to return to the Gudgers family home in the late evening, after they have all gone to bed, he observes:

> I grow full of shame and of reverence from the soles of my feet up my body to the crest of my skull and the leaves of my hands like a vessel quietly spread full of water which has sprung from the middle of my chest: and shame the more, because I do not yet turn away, but still stand here motionless and as if in balance, and am aware of a vigilant and shameless hope that—not that I shall move forward and request you, disorder you—but that 'something shall happen,' as it 'happened' to the car lost to the mud…[35]

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33. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 1960, 46.
34. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 1960, 18.
35. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 413.

The preservation of his narrative inertia is a fantasy, ultimately inaccessible and impossible for Agee to actually achieve, and indeed, not actually reflected in the (conflicted) progress forward of the text he composes in sentences that move him forward: something always "happens"—perhaps occasionally Agee himself even does something, and indeed, not "doing anything" at all is a form of action. His discomfort with his own activity and responsibility leads him towards fantasies of liminality, of not having done at all. The ensemble of measurements—motion, life—are not accessible all at once to the author from outside: and in order for things to be still enough to examine all of, they must be half-dead or half-alive. The ambivalence of this perfect liquid stillness is expressed in the ways that liquids are characterized as both pre-natal and post-mortem language. Returning to the oil in the same lamp, Agee remarks that it also reminds him of things:

> once alive which I have seen suspended in jars in a frightening smell of alcohol—serpents, tapeworms, toads, embryons [*sic*], all drained one tan pallor of absolute death; and also of the serene, scarved flowers in untroubled wombs (and pale-tanned too, flaccid, and in the stench of exhibited death, those children of fury, patience and love which stand in the dishonors of accepted fame, and of the murdering of museum staring); in this globe like a thought.[36]

These aqueous globes of thought—as spaces of examination, as Petri dishes for experimentation, as blank pages for arranging text—appear in the section entitled "colon," which blurs the distinction between bodily and textual from the first moment of intestinal punning in its title. At the beginning, he outlines the "account" and its relation to its audience as if outlining a map of some massive cluster of reproductive chambers or embryos: "Let me say, then, how I would wish this account might be constructed" Agee begins, "I might suggest, its structure should be globular: or should be eighteen or twenty intersected spheres, the interlockings of bubbles on the face of a stream; one of these globes is each of you." He continues with his generic account of the human body: "The heart, nerve, center of each of

36. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 49

these, is an individual human life."[37] These individual, enclosed and liquid lives are pure potentiality: "capable, in its terms, of health, which is perfection, which is holiness, which is simple and salted, blooded functioning of each animal in his own best: and is capable likewise of all harm to itself and to others."[38] Once the child emerges from the liquid, the stakes are high: each interaction and fact of context is an impression or wound on the particular "soul." Every moment of contact or touch changes it. If Agee figures his own acts of reproductive writing as ideally involved in the creation of watery, liminal, gestational spaces, using the same language with which he describes the archetype of reproductive intercourse, that implies his participation as writer and as a body in the world he documents. The image works: a physical encounter produces something inexplicable and interstitial—a child, a document—until it comes forth in the world: imperfect, fading, and subject to critique and chance.[39]

An ethical aesthetics of non-interruption and non-disturbance is anchored in this act of God-like reproduction: making a "pure" human creature to study. Agee documents his own process of making by narrating a cycle of reproduction from gestation to birth in order to produce a generic—or archetypical—human child. "Here then he is, or here is she: here is this tender and helpless human life:" he muses after narrating its birth: "it lifts up its little trembling body into standing, wearing upon its shoulders the weight of all the spreaded generations of its dead: surrounded already, with further pressures, impingements." (95) This merging of the mechanisms of perception into an ideal of "common humanity"—of which race, class, and gender are external interruptions that influence and alter this flesh, is gestured towards in the brief pronoun switch here. These joined and generalized fragments of common

37. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 89.
38. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 89.
39. The parallels that Agee might see or be playing with here between the ambivalent nostalgia of birth and the *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men's* own publication history and continued existence as book would certainly be worth considering.

human flesh come apart at the seams: the feminine pronoun does not persist through the paragraph in which it is introduced. The creation is identified as "it" neutrally for four more colon-conjoined clauses before becoming gendered again as "he" watches his parents have sex and continue the cycle: "his repeated witness of the primal act, that battling and brutality upon a bed which from his pallet on the floor of the same room he lifts his head and hears and sees and fears and is torn open by."[40]

The act of intercourse, here, but in fact all actions and encounters and experiences, are acts of traumatic marking and making-specific. The generic embryonic creation, "this midge, this center," becomes a particular human being through the contexts of its birth which "specialize him" and indeed specialized the "we" of the authorial-readerly collective: "yes, he is of the depth of the working class; of southern alabamian tenant farmers; certain individuals are his parents, not like other individuals; they are living in a certain house, it is not quite like other houses…"[41] However, these individuations are experienced as irrevocable losses, as wounds:

> each of these registers, cuts his mark: not one of these is negligible: and they measure, not only by multitudes within each granular instant, but by iteration, which is again beyond our counting not alone but as well the remotest realization of our flesh and even brain: and with each iteration the little cut is cut a little distincter, a little deeper, a little more of a scar and a shaping of a substance which might have taken other shape and which in each re-registration loses a little more and a little more the power to meet this possibility.[42]

Life in time—in air—rather than water, is a gradual fixing of identity or a turning to stone. It is a movement from pure potential towards definition, and that movement in the context of poverty and suffering can have lasting impact. Agee is hesitant to intervene even as his task to count these "marks" and their effect on the bodies and characters of the individuals in these families he is observing comes from an understanding of the stakes of touch, and an

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40. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 95—96.
41. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 91-92.
42. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 93. Capitalization in original.

understanding of himself as implicated in the lives of the people he is observing and attempting to translate onto paper.[43] The situation is one of "terrific responsibility" which seems to undergird the tension in his ethics of restraint and minimal intervention:

> In every child who is born, under no matter what circumstances, and of no matter what parents, the potentiality of the human race is born again: and in him, too, once more, and of each of us, our terrific responsibility towards human life; towards the utmost idea of goodness, of the horror of error, and of God.[44]

To this attempted retroactive erasure of his entire body, the desire to melt from existence in that encounter or that world, we come to an apparent paradox. For all of his interest in non-interference and stillness, Agee exhibits no hesitation about hypothetically touching, or gratuitously describing, female bodies.[45] His connection to other humans through gender is available to his imaginary, whereas he stutters to articulate similarly fluent understandings of himself in the context of race, or racialized interaction. The sexual formula for interaction, and the fertility of that formula for creation, mean that he returns continuously to the following: "[a] man and a woman are drawn together upon a bed and there is a child and there are children."[46] Similarly, the presence of the young married relative—Emma—in the Gudgers' house makes her a touchstone for all kinds of sexual speculation. He narrates a projected understanding of her consciousness and describes her as somehow visibly marked by the desiring of all the adult male inhabitants of the house, including himself, Evans, and George Gudger. Agee remarks: "everyone to some extent realizes… then if only Emma could spend her last few days alive having a gigantic good time in bed, with George, a kind of man she is best used to, and with Walker and with me, whom she is curious about and attracted to"

