LISTENING INCOMMENSURABLY:

RECKONING WITH SEXUAL VIOLENCE THROUGH CRITICAL GEOGRAPHIC PERFORMANCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY U.S. AND CANADA

A dissertation submitted by

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation argues that performances—such as songs, oral histories, and legal testimonies—are maps, which powerfully connect the survival of sexual violence with interrogations of place in the U.S. and Canada. I analyze how artists—namely, Nina Simone, Tanya Tagaq, and Nona Faustine—recruit sound to imagine more rigorous and capacious listening and narrative practices. I contend that these artists are critical geographers who instruct their audiences to *listen incommensurably,* or with a disciplined attention to context and relation in lieu of easy comparison and empathy.

My first chapter centers Nina Simone, who I suggest cultivates her critical geographic practice through performance strategies, including shifting subjectivities, citation, audience interplay, and refusal. Simone presents a century-spanning map of Black women's sexual violation within U.S. histories of African enslavement, exceeding and critiquing the cataclysmic "moment" of the Civil Rights era. My next case turns to Inuk throat singer Tanya Tagaq, whom I position as redefining sexual, sonic, and spatial sovereignty through my readings of her performances and her book *Split Tooth*. I foreground Tagaq as challenging the "I" or individual often prioritized in colonial narratives of sexual violence through her multi-sensorial performances. My final chapter examines how Nona Faustine's *White Shoes* critiques productions of power in contemporary New York through explicit provocations of the city's histories of African enslavement sexual violation; I suggest that Faustine traces an alternate lineage of photography, portraiture, and landscape art through her citation of Black feminist performance strategies, particularly through her invocation and reappropriation of posture.

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INTRODUCTION

Beginnings That Precede Me

Where does a story begin? The fiction is that they do, and end, rather than that the stuff of a story is just a cup of water scooped from the sea and poured back in.

- Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby*

Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world […] Even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.

- Toni Morrison*, Beloved*

Michel DeCerteau once proclaimed that "what the map cuts up, the story cuts across," but stories are maps, too, and they guide their readers across terrains in ways that demand they listen more fully. My understanding of maps as more than two-dimensional objects began in two of my most profound childhood classrooms: my dad's office and my grandma's living room. My family runs a small trucking company in Delaware, Ohio, just north of Columbus. Growing up, I spent my afternoons at "the shop," our family shorthand for the business's auto garage and office. On summer afternoons, my sweaty legs stuck to the vinyl orange chairs in my dad's office while he taught me about Ohio's interstates. His hand followed bright-red lines on the sprawling atlases that papered the wood-paneled walls. "Here's where we are now, and here's the salt yard," he'd say, tracing the path. "Here's grandma's house, and here is home." His finger slid back to the country, pointing towards the Olentangy and Scioto rivers, the borders that framed my universe.

During our long talks in that office and drives out on the road, my dad instilled in me a belief that it is the people of a place, and your memories of it, that make its meaning more than any official map or infrastructure. My grandma's maps were a different kind, but just as instructive. Sitting in her carmine-red living room, twin cups of black coffee pressed between our palms, she recounted her Kentucky youth, how it was scored by sexual violence of men in her family and community's circle, although she wouldn't use those words. These men would follow her into her adolescent home and often arrive unannounced. As a girl, my grandma invented new routes to elude them. She cut through yards and fences coming back from school, earning a barbed-wire scar below her left eye. She lived with her aunt and uncle, and during family gatherings she hid in her aunt's bedroom, shivering and covered in patchy, red hives—an anxious affliction that she passed down to me.

My grandma's experiences strikingly mirror my own, and I know that's why she tells me them. They are survival strategies and worry-stones for solace. Trauma transforms your maps in memory and movement: places that used to be safe become not so, literally and in your reflections. Between those two Ohio rivers that were once my whole world, there are now houses I will not enter and intersections that I avoid. Fear and violation cause you to change roads, if you are privileged enough to be able. And sometimes, you may still have to walk the same paths, unable to fully leave the places that wound you, but you will surely walk differently and with vigilant considerations.

It was through my grandma that I first learned that *where* people tell stories is as important as *how* we tell them. It is the *where* of a story that provides clues to its stakes and investments, the embodied histories that live inside of it. My grandma told me stories of her youth only when we were alone together, in the spaces between armchairs in her living room or

walking side-by-side in her backyard, following the path of the honeysuckles' bloom. In other words, we spoke only in spaces where we would not be overheard. As I began to make sense of my own experiences, the terror and shame burrowed inside my body, I shared my stories in similarly intimate environments: the office hours with teachers who truly saw me; the dwindling moonlit hours of wine nights with close friends and fellow survivors; on the page, within the words I wrote plainly and read with devotion; and in music, the sounds that sang into my ears and rearranged my thoughts.

Through writing and music, especially, I learned to hear my own perspective and listen beyond it. The word for the inner ear is *labyrinth:* the stories that we hear literally wind their way through a complex maze of canals, and we meet them halfway when we decipher them. Acts of navigation—of movement and meeting—are woven into the biological fabric of what it means to listen to another's story. Cultural critic and essayist Rebecca Solnit, quoted in the epigraph above, writes that "to hear is to let a sound wander all the way through the labyrinth of your ear; to listen is to travel the other way to meet it."[1] Solnit poses empathy as the process of deciphering "the data that comes through the labyrinths of the senses […] as though another person's life was also a place you could travel to." Yet, my dissertation considers how traveling into another's life is impossible because no person navigates places in the same way. Presuming that you might understand a person's relationship to place through the stories they tell is dangerous in its erasure of difference. Rather, for me, it is in the process of actively listening to others' stories—and in speaking my own and having them repeated back to me—that I continue to learn that while my catastrophes are personal, they are not unique. Incommensurability, then, is perhaps a more precise framework than empathy when it comes to "entering" the lives of

[1] Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby* (Penguin Books, 2013), 193.

others. *Listening incommensurably* instructs me how to move *across* space—to not *cut up* the map, but rather pay serious consideration to its grooves, details, memories, sounds, layers, and textures.[2]

My grandma's stories remind me of a quote by memoirist Sarah M. Broom, whose *The Yellow House* provides an example of a story that maps *across*. Broom's book remembers her New Orleans's family home after it was washed away by what she calls "the water." "My mother is always saying, *Begin as you want to end,*" Broom writes.[3] "But my beginning precedes me. Absences allow us one power over them: They do not speak a word […] Still, they hover, pointing fingers at our backs. No place to go now but into deep ground."[4] *Begin as you want to end.* I want to heed Broom's directive and delve "into deep ground," to the places where artists speak back to imposed absences: for Broom, that absence is her family's house: destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, the home is now simply a lot of land, "a scab of green" to the aerial photographer. To Broom's family, however, it is no mere speck or site of ruin, but a host of memories: a plot of land that is a portal into familial histories, lore, and strategies of survival.[5] To enter Broom's yellow house is to move across New Orleans through time, rather than to survey the city through a singular and calculable vantage point. "The facts of the world before me inform, give shape and context to my own life," she shares.[6] "The Yellow House was witness to our lives. When it fell down, something in me burst."[7] When the material structures that house a person's reality and history are gone—either due to time or force, or some mixture of both—

[2] My dissertation advisor, Lilian Mengesha, meditates beautifully on "across as method" in her forthcoming monograph *Critical Dreaming: Feminist Performances Across the Indigenous Americas* (New York: New York University Press, Forthcoming 2025).
[3] Sarah Broom, *The Yellow House* (New York: Grove Atlantic, 2019), 9.
[4] Broom, *Yellow House,* 9.
[5] Broom, *Yellow House,* 9.
[6] Broom, *Yellow House,* 9.
[7] Broom, *Yellow House,* 9.

the worlds they have crafted remain in the body, and in stories and memories, or through what Toni Morrison theorized as "rememory" in *Beloved.*[8]

When I first read Broom's words, I was reminded of the places that come to me now only in dreams: the ones where I can no longer go, or which are forever transformed in the aftermath of assault. For me, living through rape—through what I once thought of as personal catastrophe—has meant mapping the places that I have grown up alongside, where I have been cared for and wounded, through my own memory, language, and movement. My survival of sexual violence is not the same as Broom's family's loss of their house, but both experiences mark a *home* irrevocably altered, be it brick-and-mortar or body. Each of our stories could easily be subsumed into a narrative of isolated catastrophe, and yet Broom resists the latter framework throughout her book and through her phrase: "My beginning precedes me." Following Broom, I go into the *deep ground* of that which precedes me and contrasts the shapes and contexts of my world: I enter by navigating across the specificities woven into my own and others' experiences.

My dissertation argues that the racialized, gendered, and classed particularities of sexual violence, while incommensurate—as in, not to be compared—must be read in relationship to one another. I advocate for *listening incommensurably* as a method that intervenes in dominant culture's reductive, and ultimately harmful, narratives of sexual violence, which contain rape to an isolated catastrophe with no relationship to the maintenance of white supremacist and settler-colonial space. My project is fundamentally a study on the relationship between sexual violence and geography; my investment begins with my own survival, which has meant learning to love the places that raised me with an asterisk. It has meant fearing my own body and not feeling safe

[8] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Penguin Random House, 1987; repr., Vintage Books, 2004), 43. Citations refer to the Vintage Books edition.

inside of it.[9] This is my project's catalyst, however, my perspectives on sexual violence are restricted to my own specific histories and as a white settler, they are coated in my own privileges. Dominant media representations of rape often reduce its impacts to white female individuals, thus consolidating longer patterns of violence into a singular story, erasing rape's ongoing role as a strategic tool of colonization and white supremacy that is profoundly tied to land ownership. While my personal histories motivate and inform my work, my scholarly concentration is how Black and Native artists and storytellers make visible enduring relationships to place and imagine cartographies rooted in consent instead of property and force. I locate the "imposed absences" in dominant narratives of rape and place in contemporary U.S. and Canada and analyzes how artists—including Nina Simone, Tanya Tagaq, and Nona Faustine—speak back to the individualistic myth of rape as something that mostly happens to white women, alone in dark alleys, which can be contained to one particular traumatic moment. Simone, Tagaq, and Faustine instead place sexual abuse within particular historical and place-based contexts to illustrate that rape, rather than an isolated catastrophe, is intimately and acutely entwined within chronic conditions of violence. These artists' attention to particularity, through the instructive methodology I frame as "listening as incommensurable practice," complicates dominant narratives of sexual violence and its relationship to landscape. It also expands the metrics researchers might use to understand multi-leveled systems of domination as intertwined: specifically, these performance artists challenge the "survey" as the best, or most illuminating and informative, instrument for appraising crisis.

[9] If my body is my home, intruders have broken inside of it and on some days, I compulsively check the locks, attempting to regain control, and then on others, I leave the door wide-open, willing the worst to happen again as proof I deserve it. There are the hard-won moments, however, when I slide the window open and breathe the night air while I read; or sometimes, I sit on my porch, deep in conversation with friends, observing the street in front of me, bolstered by the perspective that comes from listening to others deeply and paying attention.

Against Narrative Catastrophe: Beyond the Survey and Singular Story

Surveys of violation both spectacularize pain and obscure its specificities. I am interested in the double-meaning of "survey" here: surveys are instruments for measuring data points, but also for parceling land and claiming it. How do attempts to control and own the land connect to questions of rape and power? Certain details escape surveys' grasps; the most embodied and intricate elements of a story, issue, or terrain that are too difficult—too profound in their particularities—to name evade the survey's broad sweep.

The artists that I analyze find a balance between particularity and context through performance methods including citation, contention, sound, and refusal. Simone, Tagaq, and Faustine reveal that some details resist the surveyor's capture out of necessity: to survey is to evaluate, often in pursuit of conclusion or total comprehension; a close cousin to "surveil," it implies an overarching and totalizing gaze. These artists recruit performance as an embodied tactic to critique cursory readings of place and its relationships to sexual violence; reveling simultaneously in granularity and perspective, their work tracks the beginnings that precede them and which characterize their navigations of places. Throughout my dissertation, I detail how performers—who can be thought of as non-traditional cartographers—reject and complicate maps that rely on a rhetoric of ownership, control, and categorization, instead favoring to craft ones that encourage relation, agency, and transformation.

My definition of rape aligns with lawyer and scholar Sarah Deer's (Creek), for whom rape "encompass[es] a constellation of crimes that involve the abuse of sexual power, even when not overtly physically violent."[10] Like Deer, I refuse to hierarchize rape, believing *all* rape to be

[10] Sarah Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xix.

an "intimate violation of the highest order."[11] As I explore at-length in my second chapter, I follow Deer's claim that "rape is a fundamental result of colonialism," explicitly tied to and subsisting from settler-colonial law and culture.[12] Rather than any individual's crisis "event," the catastrophe of rape is foundational to the violent "structure" of settler-colonialism, echoing Patrick Wolfe's formulation.[13] An investigation into the narrative roots of "catastrophe" in Euro-Western culture and literature is illuminating here: stemming from the Greek *katastrephein,* or "to overturn," 16th-century English speakers first introduced "catastrophe" in the lexicon to mean "the conclusion or final event of a dramatic work, especially a tragedy."[14] Now, "catastrophe" is used to mean fiasco, violent and sudden change, or momentous misfortune; it is also, of course, used hyperbolically (as in, *that dinner was a total catastrophe*).

The survey is connected to catastrophe in that both seek to contain stories of crisis and the land through making them into legible objects of analysis. "Catastrophe" operates on a particularly narrative level and has the Western theatrical roots. Euro-Western dramatic structure and psychoanalytic thought both pose "catastrophe" as an isolated, cataclysmic event, often befalling a lone white male protagonist, which, most crucially, *ends the story,* if it is a tragedy, or foretells resolution, if it is comedy. This etymology implies that through performance specifically crisis is made to *seem* over and done. This traditional narrative form, sometimes called Freytag's Pyramid, concentrates on the individual and frames the catastrophe as a closed event, solved by the time the final crimson curtain draws the stage shut.[15]

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[11] Deer, *Beginning and End of Rape,* xx.
[12] Deer, *Beginning and End of Rape*, x.
[13] Working from Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409 and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui's follow-up and intervention in the phrase's circulation: " 'A structure, not an event': Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity,'" *Lateral* 5, no. 1 (2016).
[14] "Catastrophe," *Merriam Webster,* https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/catastrophe.
[15] The following article charts the history and dissemination of Freytag's pyramid in introductory English and language arts courses and interestingly points out that the structure is not quite even Freytag's, but rather an amalgamation of Progressive Era education policies and various broad textbooks aimed at making literature

Canonical Western trauma theorist Cathy Caruth rightfully discerns that "*survival itself* [...] can also be a crisis," and she defines the traumatized condition as being "possessed by an image or event."[16] Caruth's theory of *survival as crisis* mirrors my discussion of rape survivors' relationships to navigating place; in my own experience, my ability to move across the central rural Ohio landscapes that once seemed so secure and familiar became chronically fraught with real danger, both psychologically and in regards to my literal safety, in the aftermath of my sexual abuse. The story of a place, however, does not begin with my story of crisis; framing my environment as safe *before* falls into the same trap as Caruth's survival-as-crisis. It overemphasizes the individual's traumatic moment of assault as the only beginning, while the survey risks eliding the complexities of the survivor's experience altogether. Narratively framing the landscape I grew up in as "safe" prior to my experiences of sexual violence occludes that this illusion of safety is wedded to my privileged ability to negotiate space as a white woman. It is precisely this culture of domination that simultaneously permitted my rapes to occur while making the landscape I grew up in dangerous. Caruth, following a psychoanalytic framework and genealogy, characterizes the survivor as possessed by their trauma: it becomes an object that haunts them and that they, in retaliation, hope to possess or control.[17] Caruth positions the trauma itself as beyond the ordinary, even as it haunts and possesses the traumatized person's daily life. Through the psychoanalytic language (and fixation) on *possession,* she also configures trauma as something the victim strives to have mastery or ownership over. I critique this idea that trauma is a preternatural possession that one might someday overcome because it centers personal crisis as

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"teachable and testable." See: Dallas Liddle, "Falling Action: Against 'Freytag's Pyramid,'" *Studies in the Novel* 56, no. 4 (2024): 415-424.

[16] Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4-5 and 9.

[17] See: Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XIV (1914-1916),* trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1917). 243-258. Accessed digitally at https://web.english.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Freud_MourningAndMelancholia.pdf.

a master narrative with a beginning and end. Furthermore, psychoanalysis's preoccupation with *possession* as resolution mirrors colonial Euro-Western understandings of land whereby place is theoretically fixed and settled through ownership.

The Euro-Western impulse to settle land and narrative relies on catastrophe as a historical exception.[18] In *Cruel Optimism,* Lauren Berlant interrogates trauma as exception; she outlines how critical theorists and "mass society generally" place catastrophe "as the scene of an exception that has just shattered some ongoing, uneventful ordinary life.*"*[19] For example, returning to my citation of Broom's *The Yellow House*, I by no means want to diminish the genuine catastrophe that was, and still is, Hurricane Katrina. However, to make Katrina an aberration, to be discovered as catastrophe anew by tourists and spectators, is to horrifically neglect the systemic crises, or "crisis ordinariness," which structure the lives of Black New Orleanians, like Broom, in a city where generations of white supremacy and institutional neglect sustain severe patterns of environmental racism and State violence.[20] More to the point of my dissertation, reading rape as a survivor's individual catastrophe elides the structural reasons such a persistent culture of patriarchal domination continues to thrive in the contemporary the United States and Canada.