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43. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 93.
44. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 255.
45. See especially the description of the two images of "Squinchy Gudger and his mother," and "Ellen Woods as she lies sleeping," which merit essay-length close readings on their own. (Agee, 389-390)
46. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 49.

things would be—somehow—much happier for her.[47] He notes the desire to act and intervene, to participate:

> while she spoke I very strongly, as something steadier than an 'impulse,' wanted in answer to take her large body in my arms… and I can swear that I now as then almost believe that in that moment she would have so well understood this, and so purely and quietly met it, that now as then I only wish to God I had done it[48]

Here his ethics of non-intrusiveness—and horror of "error"—motivates an overwhelming fear or guilt and evasion of responsibility. Following this reading, Agee's apologies begin to ring out as self-protective rather than generous, and his apologies and "participation" become demands for a performance of ease and comfort. Once we separate out the poetic method of not disturbing the water from the immediate affective stakes of each individual social interaction, Agee's apparently paradoxical desire for involvement and immediacy with the women he sees reveals itself to be driven by the opposite side of the same self-protective gesture: white, feminine bodies are available and legible to Agee as possible sites of sexual interaction. He is not only willing, but condescendingly and anticipatorily willing to take responsibility for the actions and bodies of the women around him. He is certainly fantasizing about it.

This tension of interacting with and preserving the life he observes is persistently figured as an interaction with fluid-like substances, he describes morbid specimens preserved in liquid and embryos developing in utero, meditates on the motion of light across water or oil, and the possibility of entering below the surface of things without causing too many ripples. This prior and idealized state of uninterrupted calm is repeatedly figured as aquatic and liminal. In an apparent paradox, despite how much of this narrative is preoccupied with being physically and narratively unobtrusive, Agee includes a number of unapologetic and gendered sexual fantasies with the white women he encounters. Rather than regretting an

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47. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 55. Emma was about to return to her husband after visiting her family.
48. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 58.

intrusion, here Agee laments an act not taken: "I only wish to God I had done it."[49] Though Agee's descriptions of women as sexually and reproductively available are shaped by an obvious set of heteropatriarchal assumptions, the mixture of liquid imagery in his work, his anxiety of interference in the world he is depicting, and his veneration of heterosexual reproductive intercourse as somehow "essential" to human development and artistic reproduction, constitute the text as a fascinating and perplexing *ars poetica.* It is as if by this mixing of his labor and work as artist, alongside his physical presence and penetration into or "commingling" with the lives of the families he observes, Agee understands himself as inheriting a responsibility that is explicitly parental.

IV. Questions of Whiteness: Manic Apologetics

In contrast to his imaginative writing of himself into relationships of responsibility to—and involvement with—both the individual and massively abstracted humanity, Agee is unable to access such fantasies of mutual implication with those he understands as racialized, and his apologies are stuttering. Agee begins establishing parameters for his non-responsibility for Black people—and effectively insulating himself from risk—almost immediately. In his listing of "Persons and Places," he does not list the races of any of his cast of characters, and we are to determine that they are all white, members of the "three representative white tenant families" from which Agee's account of "North American cotton tenantry" will be drawn.[50] In one of the first episodes, Agee expresses gratefulness for being exempt both from an immediate social interaction and from the possibility of interaction with a population of Black tenant farmers for which he does not want to be held responsible. The driver who brings him to his first location apparently performs the distancing for him, and keeps things

49. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 58.
50. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* "Preface," X.

"on the surface," as it were. "The man I drove with made steady conversation, in part out of nervous courtesy, in part as if to forestall any questions I might ask him." Agee observes, "I was glad enough of it; nearly all his tenants were negroes *and no use to me*, and I needed a rest from asking questions and decided merely to establish myself as even more easy-going, casual, and friendly than he was."[51] Agee then recounts how he and his photographer-companion Walker Evans "caused an interruption that filled [him] with regret" at the foreman's home on a large farm whose landowner leased out the land in parcels to sharecroppers.[52] The foreman and the landowner, who had been entertaining family members and whose workers were going about their lives on a Sunday, called over the group of three Black men to sing songs for them.

> They had been summoned to sing for Walker and for me, to show us what nigger music is like (though we had done all we felt we were able to spare them and ourselves this summons), and they stood patiently in a stiff frieze in the oak shade, their hats and their shirts shedding light, and were waiting to be noticed and released.[53]

The harm—a racialized and unequal division of power, structured by positions of material subjugation and dependency—has begun prior to his arrival, though he occasions a further performance and manifestation of that control. Agee is split between his position as a hopeful source of reparative impulses of reform about the circumstances of sharecropping, and a concatenating sense of responsibility for the scene. However, his main concern is that—while he is the reason for their being called forth as examples—they know that he, an individual, did not actively desire or call them forth:

> Meanwhile, and during all this singing, I had been sick in the knowledge that they felt they were here at our demand, mine and Walker's, and that I could communicate nothing otherwise; and now, in a perversion of self-torture, I played my part through. I gave their leader fifty cents, trying at the same time, through my eyes, to communicate much more, and I said I was sorry we had held them up and that I hoped they would not be late; he thanked me for them in a dead voice, not looking me in the

51. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 24.
52. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 24.
53. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 28.

> eye, and they went away, putting their white hats on their heads as they walked into the sunlight.[54]

Here, we see Agee figuring his involvement (a demand made by his presence as documentarian and not part of the community) as an interruption of a previously liminal state. We see an apology serving to rectify an error in perception on the part of the person harmed, rather than the person doing the harm. Agee's reflection of discomfort that the singers might feel as if Agee and Evans commanded their performance rings odd, precisely because of the ways that—as Agee takes great pains to point out—everyone who is represented in this text in any form is only within it because Agee has written them into it, and every person encountered is only encountered by virtue of Agee's assignment to write about them. To consider the experiences of black tenant farmers and families "of no use" to the narrative and extraneous to the ambitions of a project on sharecropping is to eliminate those who were physically, economically, and historically at the center of the sharecropping industry. Sharecropping involved renting a small plot of land, often borrowing further in order to purchase seed, animals, fertilizers, plows, and other farming materials, and then providing a certain percentage to the landowner at the end of the year.[55] The actuality of tenant farming at the time that Agee and Evans started observing was still effectively structured by Reconstruction-era policies that limited the work opportunities the freed black population could access, made land ownership difficult, and incentivized and policed those who were not employed into working land owned by others.[56]

Agee's most striking apology occurs early on in the text as well, in third section of the first part (act, chapter) of the book, which is entitled "Near a Church." Agee and Evans stop on the side of the road to take a picture of a beautiful, if decrepit, church. While the pair of

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54. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 28.
55. J.R. Mandle, *Not Slave, Not Free* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 34 and 86 (table 26).
56. David E. Conrad, *The Forgotten Farmers: The Story of Sharecroppers in the New Deal*, (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1965.)

white men set up the camera and wait for the light to hit it just perfectly, a well-dressed black couple walks by them, chats with them for a moment, and then continues walking. Agee narrates as follows:

> They made us, *in spite of our knowledge of our own meanings*, ashamed and insecure in our wish to break into and possess their church, and after a minute or two I decided to go after them and speak to them, and ask them if they knew where we might find a minister or some other person who might let us in, *if it would be alright.*[57]

Though the explicit apologizing has not begun yet, Agee's reflective narration of the episode has already begun to weave in explanations and defense. It appears that Agee has begun to blame the couple for his own discomfort at their presence. His knowledge of his own meanings and desires pertaining to the church are not suspect until the presence of the couple, and his projection of that couple's relationship to the church makes them reflect on themselves as being-outside, as interlopers, and as white. What ensues is a many-page, granularly detailed description and investigation of what happened: how Agee begins to follow after the couple, how the couple begins to look back and forth at one another and then surreptitiously at Agee, who waves and begins accelerating. "I had no doubt Walker would do what he wanted whether we had 'permission' or not," Agee reflects, further articulating a sense of responsibility and reiterating the goodness of his own reasons, "but I wanted to be on hand, and broke into a trot."

> I was walking more rapidly than they but quietly; before I had gone ten steps they turned their heads (toward each other) and looked at me briefly and impersonally, like horses in a field, and faced front again; and this, I am almost certain, not through having heard sound of me, but through a subtler sense. By the time I raised my hand, they had looked away, and did not see me, though nothing in their looking had been quick with abruptness or surreptition. I walked somewhat faster now, but I was overtaking them a little slowly for my patience; the light would be right by now or very soon; I had no doubt Walker would do what he wanted whether we had 'permission' or not, but I wanted to be on hand, and broke into a trot.[58]

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57. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 36

58. While Agee often compares humans to animals, including the white sharecroppers, this moment is particularly worth mentioning as, it collects these two into a collective of animal behavior, as well as for the ways that it dehumanizes their fear as if it were instinctive rather than the result of an analysis of his perceived class and the threat of potentially racialized harm. See Jackson, Zakiyyah Iman, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World,* (New York: NYU Press, 2020.)

At this movement, the scene changes and slows as the woman finally breaks from the performance of normalcy into fear: she jerks as if she wants to run, skids, scrambles, and nearly falls, her partner reaches towards her and places himself protectively alongside her. Agee's description turns to apology as he describes approaching them carefully and intensely aware of his body:

> shaking my head, and raising my hand palm outward, I came up to them (not trotting) and stopped a yard short of where they, closely, not touching now, stood, and said, still shaking my head (No; no; oh, Jesus, no, no, no!) and looking into their eyes; at the man, who was not knowing what to do, and at the girl, whose eyes were lined with tears, and who was trying so hard to subdue the shaking in her breath, and whose heart I could feel, though not hear, blasting as if it were my whole body, and I trying in some fool way to keep it somehow relatively light, because I could not bear that they should receive from me any added reflection of the shattering of their grace and dignity, and of the nakedness and depth and meaning of their fear, and of my horror and pity and self-hatred; and so, smiling, and so distressed that I wanted only that they should be restored, and should know I was their friend, and that I might melt from existence: I'm *very sorry*! I'm *very* sorry if I scared you! I didn't mean to scare you at all. I wouldn't have done any such thing for anything.[59]

This apology proper begins as we might expect it to at this point, establishing and correcting the narrative of his intentions, the ways that his world and understanding of his actions could not possibly have included the kind of harm they just experiences. However, after a few more cycles of apology, the text and the performance stalls out:

> They just kept looking at me. There was no more for them to say than for me. The least I could have done was to throw myself flat on my face and embrace and kiss their feet. That impulse took hold of me so powerfully, from my whole body, not by thought, that I caught myself from doing it exactly and as scarcely as you snatch yourself from jumping from a sheer height: here, with the realization that it would have frightened them still worse (to say nothing of me) and would have been still less explicable; so that I stood and looked into their eyes and loved them, and wished to God I was dead. After a little the man got back his voice, his eyes grew a little easier, and he said without conviction that that was all right and that I hadn't scared her. She shook her head slowly, her eyes on me; she did not yet trust her voice. [60]

59. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 1960, 38
60. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 1960, 37-39.

Agee's retroactive discomfort with his own behavior forces him to a kind of neurotic and careful revision of every move he made, looking for the wrong one: he ultimately comes up empty except for the fact of his race, which he can name but cannot disavow or release—and ultimately ends up defending. This apology produces a fiction, the man receiving it gives Agee what he wants: a fiction, "he hadn't scared her," it's as if Agee wasn't there at all. But of course the woman has still been harmed—she has been startled, perceived a threat, and fell to the ground—and Agee has managed to apologize for everything except that. In the scene he ultimately capitulates to his "wish to clarify and set right," but not without encountering the truth how inadequate his apology is. Agee experiences the apology failing to account for the full scene of harm, but can't quite decide which harm he needs to address: his sense of himself as a good person, his relationship to these strangers, the woman, frightened, on the ground, or—perhaps—the historical violence of the racialized division he sees between them? The scene continues on the surface, but in stretching the apology for pages in a kind of retrospective projection of what he was thinking, he has become aware of the performance and of his impact on the scene qua his positionality as white, observing:

> … and they had to stand here now and hear what I was saying, because in that country no negro safely walks away from a white man, or even appears not to listen while he is talking, and because I could not walk away abruptly, and relieve them of me, without still worse a crime against nature than the one I had committed, and the second I was committing by staying, and holding them.[61]

Agee's awareness is split here between an involuntary relationship to his whiteness—as what causes the scene and holds them there—and his sense of himself as someone who tries his best to do good. He is unable to interact with them as individuals (this describes both his narrated experience of them in the text as metonymic, examples of a kind of life that is not the purview of his writing, and also his quite sensitive analysis of his structural impairment, that as he speaks to them he holds them captive.) He makes his decisions socially, engaging

61. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 1960, 37-39.

that perceived difference rather than scuffing it clean, and describes his choices as if he is passive in them:

> And so, and in this horrid grinning of faked casualness, I gave them a better reason why I had followed them than to frighten them, asked what I had followed them to ask; they said the thing it is usually safest for negroes to say, That they did not know; I thanked them very much, and was seized once more and beyond resistance with the wish to clarify and set right, so that again, with my eyes and smile wretched and out of key with all I was able to say, I said I was awfully sorry if I had bothered them; but they only retreated still more profoundly behind their faces, their eyes watching mine as if awaiting any sudden move they must ward, and the young man said again that that was all right, and I nodded, and turned away from them, and walked down the road without looking back.[62]

Here we see a return to or citation of the quotidian polite apology that Agee employed with the Gudgers, which he waxed eloquent about as a way of building community around mutual forgiveness: "I said I was awfully sorry if I had bothered them."[63] The apology here is eloquent but inscrutable, a gesture—consciously employed as such—that does a number of things in the social space, positive and negative. Practically, it remains on the surface of the interaction, citing politeness and releasing the couple forced bind of paying attention that was structured by the other apologies offered prior, by the displays of contrition that kept them there responsible for his feelings of guilt.