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[18] See: Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2003):

[19] Berlant is specifically critiquing Caruth, as well as Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, here. See: Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 9.

[20] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism,* 9-10. For more history on environmental racism and New Orleans see: Charisse Gibson, "Tremé: Death of a Neighborhood, Survival of a Culture," "How 'Urban Renewal' destroyed the cultural heart of New Orleans," and "Katrina opened the floodgates to another wave of issues," *WWLTV*, November 26, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXKsGol8cAQ; Paige McGinley, "Floods of Memory (A Post-Katrina Soundtrack)," *Performance Research* 12, no. 2 (2007): 57-65; Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, "No one knows the mysteries at the bottom of the ocean," *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2007); Paper Monuments. "Paper Monuments Final Report: Imagine New Monuments for New Orleans," accessed March 6, 2020, https://issuu.com/colloqate/docs/pm_final_report; Matt Sakakeeny, "'Under the Bridge:' An Orientation to Soundscapes in New Orleans," *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 1 (2010): 1-27; Rebecca Snedeker and Rebecca Solnit, *Unfathomable City: A New Orleans Atlas* (University of California Press, 2013); and Lynell Thomas, *Desire & Disaster in New Orleans: Tourism, Race, and Historical Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014)

Berlant's critique of Western trauma theory's fixation on the singular is one of *Cruel Optimism*'s central thrusts. Berlant writes: "Trauma theory conventionally focuses on exceptional shock and data loss in the memory and experience of catastrophe […] Crisis is not exceptional to history or consciousness but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what's overwhelming."[21] I second Berlant's intervention in catastrophe's grammar—its predisposition towards harm's shock, rather than its staying power—but add that "what's overwhelming" splinters and varies widely within what Joshua Chambers-Letson, following his mentor José Esteban Muñoz, calls "the communism of incommensurability," which forms the basis of the method I offer as "listening as incommensurable practice," explored thoroughly in my first chapter.[22] Muñoz and Chambers-Letson's "communism of incommensurability" requires "a form of 'being-with, in difference and discord' where racial and sexual difference are not extinguished but shared out with each other."[23] The artists and scholars that I foreground in my dissertation help me think through how catastrophe's structural persistence shifts with a supple attention to race, gender, class, sexuality, and the environment's specificities. These thinkers disrupt catastrophe as narrative aberration and survey as spatial authority through their methods of "being-with-in-difference," which encourage audiences to listen more deeply.

All ghosts are not conjured out of the same persistent catastrophes, and haunting—as an activating call to action, a place-based sign that "something needs to be done"—challenges the separation and silencing of places' violent histories that is necessary to the survey that "cuts up"

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[21] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 10.
[22] See: Joshua Chambers-Letson, *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2018): xx-xxii and José Esteban Muñoz, "Race, Sex, and the Incommensurate: Gary Fisher with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick," in *Queer Futures Reconsidering Ethics, Activist, and the Political*, ed. Elahe Haschemi Yekani, Eveline Killian, and Beatrice Michaelis, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 103-15.
[23] Chambers-Letson, *After the Party,* xx-xxi.

and catastrophe's isolated scenario. Sociologist Avery Gordon offers that "haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly done with (slavery, for instance) or when their oppressive nature is denied."[24] By characterizing the chronic impacts of abusive systems of power, Gordon inverts a linear structure, in which the ghost would vanquish the hero or be banished by him, and insists on instead engaging with these specters and minding their lessons. Eve Tuck and C. Ree situate haunting as decolonial, suggesting that ghosts do not "hope for reconciliation."[25] Ghosts do not exist to appease settlers through tidy resolution. Tuck and Ree's haunting upends settler-colonial catastrophic grammar in which tragedy is concentrated into one event in a long-gone, already-resolved past. Their insistence against reconciliation for crimes of "slavery, genocide, and violence entwined in [settler states'] first, present and future days" asserts that haunting is also about land and who has claims to it.[26] Haunting makes visible that settlers' occupation of Native lands is not natural and is possible only through continued displacement, assault, and denial: the land survey is not the neutral instrument settler-colonial mapmakers purport it to be. Tuck and Ree's decolonial ghosts perturb settlers' willful amnesia and advocate for past and present victims of colonization's violations.

Tuck and Ree move catastrophe's grammar into the present tense through "haunting;" this brings me to the vital work of Black studies scholar Christina Sharpe, who asks:

> How does one memorialize chattel slavery and its afterlives, which are unfolding still? How do we memorialize an event that is still ongoing? […] How does one memorialize the everyday? How does one, in the words so often used by institutions, 'come to terms with' (which usually means move past) ongoing and quotidian atrocity?[27]

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[24] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997; repr. 2008), xvi. Citations refer to the 2008 edition.
[25] Eve Tuck and C. Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," *Handbook of Autoethnography,* ed. by Stacey Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2013), 642.
[26] Tuck and Ree, "Glossary," 642.
[27] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: on Blackness and being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 20.

Sharpe theorizes "the wake" and "wake work" as analytics which attend to "the afterlives of property," following Saidiya Hartman's framing; these frameworks account for the "past that is not past" through "a sitting with, a gathering, and a tracking of phenomena that disproportionately and devastatingly affect Black peoples any and everywhere we are."[28] Through her work of being in / with the wake, Sharpe names a grammar counter to catastrophe's when she writes: "*To be* 'in' the wake, to occupy that grammar, the infinitive, might provide another way of theorizing, in/for/from what Frank Wilderson refers to as 'stay[ing] in the hold of the ship.'"[29] The radical Black feminist narrative structures of artworks such as Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* demonstrate what writing within the wake's infinitive grammar can do. Merging timelines of the past, present, and future, these artworks inhabit water's chronologies, enacting a different kind of narrative schema, which hinges not on an individual's catastrophe as the spectacularized denouement, but on collective remembrance and storytelling as currents which "defend the dead."[30] These artworks offer cartographies that counter the survey in their rejection of commodification and containment. Artists and writers like Dash and Morrison chart another map of their work's landscapes of coastal South Carolina and Southern Ohio, respectively, one that exceeds the limitations of the settler-colonial land survey and Euro-Western literary plot.[31]

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[28] Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 13 and Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-century America* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997; repr. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2022)*,* 6. Citations refer to 2022 edition.
[29] Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 14.
[30] Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 26.
[31] See: Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 10-11. Although Wynter configures of "plot" differently than I do here— she instead contrasts the Black commons' "plot" of land, or creative and generative place of land tucked away, but within the elite "plantation," which she compares with the rise of modern novel in a Caribbean context—her essay on "the plot and plantation" touches upon many of the same themes I do here and informs my work. See: Sylvia Wynter, "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation," *Savacou* 5, no. 1 (1971): 95-102 and also Alex A. Moulton, "Plotting a New Course for Environmental Humanities: Provision Grounds, Race, and the Future," *Environmental Humanities* 16, no. 2 (2024): 271-290.

The remainder of this introduction maps the intersections between critical geographies and performance studies and how the incommensurabilities of sexual violence may be understood more deeply and rigorously through reading these disciplines alongside one another. I begin by briefly charting my mapping methodology before moving into an overview of rape, place, and the law in the U.S. and Canada to show how both settler states have deployed sexual violence legislation to organize land and criminality through a racialized and gendered order that hinges upon property and criminality. I next explicitly outline how attention to Black and Native non-traditional cartographers intervenes in the assumptions and scenarios woven into dominant mapmakers projections of space. Finally, I offer a brief chapter breakdown and conclusion to prepare us to move into the deep ground of the core cases of my dissertation.

Bodies of Land, Land of Bodies

My Maps and Methods

My grandma and I are non-traditional cartographers. This is a skill honed through survival. Similarly, the artists I focus on here shape and complicate the places they navigate through performance methods that demonstrate an intimate connection between the land and their own experiences with sexual violence. My analysis stages innovations in my home discipline of theatre and performance studies and in the related fields of geography and trauma studies. Geography and performance studies rethink space, place, and bodies in different ways. Geography, while attentive to place, is limited in its understanding of the body; conversely, performance is perceptive of the body, while limited in its understanding of place. I am curious as to what these two fields can offer each other when thinking about sexual violence: how might performance studies and its lineage of thinkers, with their attention to embodiment's potentials and problematics, leaven the oft-flattened map? Returning to DeCerteau's statement that "what

the map cuts up, the story cuts across," how do performers intervene in what the aerial map "cuts up," what power's projections distort and flatten?[32] Conversely, how can geography studies remind us of the material conditions and socio-political contexts that can be lost when performance studies favors the ephemeral and abstract?[33] By foregrounding questions of race and Indigeneity in my work, I suggest that theatre and performance methods can name and interrogate the scripts that often accompany the violent social constructions that define Black and Native material realities, and illuminate performance's liberatory possibilities when focusing on embodied knowledge. By applying a performance studies lens to geography and trauma studies, I champion modes of navigating place and narrative that are particularly attuned to embodied ways of knowing and reading.