I turn now to a different text wherein Agee attempts to navigate a deep sense of complicity and guilt for racialized violence—and a desire to *do something about it*—while also articulating a sense of being trapped by the perceived largeness of the problem, and effectively unable to act at all. In the final days of June 1943 in New York, two years after publishing *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, James Agee saw the news coverage of several days of deadly rioting and protests that began in Belle Isle Park in Detroit in response to anti-

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62. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* 37-39.
63. In conversation, Jonathan Lear called this kind of apology a "cup of sugar apology" and pointed to it as a regionalism, and a kind of compulsive, emotionally light, pleasantry exchanged without very much meaning in the South. The exchange of apologies as a kind of world-building exercise, or a form of banter and testing—if I throw you this, will you throw it back to me—deserves much longer elaboration that I give it here.

black racism, poor living conditions, and unequal access to goods and services. Anti-black and anti-immigrant violence had increased in the city in the wake of the Great Migration, as black populations moved north out of the legally segregated Jim Crow South in order to take advantage of the wartime boom in employment and manufacturing—and found de-facto segregation, low-quality housing for inflated prices, and strikes from white workers opposing the employment and promotion of their black colleagues. The coverage of the events in *PM*, a liberal New York-based newspaper, was sensationalized under the striking capitalized headline *AMERICA, LOOK AT YOUR SHAME!* It included a number of photographs of the violence which the publication had secured exclusive rights to. Though disgusted by the combination of the headline and the magazine's exploitation of the photographs of violence against primarily black bodies for profit, "look at your shame, indeed," as Agee repeated with emphasis in his response.[64] James Agee was struck by one of the photographs in particular, which in Agee's perspective showed "that there were white people who were not only horrified by the riots but brave enough to do all they could for the Negroes" and wrote an essay under the same title as the headline.[65] Unpublished during his lifetime, Agee's "America, Look at Your Shame!" was eventually published in *Oxford American,* and narrates his engagement with the two white figures in the photograph:

> It showed two young men. They were holding up a terribly bleeding Negro man between them, and they looked at the camera as if they were at bay before a crowd of rioters, as perhaps they were not. The mixture of emotions on their faces was almost unbearable to keep looking at: almost a nausea of sympathy for the hurt man and for the whole situation; a kind of terror which all naturally unviolent people must feel in the middle of violence; *absolute self-forgetfulness*; a terrific, accidental look of bearing testimony—a sort of gruesome, over-realistic caricature; which was rather, really, the source of those attendant saints or angels who communicate with the world outside the picture in great paintings of crucifixions and exalted agonies.[66]

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64. James Agee, eds. Michael A. Lofaro and Hugh Davis, "America, Look At Your Shame!" Little Rock, Arkansas: *Oxford American.* Issue 43, January/February 2003.
65. James Agee, "America, Look At Your Shame!" 2003.
66. James Agee, "America, Look At Your Shame!" 2003. My emphasis.

Though he first feels ashamed at the way he usually would be called to dismiss such individuals if he met them on the street, "rather humbly 'artistic,' four-effish people, of whom you might think that any emotion they felt would be tainted, at least, with fancy sentimentality," he wonders, most of all, "whether, in such a situation, I would have been capable of that self-forgetfulness and courage."[67] The use of the black man's horrific injury as occasion to describe and beatify the two white individuals assisting him is startling and disturbing—bearing out James Crank's observation that, in almost all of Agee's prose, "the racialized, wounded body only presents an opportunity to connect somehow with his own identity."[68] And this fantasy of "self-forgetfulness" is in fact a way of eliminating histories—personal, political, inherited, narrated, etc. The essay continues to describe Agee's commute home on the crosstown bus, where he remarks on the sights and smells of the city, and admires a group of young, white, recently-enlisted soldiers holding court in the back of the bus.

> I specially noticed one quite strong young sailor, just across from me; a big boy, bigger than I am, a little; and because his eyes and his face had a good deal in them which as a child I used to fear, and have always been shy of, I now liked him particularly well. It was the sort of face which only turns up, so far as I know, in the South—heavy jaw, a slightly thin yet ornate mouth, powerful nose, blue-white, reckless, brutal eyes. I knew the voice just as well, and the special, rather crazy kind of bravery; they made me feel at once as isolated and as matchlessly at home as if I were back in the South again.[69]

> One was from Atlanta; the other knew Atlanta very well. They began testing each other out on the street names and bars, then on people, which did not go quite so well, and now and then the others chimed in with a wisecrack or an exclamation more simpleminded. They were happy as hell to run into each other like this—not even Viennese refugees can lay it on so thick, and enjoy it so much, as Southerners when they meet by surprise in an alien atmosphere. They were drunk, about as drunk as I was, and that helped; but they would have leaned on their dialects like trimming ship in a yacht-race even if they were sober. [70]

67. James Agee, "America, Look At Your Shame!" 2003.
68. Crank, James A. "James Agee and the Wounded Body." (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.) 2007.
69. James Agee, "America, Look At Your Shame!" 2003.
70. James Agee, "America, Look At Your Shame!" 2003.

The tensions of the United States entering WWII. Skewering, by narrating his own nostalgia, how easily the individuals bond over regional racism as a common thread by using various racialized slurs with more and more confidence.

> The word[s] cut across my solar plexus like a cold knife, and the whole bus, except for those two voices and the comments of their friends, was suddenly almost exploded by an immensely thick quietness. I glanced very quickly back; one of the soldiers met my eyes with eyes like hot iron, and two seats behind him sat a Negro (it is a word I dislike, but most of the others are still worse); sat a colored man of perhaps fifty, in nickel-rimmed glasses, a carefully starched white shirt, and a serge suit, managing so to use his eyes that you could see only the nickel rims and the lenses.
>
> I was trying to think what to do and what to say. I had, repeatedly, a very clear image of the moment I would get up, draw a standee aside, and hit the big young sailor who was, after all, very little bigger than me, as hard as I could on his bright, shaven jaw. I also had, repeatedly, the exact image of what would happen then. Singlehanded, that boy could tear me to pieces; what the crowd of them could do was a little beyond my imagination.
>
> I had the image of looking him in the eye; various ways, in fact, of looking him in the eye. One was the cold, controlled rage which is occasionally used to pick a fight and which my kind more occasionally uses to bring a sexual quarrel or an intellectual argument as near to nature as we are likely to go. One was the more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger look which is liable to compound some genuineness of feeling with plagiarisms from photographs of Lincoln and paintings of Veronica's veil; it is occasionally used, and effective, when somebody else's neurosis goes wild, but unless you are too good a human being to know you are using it, there is no uglier or more abject device of blackmail. One, worst of them all, was the blank eye which commits itself to nothing. But none of these, it was easy to see, were of any use unless I was ready to back them up physically, and I could hear, just as clearly as I could visualize, the phonograph-records of talk they would bring on; nigger-lover is the favorite word. I was also trying to think what to say; for I know from the past—and might have known by some of the Detroit photographs if I had thought of them just then—that their kind of talk and even action is sometimes completely quieted by the right kind of talking, and better quieted than into sullenness; quieted into deep abashment. I have a friend, a small and elderly man, who would have brought that effect almost instantly. But his size and his age would have been a part of it; still more, his perfect self-forgetfulness, his unquestioning intrepidity. I was neither small nor elderly, nor self-forgetful, nor intrepid, nor single-hearted in anyone of my perceptions or emotions; I was simply fumbling at words and knowledges: Look here… we've got to make this a free country where every human being can be well with every other human being, regardless of race, creed or color, we've got to make it a world like that. I don't believe you mean the harm you say, honestly, but you've got to realize it, you might as well be fighting for Hitler as to fight for this country feeling the way you do. [71]

71. James Agee, "America, Look At Your Shame!" 2003.

But he never says any of it—eventually, an elderly Black woman sits down in the back of the bus and says, concisely, the words that he had not been able to say.

> She was talking very little, and crying a little, and telling him, and the whole bus, that he ought to be ashamed, talking that way. People never done him no harm. Ain't your skin that make the difference, it's how you feel inside. Ought to be ashamed. Just might bout's well be Hitluh, as a white man from the South. Wearing a sailor's uniform. Fighting for your country. Ought to be ashamed.
>
> There was an immense relaxation in the quiet through the whole bus; but not in me. I felt in my own cheeks that tickling, uncontrollable, nauseating smile which is so liable to seize my face when I tell one close friend disastrous news of another.
>
> I remembered the photograph in PM, and looked sternly at the floor, with my cheek twitching.
>
> That evening I told of the whole thing, as honestly as I could, to several people who were down for drinks. They were quite shocked by it, and seemed also rather favorably stirred by my honesty. That embarrassed me a good deal, but not as painfully as I wish it might have, and I found their agreement that they would have done the same almost as revolting as my own performance in the doing of it, and in the telling.
>
> So now I am telling it to you.[72]

Indeed, this is precisely one of those moments that Toni Morrison catalogues in her book *Playing in the Dark,* where "black people ignite critical moments of discovery or change or emphasis in literature not written by them."[73] Agee's sense of his own guiltiness, but his inability to specify his personal complicity, leads him to confession with a group of his friends, unracialized. The kinds of failure of self-awareness that he toggles between in a moment that is almost exactingly committed to narrating his emotions, bodily positioning, and so on, brings him no further clarity nor does it settle his guilt, despite the agreement and absolution of his passivity. Rather, he finds that he has not yet found his audience. In telling it to us, he asks for us to not agree with him—to criticize him—but also, perhaps, to show him some other possibility that he had not yet seen. The problem exceeds the perspective and

72. James Agee, "America, Look At Your Shame!" 2003.
73. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination,* (New York: Vintage, Random House, 1993) viii.

possibilities seen by Agee himself and Agee's immediate social world, but perhaps the solutions might be found in a different audience.

V. Coda: Splitting, Self-Self, and Scale

It is the scale of address, and the sense of the relationship narrated between issuer and recipient that establishes the affective ground and orientation for future projects of action, material reparations, or future harm. I am interested in how the apology can fail to structure repair, how the emotions of guilt and shame about self, other, and situation that provoke a reparative gesture (and structure political movements of reform) might also structure a kind of harmful echo chamber within the contours of a form that promises to ameliorate or alter that situation. The apology, and the unbearable echo seems to crystallize the problem of the reparative crisis contemporary which wants to tell a history of what happened as if it might mark a turning point or a change, organized around the compulsions of narrative historicizing characterized by Saidiya Hartman as "the hope for social transformation in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, the quixotic search for a subject capable of world-historical action, and the despair induced by the lack of one."[74] In both works, *writing* these apologies and thus dwelling in these apologetic scenes prolongs the violence of the racially supremacist structure in which these apologies are set, both within the text, presumably, within the live scenes and situations that inspired these anecdotes.

In contrast, on the other face of the binarized apologetic experience, I turn now to Claudia Rankine's and Christina Sharpe's "documentary" recording of the phenomenon of white apologetics—whatever the apologizer's internal experience of time and avoidance,

74. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 14.

delaying or undoing or evading the impact of an action or an inheritance—occur in interpersonal time, at an individual scale, and in a form that invites a response (or refusal.) The monologic and non-reciprocal production of explanation (of self, other, and the relationship between them) that such apologies stage resonates particularly starkly in a text where the internal struggles of the manic apologizer are not available or prioritized. Instead, the apology as a social tool, one that prioritizes accommodating white discomfort and self-image, becomes apparent.[75] As such, pessimistically, these apologetics structure the apologizer as a bystander to their own actions, and optimistically, these texts both also allow the contours of the apologetic relationships to be inhabited and questioned, prolonged as an unsolved and unsolvable scene available for critique.

In *Ordinary Notes*, Christina Sharpe recounts a visit to the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, a monument erected as a space for reflection about racial terror in America. In the note, Sharpe narrates looking through what she calls the "graveyard section" of the memorial for lynching in a state of apprehensive anticipation that she might find kinship and connection to someone named in the memorial, a family member, when she is interrupted:

> A white woman approaches me tentatively. "Excuse me," she says. We are walking in the same direction. She is crying. I don't know at first that she is speaking to me, and I can't imagine what she wants. I turn partially and reluctantly toward her. "Excuse me," she says again, "I just want to say that I'm sorry…"—and she gestures toward where the monoliths are laid out like coffins—
>
> "I'm so sorry about all of this…"
>
> I do not reply.[76]

75. I discuss some of the possibilities, straightforward and subversive, in my chapter on drag apologies. I would be interested in defining a periodizing or regionalizing gesture to this particular kind of "manic white apologetics" I am diagnosing, in response to the wave of increasing collective apologies itself as something that scholars like Michel-Rolph Trouillot have read as transformative "late-modern rituals," as "a phenomenon unique to our times, which both reveals and impels new stakes in the construction of collective subject positions and identities—and therefore new takes on history." Trouillot, Michel-Rolphe. "Abortive Rituals: Historical Apologies in the Global Era." *Interventions.* 171-186.

76 Christina Sharpe, "Note 36, National Memorial for Peace and Justice, December 28, 2018, Montgomery, Alabama," *Ordinary Notes,* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023.)

There is so much more to say here about memorial gestures, interruption, the violent (re)creation of a political and racialized collective "us" through physical positioning and orientation towards whose collective past, and the taking up through a paired address an individually emotional reparative stance towards a large scale of history and symbolic spectacle of lynching. I want us to dwell in the question of the apology as an ambivalent reparative form that opens up all of these questions and makes them available, not foreclosed: one that can be successfully employed to a variety of ends, and the emotions of guilt and shame about self, other and situation that provoke a gesture (and structure political movements of reform) might also structure a kind of harmful echo chamber within the contours of a form that promises to ameliorate or alter that situation.

In response to a paper given at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association's series University Forum on Racism in America, where Sharpe relates this encounter in the graveyard, she is asked if she can say why she doesn't respond. She first states that she will not answer the question, because her work presented has already answered the question, but then she continues, articulating a new speaking position for herself and taking up a pedagogical stance:

> "My second answer is that I will step into my role as a teacher and elaborate. I tell the white psychoanalysts that I do not reply to the woman at the memorial because I am at first unsure that she is speaking to me. And really, she isn't. She is speaking into the space and in the direction of a Black person. But second, and more importantly, I do not reply to her because with her apology, she tries to hand me her sorrow and whatever else she is carrying, to super-add her burden to my own. It is not mine to bear. I have my own sorrows."[77]

Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* is a book that gives lyric accounting of the daily, deadly lived contours of Black life under conditions of white supremacy, and strikingly, it is also a book filled with white people apologizing. Though the critical and scholarly literature in response to *Citizen* is copious and contentious, there has not yet been any

77. Christina Sharpe, "Note 37, New York City, February 8, 2019," *Ordinary Notes*.

sustained engagement with her treatment of apologies, or analysis of her work in terms of its preoccupation with and critique of the performance of the apology in a racialized encounter. There are six poems included in *Citizen* which explicitly center on a scene of apology—and more than ten if we broaden the sense of the term apology to include recognitions of error, confessions of guilt, or performances of contrition and retraction that do not involve the usual vocabulary of saying "sorry." Following the now copious research and writing on microaggressions and the violence at work in small-scale racist social interactions, a number of Rankine's poems hinge on moments where the illusion of common experience or understanding falls abruptly away across a racialized interaction.[78] This movement is affected by her use of a relational second-person "you" in many of the lyrics. Poet Evie Shockley observes that this "you" seems "to invite — almost demand — white cross-racial identification. What results may be less a challenge to the coherence of the lyric speaker than to the coherence of many readers."[79] White readers, then, are invited second-personally into a first-personal lyric position that that destabilizes their sense of themselves: they can, and cannot comfortably, appropriate the racialized experiences narrated about the "you" in these lyrics.