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[32] See: Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* trans. Steven Randall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984): 129 and also Dwight Counquergood, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," *TDR/The Drama Review* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 145-156. Interestingly, returning to "surveys"' double meanings, "survey" and "survivor" share a prefix, *sur-*, which derives from the French word for "over" or "upon." If the map cuts "up," the "survey" cuts over or upon.

[33] In the first chapter of the *Archive and the Repertoire,* Taylor navigates her reader through the anthropological and theatrical "streams" of thought which have queried and furnished "performance." Careful to name each disciplines' innovations and blind spots, Taylor locates key scholars of the dramaturgical and linguistic lineages of anthropology. Of the former, Victor Turner, Erving Goffman, and Clifford Geertz figure individuals as actors "in their own dramas" of everyday life. Linguistically, J.L. Austin mused on the "performative function of communication," that is the way people "did things with words," to usher legal and inventive outcomes. Though their contributions remain instrumental, these white male anthropologists often reified the field's colonialist thrust in their positioning of non-Western subjects as objects of non-reciprocal study. Meanwhile, within the theatrical branch, avant-garde performance artists and "transgressive" theatre scholars' preoccupations with authenticity and newness ignored "multiple rich and long traditions of performance practice."[33] Such artists and scholars frequently oriented the non-Western as "the raw material to be reworked and made 'original' in the West." Taylor crucially intervenes in these aforementioned "streams" to avouch that performance is *not* new, that it has "existed as long as people have," even while its academic iterations are relatively recent.[33] I tie Western theatre workers' "discovery" of newness to debates in the discipline around ephemerality, or "performance's staying power." Framing performance as tantalizingly on the edge of and "becom[ing] itself" through "disappearance," as Lacanian thinker Peggy Phelan declared, obfuscates how minoritarian actors use performance practices to "transmit vital knowledge," as Taylor insists. Furthermore, discounting that "performance remains," to cite Rebecca Schneider, elides how performance is often *forced* upon people by those in power. What is felt in the body is well-remembered. These "profoundly political" deliberations on performance, its remnants and requirements, are inseparable form issues of race and Indigeneity. See: Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 9-12, and also J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words,* 2d ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1975), 6; Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), 30-32; Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in the Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011); and Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

As I shared earlier, I am a lifelong lover of maps. As a child, I was fascinated by the ones that I found in library books which pictured sea dragons and other fearsome creatures at the edges of the earth. These maps, crafted by 15th-century European colonizers during the so-called Age of Discovery, reflected the idea of *terra incognita,* or unknown lands. Through *terra incognita,* colonizers characterized the "unknown" as wickedly dangerous and destined to be tamed.[34] They followed a similar rhetorical move to *terra nullius,* the legal doctrine, which translates to "nobody's land," that Spanish, Portuguese, and British settlers used to justify their conquest and dispossession of Indigenous lands, especially in Australia.[35] As a method for my mapping, however, I wonder what it would mean to instead celebrate the unknown, what those cartographers called *terra incognita*—to relish in what appears unruly to the colonial eye and its surveys' systems of measurement? In the following section, I historicize rape, land ownership, and the law in the U.S. and Canada as connected structures which depend on containment; with my invocation of *terra incognita* here, I open up the uncontainable then as not signifying something monstrous to be conquered, but as more akin to Sylvia Wynter's "demonic," which refuses to categorize sets of data—and the stories, people, and places they represents—into neat and knowable outcomes.[36] In rejecting closed systems of analyses, I aim to write a research map

[34] See: "Terra incognita." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/terra%20incognita. Accessed 25 Mar. 2025 and Alfred Hiatt, *Terra Incognita : Mapping the Antipodes before 1600* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).
[35] The following article powerfully maps *terra nullius* alongside Indigenous feminisms and decolonial theory: Ahsley Noel Mack andTiara R. Na'puti, "'Our Bodies Are Not Terra Nullius': Building a Decolonial Feminist Resistance to Gendered Violence," *Women's Studies in Communication* 42, no. 3 (2019): 347–70.
[36] See: Sylvia Wynter: "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/Silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Women,' *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature* (Africa World Press, 1994), and also Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

that mobilizes the daring possibilities and un-fixedness of performance, which acknowledges its capacity for transformation as it refuses the containing logics of narrative progress.[37]

Rape, Place, and the Law

Any conversation around sexual violence in the Americas must center the fact that white Western systems of power have *incentivized* the rape of Indigenous and Black people, including members of Afro-Indigenous communities. While in no means comprehensive, this section reviews some of the most central legal doctrines wielded to uphold those structures and their contemporary relevance as a prerequisite for understanding my dissertation's methodological interventions. Moving through themes of conquest, control, and containment, I illustrate how legal conceptualizations of rape in North America are fundamentally undergirded by white supremacist and racial capitalist forms of power and organizations of space, thereby underscoring an urgent need to reconfigure what *justice* means for survivors of sexual violence. Through their need to master and contain, these organizations of space reify the misconception of rape as a singular catastrophe rather than interwoven in a cultural and spatial system.

For wealthy white settlers in 17th-through-19th century North America, rape was an essential weapon for securing claims to capital through the ownership of land and enslaved labor: that the institution of slavery is the foundation of the U.S. economy cannot be divorced from this fact.[38] Operations of rape and possession functioned differently across colonial American and Canadian contexts and regulations of Blackness and Indigeneity, although there are some crucial similarities. Perhaps the clearest distinction of the latter can be summarized by Eve Tuck and K.

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[37] Della Pollock might frame this writing style and ethos through the "performative I." See: Della Pollock, "The Performative 'I,'" *Cultural Studies ←→ Critical Methodologies* 7, no. 3 (2007): 239-255.

[38] See: Nikole Hannah-Jones, host, *1619*, season 1, episode 2, "The Economy That Slavery Built," *New York Times Podcasts*, August 31, 2019, 31 min. 55 sec., https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/30/podcasts/1619-slavery-cotton-capitalism.html and Matthew Desmond, "In Order to Understand the Brutality of American Capitalism You Have to Start at the Plantation," *New York Times Magazine,* August 14, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/slavery-capitalism.html.

Wayne Yang's argument that "Blackness in a settler colonial context is expansive," while "Native Americanness is subtractive."[39] Tuck and Yang continue:

> Through the one-drop rule, Blackness in settler colonial context is expansive, ensuring that a slave/criminal status will be inherited by an expanding number of 'Black' descendants. Yet, Indigenous peoples have been racialized in a profoundly different way. Native Americanness is subtractive: Native Americans are constructed to become fewer in number and less Native but over time never exactly White.[40]

In the context of African enslavement, the *partus sequiter ventrum* law dictated that a child's slave status followed their mother's; this decree absolved whites' rape of enslaved Black women and in fact further motivated them because any children resulting from the rape would increase enslavers' capital through generating more human property.[41] As historian Jennifer Morgan notes in her exploration of slavery and inheritability, "enslaved people had to be understood as dispossessed outside of normal networks of family and community to justify the practice of mass enslavement," therefore, enslavers defined racial meaning through "enslaved women's maternal possibilities […] long before legislators indexed such possibilities into law."[42] Through highlighting practices of reproductive control prior to *partus sequiter ventrum*'s official legal status, Morgan suggests that systems of bodily domination are exercised and rehearsed through socially codified behavior, including stories and narrative tropes. Morgan's argument that enslaved people "had to be understood as dispossessed" has important spatial implications; as Saidiya Hartman thoroughly outlines, using *Alfred v. State* as her case study, the American institution of slavery ensured that for the enslaved, rape, marriage, and parental claim were all illegitimate in the eyes of the law.[43] The only legal protection afforded to enslaved persons was,

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[39] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012), 12.
[40] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," 12.
[41] See: Jennifer Morgan, "Partus Sequiter Ventrum," *Small Axe* 55, no. 22 (2018): 1-17.
[42] Morgan, "Partus Sequiter Ventrum," 1-2.
[43] See Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 169-197.

perversely, rooted in enslavers' insurance claims, or the damage and injury to their property. Besides *partus sequiter ventrum*'s sanctioning of rape as a way to increase capital and property, the dispossessive quality of enslaved persons' maternal status served to, returning to Morgan, mark them as "outside of the network of normal," even in cases where reproduction was not physically possible.[44]