> A friend argues that Americans battle between the "historical self" and the "self self." By this she means you mostly interact as friends with mutual interest and, for the most part, compatible personalities; however, sometimes your historical selves, her white self and your black self, or your white self and her black self, arrive with the full force of your American positioning. Then you are standing face-to-face in seconds that wipe the affable smiles right from your mouths. What did you say? Instantaneously your attachment seems fragile, tenuous, subject

78. Microaggressions, a term first coined by psychiatrist Chester Middlebrook Pierce in the 1970s in order to distinguish between what he called "macroaggressions" or overt and explicit acts of racially motivated violence. This distinction/dismissal might possibly be psychoanalytically relevant to discussion of the "size" of objects, e.g. Piaget's account of space-centered mental processes or Freud's distinction between thing-representation or world-representation. Derald Wing Sue and Lisa Beth Spanierman. *Microaggressions in Everyday Life.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. 2020.
79. Evie Shockley, "Race, Reception, and Claudia Rankine's 'American Lyric'" in "On Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric*: A Symposium" Part I. LA: Los Angeles Review of Books. https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/reconsidering-claudia-rankines-citizen-an-american-lyric-a-symposium-part-i/

> to any transgression of your historical self. And though your joined personal histories are supposed to save you from misunderstandings, they usually cause you to understand all too well what is meant.[80]

These scenes that draw out explicitly "what is meant" often read like confessions or legal defense speeches: both transgressive speakers, and those who were harmed, produce accounts of what happened, insist on an interpretation, or dwell in the disconnect of not understanding "what happened" or why. The stutter experienced in the engagement between historical selves—and self-selves—marks a failure of scale of address. The following poem features an interaction that can be read as a kind of apology in that it attempts to account for an error or oversight by providing an explanation.

> In line at the drugstore it's finally your turn, and then it's not as he walks in front of you and puts his things on the counter. The cashier says, Sir, she was next. When he turns to you he is truly surprised.
>
> Oh my God, I didn't see you.
>
> You must be in a hurry, you offer.
>
> No, no, no, I really didn't see you.[81]

We read this vignette in the context of the other moments of invisibility included in the book—including "a close friend who early in your friendship, when distracted, would call you by the name of her black housekeeper,"[82] and the experience of a colleague who "calls you by the name of another woman you work with."[83] This apology by way of explanation does, in one sense, serve to close the scene. Seemingly in contrast to Rankine's observation that one of the questions she most often hears is: "'How did that happen?' as it relates to mind-numbing moments of injustice," this individual seems to have a precise account of

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80. Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric*. (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014) 14
81. Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyri*c, 77.
82. Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyri*c, 7
83. Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyri*c, 43

what, and how, the violence that he committed happened.[84] The error he sees and articulates is impersonal and complete: he didn't have the adequate information to act appropriately, and therefore acted as if that information (there is a person in my visual field) were not available to him. His restatement of the fact that he did not see her as adequate explanation in itself—and refusal of the offer of an explanation *for* the act of not seeing—reveals a deeper disconnect from another level of the violence of the scene, and what Nick Smith might call the failure to apologize for "the right wrong."[85] In apologizing for not seeing her and therefore cutting her off, he opens up the further wrong of not-having-seen, as waiting-in-line or otherwise. That wrong remains as he stays on the level of the error he sees and, having absolved himself of guilt and repaired his sense of himself, he can move on from—but the apology reveals an extant responsibility that he cannot quite efface. The awareness of the deeper wrong—evinced by your "offer" of another explanation—stays an open wound. From his perspective, this apology by way of explanation functions as closure. Rather than correcting the situation for the person he has wronged, he is correcting *her* misperception of him as 'someone who might rudely cut the line at the pharmacy' by saying that he did not in fact see her, and therefore did not 'cut the line' or do anything not in keeping with his understanding of himself. This gesture turns "her invisibility to him" into a previously constitutive statement of world, an attribute of hers for which she bears responsibility rather than an epistemic inequality or a blindness on his part: I did not see you there, it was as if you did not exist. Rankine takes up this uncomfortable burden-shifting more explicitly in another anecdote about a white colleague failing to differentiate between "you" and the other Black worker in the office. The white colleague sends an apology for the encounter afterwards:

> Yes, and in your mail the apology note appears referring to "our mistake." Apparently, your own invisibility is the real problem causing

84. Claudia Rankine. Interview: "Claudia Rankine by Lauren Berlant," *BOMB Magazine*, October, 2014.
85. Nick Smith, "Apologies as Remedies/Apologies as Weapons: Considerations for the Trudeau Administration," *The Ethics of Apology: Interdisciplinary & International Perspectives*, Public Lecture, 2017.

> her confusion. This is how the apparatus she propels you into begins to multiply in meaning.[86]

Certainly, the apparatus that the second-person "you" is propelled into could be read as the superstructure of white supremacy, but it is also manifestly the apparatus of the apology itself and the vision of the world and the event within it that the apology accounts for. In this vignette, the apology is establishing a whole host of dynamics and performing a number of functions beyond the straightforward performative of apologizing for a wrong. The possessive "our" aligns both the woman mistaken with the woman who made the mistake on one side of the apology, as accomplices in the error, and it renegotiates the temporal significance of the action by writing that "mistake" as apologized-for and therefore past and perhaps even forgiven. The apology as it unfolds also serves to minimize the discomfort of apologizer and her disorienting experience of the differences in her perspective. This seems an experience of exactly what Shockley called a "challenge" to the coherent self-understanding of the white speaker—and reader—smoothly negotiated back into comfortable non-confrontation via a multi-valent apology.

It is, I think, fascinating that the introduction of the ideal of the apology—as an interaction that might repair a harm—and a real attentiveness to the ways that it failed to achieve its ends, led Agee in that instance to a sense of his positionality. In apologizing during the scene for everything *but* his whiteness, he was able to place himself retrospectively in his positional context of the violence of white supremacy which allowed him entrance to that space and gave him the confidence to stop whomever he wanted on the street, but overwhelmed by guilt, he was unable to actually speak to the individuals he harmed. When read alongside Rankine's surface descriptions of white violence from within the explicit perspectival limitations of her positionality and from within the Black positioned

86. Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyri*c, 43.

experience, we can see how apologies function most powerfully and often *not* as tools of closure. This realization is, of course, retrospective and dissatisfying. In the moment, nothing happened, and the apology he ultimately issued was one that did not apologize for the "right wrong." Rather, it was one that allowed the scene to go on for his own comfort and, nominally, the projected comfort of the people he had harmed. Stringing together the phrases actually uttered aloud, one has the feeling that such an event from the perspective of the two people harmed in it could have been re-written in a few stark lines of poetry.