This configuration of Black deviance or incongruence in relationship to the white (and economically successful) nuclear family remains absolutely essential to understanding contemporary markings of Black bodies and spaces as inherently criminal and illegitimate: if the white elite—through violence sanctioned by law—are able to make the rape and dispossession of Black people appear natural, then they are able to maintain a geographical and capital order which displaces their own crimes onto a racialized *other* and *elsewhere.* This is clarified through an examination into the history of modern-day statuary rape laws. As I discuss in my third chapter, through her research on lynch law Ida B. Wells revealed how white men falsely accused Black men of raping white women in order to justify their lynching and also to distract from whites' *actual* sexual violence against Black women.[45] This same basic structure remains fixed in the American criminal justice system: while white men commit the majority of sexual violence in the US, of the rapes reported to the police (the vast majority of which are not), less than 3 percent of rapists are imprisoned—Black men, meanwhile, are incarcerated at five times the rate of white men in America for any crime.[46] Furthermore, as Hartman explains, Black reformers rightfully critiqued the formation of statuary rape laws in the late-19th and early-20th

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[44] As Morgan notes, oftentimes the enslaved were in too poor of health to reproduce, however, this law was still important as marking them as outside of normative kinship structures. See: Morgan, "Partus Sequiter Ventrum," 1-6.
[45] See: Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors, Lynch Law in All its Phases, A Red Record,* and *Mob Violence in New Orleans* in *Southern Horrors,* ed. Jacqueline Royster (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1997).
[46] See: "The Criminal Justice System: Statistics," RAINN, accessed February 27, 2025, https://rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system "Criminal Justice Fact Sheet," NAACP, accessed February 27, 2025, https://naacp.org/resources/criminal-justice-fact-sheet.

centuries as designed to criminalize Black men and fail to protect Black women. As legal historians of statuary rape regulation illustrate, its advocates (which consisted of an uneasy mix of white feminists, religious conservatives, and moderate legislators) primarily developed its laws to protect, police, and punish young white women's sexuality, thus reinscribing the societal, moral, and economic value placed on white women's sexual purity.[47] This value is rehearsed in dominant media representations that overemphasize and exceptionalize violence against white women. At the same time, vagrancy laws—using loaded language of "lewdness," "indecency," and "public nuisance"—targeted Black and Indigenous women to reaffirm their "status criminality," through legally restricting their mobility and disparaging their legitimacy as victims of sexual crimes.[48]

In her rigorous and formative essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Hortense Spillers points to *partus sequiter ventrum* to argue that sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan's pathologizing of Black families represents a "fatal misunderstanding;" the dominant culture's "traditional symbolics" of gendered femaleness cannot apply to Black mothers, as the Atlantic Slave Trade initiated an "ungendering" of Black female flesh.[49] Spillers insists that gendered scripts and scripts about rape are not uniform across identity markers and histories, demonstrating that the legal statuses of Black women during enslavement necessitates its own specific vocabulary. As Chambers-Letson observes, Spillers "invents a certain strand of performance studies (which is to invent Joseph Roach and Diana

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[47] See: Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), 28-33, 358 and Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters, Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the U.S., 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 25-31, 33, 35; and Carolyn, *Jailbait: The Politics of Statuary Rape Laws* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 14-15.

[48] See: Hartman, *Wayward Lives,* 251-254, 400-402,

[49] See: Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987), 65-81.

Taylor) when she queries: 'We might well ask if [the] phenomenon of marking and branding [the black body] actually 'transfers' from one generation to another, finding its various *symbolic substitutions* in an efficacy of meanings that repeat the initiating moments?'"[50] That Spillers invents this strand of performance studies is important to my work because it accentuates an intellectual and creative lineage of Black feminist thought which links questions of embodiment and violence to the "acts of transfer" that Diana Taylor defines as constituting performance. As I suggest in my third chapter, Spillers also prefigures Judith Butler's theory of gender as cohering through repeated and performative scripts. Following Spillers's intervention that racialized markers are instrumental for understanding and complicating gendered scripts of behavior, Hartman's questioning of the category of "woman" as it relates to sexual violation is particularly illuminating:

> Can we employ the term 'woman' and yet remain vigilant that 'all women do not have the same gender?'[51] … By assuming that 'woman' designates a known referent, an a priori unity, a precise bundle of easily recognizable characteristics, traits, and dispositions, we fail to attend to the contingent and disjunctive production of the category. In other words, 'woman' must be disassociated from the white middle-class female subject who norms the category. The disregard for the sexual violation of enslaved women, the reproduction of slave status across generations, and the negation of kinship cannot simply be explained or explained away as the absence of normative conditions of womanhood, for the work of feminist criticism is precisely in the interrogation and deconstruction of this normativity, rather than the determination of who is or is not woman in accordance with this measure. How can we conceive the racialized gendered difference (or the gendering of racial difference) of the black female captive in terms other than deficiency or lack in relation to normative conditions, and instead understand this production of gender in the context of very different economies of power, property, kinship, personhood, and sexuality?[52]

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[50] Chambers-Letson, *After the Party*, 14.
[51] Hartman citing Elsa Barkley Brown, "'What Has Happened Here?': The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Politics," in *We Specialize in the Impossible: A Reader in Black Women's History*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing), 39.
[52] Harman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 174-175.

Hartman's provocation to feminist critics that the real work lies "precisely [in] the interrogation and deconstruction" of the idea that the white middle-class female constitutes the categorical "woman" provides a pathway out of and beyond the spatial and capital order that I critiqued above. Moreover, her call to read racialized gendered difference not in terms of deficiency, but rather as the production of "very different economies of power, property, kinship, personhood, and sexuality," echoes Sylvia Wynter's instructive that, as intellectuals and societally, we must "introduce invention into existence."[53] In other words, artists, thinkers, and theorists must consider another order altogether, rather than resuscitate the same instruments of domination under new names and faces.

Circling back to Tuck and Yang's claim that "Blackness is expansive, while Native Americanness is subtractive," Hartman's intervention into the legitimacy of normative, white, settler-colonial womanhood is important in Native contexts as well, in which colonizers justified land theft by delegitimizing Native claims to land, largely through their challenging of Indigenous women's tribal statuses. As Audra Simpson argues, albeit writing in a Canadian context, the state "seeks to destroy what it is not" via a "death drive to eliminate, contain, hide and in other ways 'disappear' what fundamentally challenges its legitimacy: Indigenous political orders."[54] Because they "embodied and signaled something radically different to Euro Canadian governance," in the late 19th century, the Canadian state attempted to "disappear" Indian women through the Indian Act of 1876.[55] This doctrine stipulated that if Native women "married out" of their tribe, they became their husband's property and were thus absorbed into "a white, settler

[53] Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality," 331.
[54] Audra Simpson, "The State is a Man: Theresa Spence, Loretta Saunders, and the Gender of Settler Sovereignty," *Theory & Event* 19, no. 4 (2016): 2.
[55] Simpson, "The State is a Man," 6.

body politic through a limited enfranchisement."[56] In both the U.S. and Canada, the state's sovereign death drive persists, as Simpson outlines, not simply due to "police ineptitude, police racism, and gendered indifference," but also because Indigenous women's bodies "have historically been rendered less valuable because of what they are taken to represent: land, reproduction, Indigenous kinship and governance, an alternative to heteropatriarchy and Victorian rules of descent."[57] Deer explores the U.S. government's attacks on tribal sovereignty as it relates to rape through several landmark legal doctrines, notably the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and *Oliphant v. Suquamish*, the latter of which "divested tribal courts of criminal jurisdiction over non-Indians."[58] She elaborates that the *Oliphant* decision made sexual predators more likely to commit crimes in Indigenous communities because of such "jurisdictional gaps:" if a non-Indian rapes someone in Native territory, the tribe has "absolutely no criminal jurisdiction to punish the offender."[59] Thanks to the incredible advocacy Native activists and legal scholars (and their allies), when VAWA was reauthorized in 2022, Congress expanded tribal jurisdiction to include cases of non-domestic sexual assault, date rape, and

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[56] Simpson, "The State is a Man," 6.
[57] Simpson, "The State is a Man," 10.
[58] Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape,* 41
[59] See: Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape,* 41. In 2013, Congress amended and reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which was originally passed in 1994, in order to partially restore "tribal jurisdiction over non-Indians who commit acts of domestic violence on tribal lands," as Deer notes. Republican congressmen met the tribal provisions of the VAWA bill with "unfounded concerns about tribal courts violating civil rights," thereby forcing "pro-VAWA Native activists […] to confront this opposition by defending the credibility of tribal courts using Anglo-American standards (Deer, 103). Congressmen's defamatory rhetoric of tribal courts' efficacy unsurprisingly revealed "anti-sovereignty sentiments and racist assumptions about Native people;" although Congress ultimately approved the VAWA bill in 2013, it only expanded tribal courts' reach to cases of domestic violence, meaning non-Indians who "married into" the tribe could be prosecuted, but those who committed acquaintance and stranger rape and all child sexual abuse could still not be tried by tribal courts (105). Also worth noting that Deer writes on page 42 that "more than one Native woman has said to me, *even if jurisdiction is restored, my tribal government doesn't have the money to implement a comprehensive anti-rape strategy.*" For further discussion of tribal law, Indigenous feminism, and VAWA see Deer's seventh chapter, "The Enigma of Federal Reform: The Tribal Law and Order Act and the Violence Against Women Act," in *The Beginning and End of Rape* (97-106) and Lilian Mengesha, *Critical Dreaming.*

stalking.[60] At the moment of my dissertation's publication, the 2022 VAWA bill remains active—however, the work of complete tribal jurisdiction and federal support for a comprehensive, decolonial anti-rape strategy is far from complete.[61]