Indeed, Rankine and Sharpe's concise deployment of lyric and note—respectively—work against the indulgent fantastic sprawling of Agee's disarticulated modernisms, and puncture the manic splitting of white apologies for race that speak from an individual perspective to a recipient, racialized, who is utterly eclipsed and made generic and symbolic by the apologizer's recognition of their difference (and refusal to understand themselves as correspondingly white.) Where Agee is propelled into prolixity by his apologies, and uses the structure of the apology to provide an account of himself an individual in relation to structural violence, on the occasion of his particular interlocutor's presence, the narrated reception of these apologies reveals the disconnect at the level of identification—the historical self, and the self self.

There are two different kinds of ethical conundrums here: (1) Agee's attempt to name the extent of his guilt, but (2) what he has to change is so enormous (his individual participation in whiteness certainly, but also the structure of whiteness that he inhabits) and so is unable from his position as an individual agent to identify what he should do. It blinds Agee to the his inability to engage the person in front of him—who he articulates in increasingly abstract and racialized terms as they participate in, or represent for him, a genre of racialized person. The large scale wrong of white supremacy that structures the entire scene, which precedes him and exceeds him, is so disorienting (through time, across many

bodies, across broader senses of self at a social scale) that it eclipses and makes inaccessible the smaller immediate harm of the two people in front of him. The challenge for Agee as individual is to remain clear-eyed enough about his inability, to learn how to deal with not being able to apologize for the big thing—not trying to eradicate its existence. He is not going to be able to do much of anything to ameliorate that wrong qua individual: both parties feel guilt and harm far greater than what he is able to apologize for. Watching Agee apologize in this text is like watching him back away from an ever-more colossal and unwieldy pile of rubble—the histories of violence in which he is variously identified and implicated—which he has inherited a relationship to, rather like Walter Benjamin's reading of the Angel of History in Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*:

> His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his winds with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.[87]

The ineffectual and backwards-looking angel is pinned to the past by his sense of the impossible scale of the damage, and by further melancholy and impossible desire to intervene not by repair but by reversal: to awaken the dead as if they had not died, to make whole what had been smashed, to make it so that the damage had not happened.[88] This angel, and in his apologetics, Agee, is also hampered by his gaze's amalgamation of various strands of causation, collaboration, genealogy and identification into a single history—narration—of unimaginable catastrophe. As the angel is only blown forward, overwhelmed as witness, the

87. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections,* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969, 1942,) 257-258.
88. One can almost imagine the Angel of History, were he to speak, shaking his head and saying, "I'm sorry, I'm so very sorry," but in the way that one says "I'm sorry" to someone who has disclosed a personal tragedy, meaning, I regret that this occurred. This might be a way forward, teasing out the differences between saying "I'm sorry" in a symbolic way relating to a harm you did not cause, but regret, and "I'm sorry" in response to a wrong for which you are responsible.

documentarian points the camera and the journalist describes, but in these moments of harm Agee is almost overwhelmed by the concatenating enormity of one single catastrophe of history he finds himself at the node of, which prevents him from engaging the immediate scene. There is no way forward to answering the three questions that Henri Rey suggests we ask of a reparative impulse: "What is it that has to be repaired? How was it damaged? How is the damage to be repaired?"[89] Instead there is an ever-expanding sense of a failure to locate historical harm, and synecdochal chains of analysis, pages and pages of apologies. Agee's apologetic positioning sets it up so that he experiences self-obliteration is the only answer, when in fact there are concrete material things that could be done, such as speaking up on the bus. And this, perhaps, illuminates the hopeful edge of Agee's mania. In his case studies, Rey marked that the usually perniciously "manic" belief that one might be able to successfully repair something broken can also lead one to turn towards others.

> "This group showed very clearly that each member did not bring only themselves to treatment, but that they were primarily concerned, at a borderline conscious-unconscious level, with damaged inner objects where successful treatment was vital to their welfare. They could not do it without help but had kept these inner objects going in the hope that help would come one day. Every patient in the group had been seeking treatment for years previously. When those inner objects become alive in a session the therapist is confronted with a very strange feeling. Who is really there? Who are the real patients forming the group? To whom is one talking?"[90]

Rey's example of treatment—and those compelled to bring their mistakes into community—is not one that shows a rise into clarity, but rather, a progress of realizing that one is confused and unable to act as one would like.

> In previous papers I have extensively described the efforts of those patients to do concrete repair, that is, reconstruct the object as it was before damage, and at the level of space-centred thought characteristic of this level, as well as their attempts at pseudo-reparation (like manic reparation), and these defences that are used after failure to achieve reparation… Defences must not be confused as being the real problem, which is not knowing how to repair (Rey, 1986a).[91]

89. Henri Rey, "Reparation," 211.
90. Henri Rey. "Reparation," *Universals of Psychoanalysis.* 460.
91. Henri Rey. "Reparation," *Universals of Psychoanalysis.* 462.

Like the promises of psychoanalysis as a therapeutic endeavor, the apology itself is exegetical—and in its best forms, allows an individual to come to terms with what is actually happening "in the room" between communicative individuals, and then be enabled to make decisions moving forward in live time that are interpersonal rather than fantasies of omnipotence or control. However, in some situations of harm the individual cannot situate themselves comfortably or fully as the actor in the full scale of harm that needs to be apologized for, because history is an actor here too through the aggregation of massively scaled violence. When a problem overwhelms us, first-personally, we take it to others. So Agee writes his novel. As Rey remarked of a patient, Miss B: "She had kept her mother alive not only through guilt alone, but by herself being alive and identified with that inner mother. She could not repair mother but had brought her to treatment to have others do what she could not do."[92] In as far as there is sincere human hopefulness in Agee's apologizing, indeed, in the various wreckage of history in which he understands himself to be caught, it is in his presenting it to an audience as unresolved, as unsatisfactory. The apologies here, ambivalently, prolong the scenes of harm that he does not yet know how to heal, or indeed, whether he can or should.

Ultimately, through these apologies, Agee figures himself as a kind of pacified (and inactive) witness to the conglomeration of overwhelming historical catastrophe, a pose and scale of interaction which prevents him from engaging the immediate scene. He tells a story about his relationship to others instead of actually relating to the individuals in front of him, instead of allowing them to respond—where that turns, it produces a difficulty when he uses this relational form, apologizing. However, through the ambit of his authorial project the past that he puts himself in first-personal apologetic relationship to expands beyond what he himself can—and he reveals the ambivalently compositional (creative, narrative) form of

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92. Henri Rey. "Reparation," *Universals of Psychoanalysis.* 457-458.

apologizing, and the ways that it accounts for and encapsulates a present perspectival wrong in relation to the speakers and those harmed. Apologies as reparative tools might never, in fact, achieve reparation (they are importantly and emphatically, after all, distinct from and inadequate to material gestures such as economic and social *reparations*). I do want to argue that this is the way in which they can be most useful: as articulations of a harm left unrepaired, and as they capture a first-personal present response (flawed, evasive, or otherwise) to the violences of history.

CONCLUSION:

A MISSED STITCH

> That speech is not everything is true; that speechlessness may be forced, that speech is difficult, is something else. (Sometimes, as with excuses or apologies, words are essentially *owed.* Flowers are not a substitute. This suggests a subject on its own.)
>
> — Stanley Cavell, "Passionate and Performative Utterance: Morals of Encounter" [1]

The process of writing this work began with a dissatisfaction in the public and academic discourses around apologies, namely, that they are often judged by a rubric of whether or not they successfully achieved positively inflected goals of healing, closure, and the reversing or undoing of injuries, when I saw them *just as often* involved in the work of opening up those wounds through articulation—to both good and ill effect. Rather than participating in a discourse of evaluation of apologies that taxonomizes the desirable and undesirable, or that puts forward regulative or evaluative ideals (often paired with illustrative counter-examples) based on assessing the sincerity or authenticity of the speaker, I suspended evaluative criteria and tried to attend to what apologies do, as well as what we want them to do. I assembled an archive of apologies—only a few of which I have dealt with here in the dissertation itself—including what some might call "limit cases" or deviations from our expectations, but which also include examples that make beautiful use of the affordances of the genre to do work that allows growth and change, but may not look very much at all like healing. I identified three component parts of apologies: identification, narration, and transformation, and reading in the context of those three components allowed me to begin to trace across these examples some of the reasons that apologies can facilitate such truly potent

1. Stanley Cavell, "Passionate and Performative Utterance: Morals of Encounter," *Contending with Stanley Cavell,* Ed. Russell B. Goodman, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005,) 191.

human connection and healing, how their lack can be felt, and how they themselves can cause harm—and not just because they fail to produce forgiveness. At the end of the document, I find myself not in possession of any satisfying conclusions to the question, *what is an apology?* Instead, I find myself at the beginning of asking several new questions around topics that suggest whole subjects on their own. In lieu of a conclusion, I want to trace for you some of the questions that I am now left with, and to point in some of the directions that my research has indicated there might be questions worth asking in the future.

I believe that apologies—as a ritual of undoing—are a particularly powerful and uniquely human endeavor. There is something moving to me, inescapably bold, about recognizing and acting on the idea that we need to stop the flow of time forward and go back to the past because we left something behind. There is something humble about the taking the responsibility of articulating what happened, of doing so in relationship to another person who you have harmed, and opening yourself to their response, whatever it is. I think that at their best, apologies engage our creative capacities to imagine otherwise, though apologies are not the only contemporary rituals of undoing, regret, and change that happen in conversation with others. Transitional justice practices, abolitionist frameworks for dealing with harm in community accountability, reparative and anti-reparative psychoanalytic models, a true examination of apologetics—in the capacious sense that I would like to give that field of study—requires an expansion of the archive to include examples that fit my formal criteria of inclusion but which do not necessarily call themselves apologies. As Layli Long Soldier wrote in her fourth "Resolution" included in her book, *Whereas*: "in many Native languages, there is no word for 'apologize.' The same goes for 'sorry.' This doesn't mean that in Native communities where the word 'apologize' is not spoken, there aren't definite actions for admitting and amending wrongdoing."[2] In particular, positing that acts of

2. Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas,* 92.

acknowledgement and memorialization might be productively reframed as *apologetic* opens up a number of venues of comparative research around practices such as contemporary land acknowledgments.

The slipperiness of land acknowledgments, often critiqued as inert platitudes rendered meaningless through sheer ubiquity, as performances which serve mostly to educate settlers about the historical facts of colonialism, or as tools for assuaging settler discomfort by invisibilizing settler and institutional complicity by serving as alibi or excuse, are often also leveraged at apologies. Both forms imply an eruption of the past into a split present, between the speakers and their positions, and a shared and ongoing future. A land acknowledgment is—and is not—an apology in that it does not refer to a past, but rather affirms something past as present, it thus loosens the unquestionable hold of the actions of the present (the work of a university, our sitting at our desks oriented towards one particular screen or book or task and thus away from other actions and possibilities) as a choice that might be otherwise in that it takes place on the land. This apology cracks the concrete. It is a critical, expository tool. The land, the where, persists through its names, through the different tools of time and a place that are used to capture it. There are indigenous methods of acknowledgment, welcome, and acceptance: these are distinct from settler narratives of pastness.[3]

In the course of my research, I have also introduced two novel ideas—which I hope in time to flesh out into more usable concepts. Namely: the idea of white "manic reparative" apologetics, and the idea of the "structurally apologetic subject position." I hope to develop an account of the manic reparative, and to weave a thread more carefully between psychoanalytic accounts of reparation that are critical of the reparative and those that hold it up as an analytic and ethical imperative. I believe that this concept of the manic reparative

3. Outside of the confines of this dissertation, it would be worthwhile to consider in this light a broader comparative context of land acknowledgments and methods of engagement of place and histories of occupancy, stewardship, usage, and relation to land, particularly the Australian paired rituals of "Acknowledgment of Country," and "Welcome to Country."

apology will also allow me to trace out the temporality of the form of the apology (in the ways we see characters using the form in order to arrest and manage as-past ongoing harm) and the circuits of connection between individual identity and identification with harm done.

The argument I am hoping to move this towards would form a basis for critiquing approaches that think of the reparative as an entire good—such as Robin DiAngelo's descriptive project in White Fragility—which are more interested in preserving the scene with a kind of Goffmanian interest in strategizing avoidance processes such as "saving face" through what might be considered obsessional reparative gestures that attempt to "undo" or erase the immediate harm, and the continuing harmful situation of racialized violence. I hope to examine how literary explorations of apologies deployed as "corrective processes" under the auspices of producing affective and narrative closure to the awkwardness of racialized scenes reveal the limitations of the apology from within a perspective of self-effacing whiteness. The book that I hope to work on in the coming years, *In Spite of our Knowledge of Our Own Meanings: Race, Guilt, Anger and Apologies in 20th and 21st Century American Literature*, will focus on apologies and apologetic articulations of race relations in modernist novels and reformist documentary literature from the 1940s to the contemporary moment. I hope to support and contextualize the historical dimensions of the ideas discussed in my third chapter with a richer historical context of documentary literature, including Richard Wright's *12 Million Black Voices* and Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White's *You Have Seen Their Faces,* as well as modernist novels featuring apologies (and refusals to apologize) as navigational tools for a racialized American social context such as William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*! and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.

I also plan to develop my concept of the structurally apologetic subject position, with attention to the material circumstances that structure such expectations and their subversion. Three proposed chapters which exist in their nascent stages but are not included here will

hopefully be a part of this work: “Eco-Apologetics from the Giving Tree to Carbon-Offsets,” “Palinodes, Transphobia, and the Fear of the ‘Irreversible,’” and “Apostrophe and Imagined Apologies: Public Apologies for Sexual Harassment and Gendered Violence in Isobel O’Hare’s Erasures and V’s (formerly Eve Ensler’s) The Apology.” In each of these chapters, an apology—or apologetic structure—brings material circumstances, and structures of violence and exploitation, into public discourse. This particular possibility is where I cannot help but be persistently hopeful about what apologies can achieve, even as I tend to be rather critical of the apologies that I read in this dissertation. If apologies are often expected to repair, but materially achieve quite a lot outside of that parameter, bringing what has been broken or divided into relief *as having been broken*, that is a powerful tool for bringing individuals into conversation around possibilities of change. Apologies bring ways of relating into relief, and in my perspective, can be used to structure thick and ethical relations to alterity or difference without forcing repair by effacing that difference or break, or, as Avgi Saketopolou describes of her psychoanalytic practice, difference, trauma, and harm are “not a hurdle to be cleared but the very site of our ethical engagement.”

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