Across the legal structures that I have discussed throughout this section, a central theme of containment—of fixing Black and Native communities "in place" through placing them "outside of" normative law, what Ruth Wilson Gilmore might call "the displacement of difference"—emerges.[62] Katherine McKittrick, whose work on Black geographies is instrumental to my dissertation, writes that:

> Practices of domination, sustained by a unitary vantage point, naturalize both identity and place, repetitively spatialized where non dominant groups 'naturally' belong… This naturalization of 'difference' is, in part, bolstered by the ideological weight of *transparent space*, the idea that space 'just is,' and the illusion that the external world is readily knowable and not in need of evaluation, and that what we see is true. If *who* we see is tied up with *where* we see through truthful, commonsensical narratives, then the placement of subaltern bodies deceptively hardens spatial binaries, in turn suggesting that some bodies belong, some bodies do not belong, and some bodies are out of place.[63]

In reading the relationships between these legal histories of rape—and refusing to consider their effects either purely in past-tense or completely in isolation—scholars might follow artists and activists' work of naming systems of belonging that resist containment and imagining forms of kin that reject possession. Doing so disrupts the "naturalization of difference" and intervenes at the precise "unitary vantage point" that McKittrick critiques. The artists that I analyze instruct their audiences to consider how people move through space differently according to their

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[60] See: Congressional Research Service, "The 2022 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Reauthorization," CRS Report Prepared for Members and Committees of Congress, May 22, 2023, https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47570/2#:~:text=VAWA%202022%20also%20authorized%20new,Committee%20on%20the%20Judicairy%20(H.R. Last accessed digitally on February 27, 2023.

[61] Deer outlines what this might look like in the final three chapters of *The Beginning and End of Rape* ("Toward an Indigenous Jurisprudence of Rape," "The Trouble with Peacemaking: False Dichotomies and the Politics of Restorative Justice," and "'Righting' Tribal Rape Law: Proposals for Reform"), 107-158.

[62] See: Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference: Notes on Racism and Geography," *The Professional Geographer* 54, no. 1 (2002): 16.

[63] Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds,* xv. Emphasis mine.

racialized, gendered, and place-specific particularities; they illuminate that this "difference" is not naturally produced, but rather sustained through practices of domination. Simone, Tagaq, and Faustine, however, do not solely disrupt "transparent space," citing McKittrick's term above; they also promote geographies grounded in mutual respect and loving self-determination, scoring an alternate map of the places they navigate that enacts agency and pleasure as it rejects conquest and force. With the background context of rape, law, and property, I now move into the genealogies of some of these *alternate maps* and offer a critique of geography studies, which score maps as solely tools of domination.

Mapping a Critical Geographic Performance Studies

In his 1988 essay, "Maps, Knowledge, and Power," J.B. Harley declares that "maps are preeminently a language of power, not of protest."[64] He writes that "the social history of maps, unlike that of literature, art, or music appears to have few genuinely popular, alternative, or subversive modes of expression."[65] Harley's contributions to the field of critical geographies are invaluable, however, it is his precise binary divide between *maps* and *literature, art, and music* that my dissertation troubles. Harley historicizes maps as instrumental to the "rise of the nation-state in the modern world," positing them as "weapons of imperialism […] as much as guns and warships."[66] He suggests that maps' inherent selectivity leads to biases towards "particular sets of social relations."[67] Even as Harley destabilizes the objectivity of colonial maps, he positions them as archetypal; in other words, by situating maps as scored in languages of "power, not

[64] J.B. Harley, "Maps, Knowledge, and Power," *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments,* ed. by Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 79.
[65] Harley, "Maps, Knowledge, and Power," 79.
[66] Harley, "Maps, Knowledge, and Power," 57.
[67] Harley, "Maps, Knowledge, and Power," 53.

protest," Harley implies only society's most powerful create authoritative maps.[68] While I wholeheartedly support Harley's desire to dissect maps as political devices, his defining of maps through power alone obscures how they are also instruments of liberation—often in a literal sense, as enslaved Africans' fugitive maps attest. As I explore in my first chapter, enslaved Africans used various non-traditional maps to escape enslavement including coded freedom quilts, land markers, oral guidance, and, most germane to my dissertation, songs such as "Follow the Drinking Gourd."[69]

Indexing maps as primarily the imperial classes' domain also occludes other kinds of political, namely Indigenous, sovereignty. Prior to colonial contact, Indigenous mapmakers communicated complex webs of relations through intricate cartographic practices.[70] They still do. Indigenous groups construct maps that are authoritative in and tailored to their lived realities both discrete from and in opposition to settler-colonial maps and the nation-state's jurisdiction.

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[68] David Harvey, another canonical critical geographer, describes "a pressing need" felt by scholars of critical geography and critical urban theory to " 'deconstruct' how certain kinds of knowledge, seemingly 'neutral,' or 'natural,' or even 'obvious'" are essential for "preserv[ing] political power." David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital, Towards a Critical Geography* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), ix.

[69] See: Jacqueline Tobin, *Hidden in Plain View: The Secret History of the Underground Railroad* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000).

[70] Two examples: Tongva scholar and storyteller Cindi Alvitre shares that the ti'at, a traditional boat constructed from sea-worn wood, "becomes a map," as it charts the sea's soft-glass surface.[70] The ti'at and its wood, carved by the currents of the Pacific and its estuaries, are a "telephone" for the Tongvan people, a living map etched with stories that reach across space and time. The ti'at is a relational map, but it is also an act of sovereignty: it insists that Tongva people understand their geographical surroundings through their own histories and mapping practices, not through settlers' names and laws. In Tongvaland, or what is known as Los Angeles, this is nothing short of a radical act; State urban planners continue to develop infrastructure—from interstate to damming systems—that ply the earth's resources and infringe on ancestral Native land. Indigenous communities avouch and convey their political relationships to land through their maps. As another example, Historian Barbara Mundy compares an Aztec map of Tenochtitlan (Mexico City), the "Codex Mendoza," with one of the same region published by Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés. While the Spanish Cortés map highlights Tenochtitlan's canals, the Indigenous Codex Mendoza accentuates the city's *calpulli,* or "neighborhood groups," and their correspondent leaders. Both maps impart imperative spatial information for their particular culture's "construction of reality;" or, as Mundy writes, "while the Cortés map gained in authority as its reach grew wider, the Codex Mendoza was *authoritative* at its genesis." The Codex Mendoza's Aztec cartographers depicted the most valuable political and geographic information for their community. See: Cindi Alvitre quoted in "Shaping the Past – FUTURE ANCESTRAL MONUMENTS," Goethe-Institut Los Angeles, YouTube, uploaded November 18, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1UyXZpN8V8&ab_channel=Goethe-InstitutLosAngeles and Barbara Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain* (University of Chicago, 1996).

While Indigenous mapmakers devise cartographies of their own accord, away from settler eyes, they also assemble "cartograph[ies] of refusal," to use Audra Simpson's terminology, in intentional defiance of colonizers' territorializations of space.

Black and Indigenous cartographies interweave linguistic, storytelling, and mapping practices and deploy resistant language as resistant geography.[71] McKittrick writes that "if practices of subjugation are also spatial acts, then the ways in which Black women think, write, and negotiate their surroundings are intermingled with place-based critiques, or respatializations."[72] McKittrick reads across the literary works and historical contexts of Dionne Brand, Octavia Butler, and Harriet Jacobs (Linda Brent) to argue that these writers destabilize the apparent fixedness of "transparent space;" McKittrick and the Black women cartographers she studies write the land in order to critique spatial acts of subjugation and also to enact ways of being "in place" that, in their rejection of narrative and geographical stasis, point "*toward* a new epistemology," or "an unfinished and therefore transformative human geography."[73] In other words, these women's *writing* of the land functions as both a critical and infinitive mode of place-making.

Using a performance studies lens illustrates how Black and Native persons' respatializations critique settler-colonial maps' authority and intervene in the scenarios of domination such maps, and their corresponding "spatial acts," uphold. For example, in her ethnographic study, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political life Across the Borders of the Settler States,*

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[71] A quote from Lisa Brooks's *The Common Pot* by Simon Ortiz (Acoma) is relevant here. Responding to Indian women and men's use of both Native languages and colonizers', Ortiz writes: "There is not a question of authenticity," he writes, "Rather it is the way that Indian people have creatively responded to forced colonization. And this response has been one of resistance; there is no clearer word for it than resistance." See: Ortiz quoted in Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xxvii

[72] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds,* xix

[73] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds,* xxvi. See also: Sylvia Wynter: "Beyond Miranda's Meanings."

Audra Simpson demonstrates how the Mohawks of Kahnawá:ke inscribe "cartograph[ies] of refusal" through geopolitical actions that reject the so-called "gifts of American and Canadian citizenship" and "insist upon the integrity of Haudenosaunee governance."[74] In doing so, Kahnawá:ke Mohawk community members abstain from performances of U.S. and Canadian nation: they refuse "to vote, to pay taxes, to stop *politically* being Iroquois." [75] The people of Kahnawá:ke's unwillingness to participate in settler citizenship generates a "certain awkwardness" and upends what Diana Taylor famously defines as a "scenario," or an embodied script that is theatrically "structured in a predictable, formulaic, hence repeatable fashion."[76] In the original colonial scenario, Natives receive conquest as benevolence; by refusing to play their part in this Thanksgiving-esque scene, Mohawks rupture the myth of settler-colonial generosity, while pointing towards their own sovereignties and therefore, their own maps.

The Mohawks of Kahnawá:ke's cartographies of refusal demonstrate that the deconstructive work Harley proposes is already in process. For Indigenous communities whose very nations are contested, identification documents are questioned, and lands are occupied by settlers, the colonial map was never neutral or operating in cultural isolation. Harley's interruption in nation-state mapping projects' supposed objectivity, while good intentioned, represents yet another settler's discovery of what Native communities have always known well and a blindness to their ongoing insurgence. To that end, Native studies scholar Mishuana Goeman (Tonawanda Band of Seneca) poses a crucial intervention to Harley, worth quoting in full:

> Harley's failure to recognize that Western literature and maps have often formed a nexus, supporting and inspiring exploration, conquests, and imperial projects, perhaps led to his

[74] Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus,* 7 and 33.
[75] Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus,* 7.
[76] Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus,* 7 and Diana Taylor, *Archive and Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Duke University Press, 2003), 13.

> inability to distinguish Native stories and forms of telling *as maps.* These are maps that have contested power relations in the Americas even before European settlement. Harley, though instrumental in upsetting the modernist notion that maps merely reflected 'reality,' fails to recognize the intricate relationship between maps and literary discourses that protest settler ideological and physical dominance in the Americas. Concerned largely with Western forms of representing and marking space, he overlooks forms of spatial production that existed before Europeans arrived. The literary maps of Native people presented in oral stories or late in writing, are the subversive or alternative geographies I will engage in this book.[77]

Goeman makes several important moves here. First, she clarifies that colonizers harness Western literature and maps to execute "imperial projects;" stories are geographical and instruct their audiences on how to understand the places they depict. Performance, as an analytic, illuminates how scholars might read Euro-American maps and literary stories as operating under shared "culturally specific imaginaries" and deploying similar tools.[78] Taylor explains that, as "vital acts of transfer," performances denote both an actual event, or object of analysis, and a methodological lens. Performances are stories, or scripts, livened through the body and senses. The map is a performance that can be read as an assertion of power. Taylor theorizes that the paradigmatic "colonial 'encounter'" represents a "scenario," as defined above. She argues: "No matter who restages the colonial encounter from the West's perspective […] it stars the same white male protagonist-subject and the same brown, found 'object.'"[79]

Working from Goeman's critique of Harley, colonial scenarios of discovery are reiterated through maps and stories; William Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* as Wynter has observed, puts into poetic pentameter the same narrative that guided many formal maps at the time— namely, that Europeans must rationalize and settle the untamed lands they find themselves shipwrecked

[77] Mishuana Goeman, *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 24.
[78] Working from Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire,* 13.
[79] Taylor, *The Archive, and the Repertoire,* 13.

onto.[80] Colonial mapmakers often included animations that portrayed Natives and Africans as "savages," acting out this scenario by projecting it onto the map's flat surface. In his textbook on performance studies, Richard Schechner cites an even more ubiquitous example of Man's "overrepresentation:" the Mercator Projection map, developed by Gerardus Mercator, whose distortive "system of map-making is still practiced today."[81] Mercator's map enlarges the northern hemisphere, while shrinking the South. From this vantage, as Schechner puts it, "Spain is as large as Zimbabwe, North America dwarfs South America, and Europe is one-fourth the size of Africa. In other words, Mercator's map enacts the world as the colonial powers wished to view it."[82]

Goeman's second intervention is to locate Native stories and forms as maps. As Lisa Brooks, Leslie Silko, and Craig Womack have stressed, for Indigenous cartographer-storytellers, oral and written traditions are "interdependent"—words marry images in "a relational framework;" books of paper and birchbark stir memories, complementing, not replacing, spoken stories.[83] Lisa Brooks (Abenaki) shares that in the Abenaki language, the *map and the book are the same thing,* both united through the word *awikhigan*.[84] *Awikhigan* signifies messages and letters, implying that Abenaki maps are relational.[85] Brooks emphasizes that *awikihigawôgan*, which also refers to mapmaking, is an ongoing, absorbing, and interactive process—it is "an activity in which we are all engaged."[86] While Native maps and networks of relations are specific

[80] See: Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality," and "Beyond Miranda's Meanings."
[81] Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), 41-42. The term "Man's 'Overrepresentation'" builds from Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality."
[82] Schechner, *Performance Studies,* 41-42.
[83] Brooks, *The Common Pot,* xx-xxvii.
[84] Breaking down *awikhigan* by its roots, *awigha-* "denotes 'to draw,' 'to write' [and] 'to map,'" and *-igan* means "instruments."[84] Linguistically, *awikhigan* suggests that maps are books and vice versa; they are instruments for telling stories that contain information about a place. See Brooks, *The Common Pot,* xx-xxvii.
[85] Brooks, *The Common Pot*, xxi.
[86] Brooks, *The Common Pot,* xxi.

to their tribes, Brooks explains that Indigenous mapmaking can be understood as a shared, participatory practice of writing that responds to the tangible realities of the "place-worlds" authors engage.[87] The multi-sensorial mapmaking Brooks names *is* performance; Indigenous tribes repeat vital stories to impart knowledge of place, and they rely on embodiment, narrative, orality, and connections between speaker and listener to ensure that their maps are understood.

To this end, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee scholar Vanessa Watts defines Indigenous feminist sovereignty as "not just a contested idea, but a continuation of the self."[88] When "water is life," to cite the Lakota-led rallying cry of the Standing Rock movement, the map is written not in the earliest instance of its human telling—be that when the cartographer's pen scratches paper, or their story's first phrase fills the air—but is in an ever-present continuum wreathed within the earth itself, washing alive in its imperishable rivers.[89] In her reflection on the canals of México-Tenochtitlán and the arteries of the human heart, Taylor suggests that "memory is embodied and sensual […] it links the deeply private with social, even official, practice."[90] Like the heart, "it beats beyond our capacity to control it, a lifeline between the past and future."[91] Feeling the sensual, even erotic, kinships between memory, the body, and place opens up a channel of errant chronologies.[92]

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[87] Brooks, *The Common Pot,* xxii-xxv.
[88] Vanessa Watts, "Indigenous place-thought & agency amongst humans and on-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European World tour!)," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2, no. 1 (2013), 28.
[89] For more background on "water is life" and Standing Rock see: Jennifer Weston, "Water is Life: The Rise of the Mní Wičóni Movement," *Cultural Survival,* March 3, 2017, https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/water-life-rise-mni-wiconi-movement.
[90] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire,* 82.
[91] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire,* 82.
[92] In both the "erotic" and "errant" I am thinking with: Audre Lorde, "Uses of the erotic: the erotic as power," (Out & Out Books, 1978); Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation,* trans. Betsy Wing (University of Michigan Press, 2021); and Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Duke University Press, 2019).

The connection between embodied memory and land's agency brings me to Mishuana Goeman's third and final intervention. Goeman locates Indigenous geographic time as existing prior to colonial conquest, pivoting maps' purposes away from empires' expansion of territorial reaches. In doing so, she tunes into the land's own temporalities, performing what playwright Monique Mojica (Kuna and Rappahannock) names "sacred work," which "talk[s] back to strategies of "colonial erasure."[93] Mojica reads the "encoded language" of effigy mounds and earthworks "built by Indigenous peoples long before European contact."[94] With her whole body, she listens to her ancestors' "imprint." She absorbs what they have to say, what stories the land has to share of its own.[95] These resurgent memories are maps, an archived atlas alive deep in the ground. "*We are in conversation,"* Mojica senses. [96] "*This is real."*[97]

Within a Black American context, Toni Morrison describes the details that make up embodied maps as "emotional memory—what the nerves and skin remember," in her comparison of the writer's imagination with the Mississippi River's flooding.[98] "All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was," she writes. "Writers are like that: remembering where we were, that valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place."[99] Through her marriage of writers' and land's memories, Morrison suggests that acts of creative imagination, of storytelling, are maps held and sensed in the body; valleys ran through, the textures of a river's currents and the

[93] Monique Mojica, "In Plain Sight: Inscripted Earth and Invisible Realities," *New Canadian Realisms: New Essays on Canadian Theatre, Volume 2,* ed. by Robert Warrior and Kim Solga (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2012), 220.
[94] Mojica, "In Plain Sight," 220.
[95] Mojica, "In Plain Sight," 220.
[96] Mojica, "In Plain Sight," 218.
[97] Mojica, "In Plain Sight," 218.
[98] Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory," *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditation* (Alfred A. Knopf: 2019), 243.
[99] Morrison, "The Site of Memory," 243.

contents of its banks, its soil and stones, and the routes that water's "perfect memory" carves across time—these facts are just as vital of geographical information as any official survey of the land. If the writer's work is akin to the river's flooding, then artists and storytellers produce the same uncontainable depth of cartographic insight in their creations. As Morrison offers, she, too, "remembers where [she] was before [she] was straightened out."[100] Read against colonial and white supremacy's need to make hierarchical order appear natural, Morrison and other non-traditional cartographers' claim that it is the land and storytellers' sensorial memories of place—their ungovernable and intuitive "flooding"—which are the most real, opens up a powerful geographical language, communicated through the body, that I explore throughout my dissertation.

A Note on Rape and Gender

In my project, I primarily focus on cases of sexual violence against cisgendered women. I do this by no means to erase the very real problem of rape against trans women, men, and gender non-conforming persons; Black trans people in particular, have reported up to 1.5 times more instances of sexual harassment and assault compared to their white peers in the U.S..[101] My concentration on cases of rape committed against cis-women by cis-men reflects primarily the reality of a dissertation's scope: I cannot thoughtfully and adequately attend to all formulations of gendered and sexual violence in one project. Moreover, as I suggested above, my dissertation —following Hartman and Spillers—aims to consider gender less in terms of normative femininity and masculinity, but rather to examine how these categories are racialized and classed across historical contexts. It is my greatest hope that future scholars will pick up the threads I

[100] Morrison, "The Site of Memory," 243.
[101] See James, Sandy E., Carter Brown, and Isaiah Wilson. 2017. "2015 U.S. Transgender Survey: Report on the Experiences of Black Respondents." National Center for Transgender Equality. Accessed 27 January 2025.

have started to weave here and pull them in a range of necessary directions, including queerer ones: there is still much work to be done.

Chapter Overview

The first chapter of my dissertation centers on Nina Simone, who I suggest cultivates her critical geographic practice through performance strategies, including shifting subjectivities, citation, audience interplay, and refusal. Simone presents a century-spanning map of Black women's sexual violation within U.S. histories of African enslavement, exceeding and critiquing the cataclysmic "moment" of the Civil Rights era. Her songs *are* maps that critique racial-sexual violence in the US, while opening up space for "redress" by seizing back sonic excess. Simone's critical geographic performance practice is part of the tradition of enslaved Africans' songs as fugitive maps. Throughout her performances Simone insists that geographies of domination, and especially sexual violation, be read in relation to one another, encouraging a new method of spectatorship—what I termed earlier "listening as incommensurable practice."

My next chapter turns to Inuk throat singer Tanya Tagaq. I position Tagaq as redefining sexual, sonic, and spatial sovereignty through my close readings of her live performances and her book *Split Tooth*. I foreground Tagaq as challenging the "I" or individual often prioritized in colonial narratives of sexual violence through her multi-sensorial performances. Through reading Tagaq's writing and performances, I illuminate three strategies Tagaq invokes to "sound" sovereignty: 1.) laughter as joy and refusal; 2.) multi-sensorial listening as a rejection of the singularity of sound and within narratives of sexual violence; and 3.) contention as cutting through what Audra Simpson, following Jodi Byrd, has called "the acoustic mess of

settlement."[102] I analyze how Tagaq forwards an embodied and land-based sovereignty through performance, ultimately arguing that Tagaq's art authors and provides another map for understanding relations to and navigation of land.

My final chapter examines how Nona Faustine's *White Shoes* critiques productions of power in contemporary New York through explicit provocations of the city's histories of African enslavement and sexual violation. I suggest that Faustine traces an alternate lineage of photography, portraiture, and landscape art through her citation of Black feminist performance strategies. I focus in particular on her invocation and reappropriation of posture, situating her work as simultaneously rejecting and reclaiming poses used by photographers to hold Black women "in place," while illustrating alternative ways to navigate public space.

Into Deep Ground

While at the Brooklyn Museum visiting Nona Faustine's *White Shoes* exhibit, which is the center of my third chapter, I dedicated hours alone in a room set aside for guest interaction and reflection. There, in addition to a recorded interview with the artist, relevant literature, and a museum copy of the exhibit's catalogue, the curators had printed a grounding activity onto a sparse sage wall, which prompted its readers to see, hear, smell, touch, and taste sites of belonging and safety. The museum space encouraged its patrons to *listen* deeply, with their whole bodies, and account for their personal understandings of place and refuge as they processed Faustine's work. I recalled my grandma's coffee, my favorite songs coursing through my car, and my best friend's tight hugs. I mentally charted sites and sensations of security and love and, in doing so, I started to trace over the ones of fear and danger, not so they disappeared

[102] Simpson, "The State is a Man," 2. Simpson is drawing from Byrd's "cacophony." See: Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xxvi-xxxi.

entirely, but so they no longer seized control of my mental map. In another corner of the museum space, visitors could define “home” on a piece of paper and hang it alongside the other responses. One post-it read: “My body is my home, but I don’t know how to care for her.” The artist sketched a house on fire with greedy arms twisting out of it, octopus-style, grabbing at various cutlery. I resonated with the image immediately, its truth and desperation.

At the beginning of this introduction, I intimated that the body is a home and to be raped is to have it violated beyond former recognition. The artists I discuss in my dissertation use their bodies to complicate crisis and weave themselves back into the landscape: by placing the trespassed body in conversation with policed and colonized land, they reveal the logics that underpin patterns of harm, while also exercising another kind of claim, one that disavows ownership in favor of relation. Simone, Tagaq, and Faustine invite audiences into their maps, not so we can project empathy onto their stories, but rather so that their spectators and readers can be transformed through a practice of listening incommensurably. These artists demonstrate that there is great importance in being critical of your own perspective; of learning not for the sake of mastery or ownership, but rather interrogation and imagination; of listening to what the land and its storytellers have to say and letting those stories take you into deep ground and, perhaps, open up the earth beneath you.

CHAPTER ONE

"In Pieces:" Nina Simone's Critical Geographies and Listening as Incommensurable Practice

> I will sing for you […] after which I will graduate to a higher class. I hope you will come with me.
>
> - Nina Simone, Montreux Jazz Festival, 1976

> I thought they needed teaching. If they couldn't listen, fuck it!
>
> - Nina Simone, *What Happened Miss Simone?*

Nina Simone demands absolute rigor from her listener. Even now, looping her music on my small Bluetooth speaker, I sit still, often pausing and restarting her songs, hearing a new detail each time. When Simone settled in front of the piano, preparing to cast her spell, her goal was no less than total transformation for audiences. "I want to shake people up so bad that when they leave a nightclub where I've performed, I just want them to be pieces," Simone once remarked to an interviewer.[1]

Simone's aim—to transform her audience to "pieces" through performance—foregrounds my analysis of her critical geographic work on racial-sexual violence. What does it mean to be "to be to pieces"? Fragmentation is central to surviving trauma; it is often its effect. In the case of sexual violence, survivors are tasked with integrating discrete selves—the violated victim, the "reliable" reporter, the capable survivor—in their narrativization of the event.[2] As a survivor of rape, Simone wrestled with this bind most explicitly in her memoir, in which she attempts to

[1] Nina Simone quoted in *What Happened Miss Simone?*, directed by Liz Garbus (2015; Netflix), digital.
[2] See: Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The aftermath of violence—from domestic abuse to political terror* (Basic Books, 1997) and Chanel Miller *Know My Name: A Memoir* (Viking, 2019).

bridge her past and present selves through language.[3] Simone's provocation is not a replication of that experience. However, her desire to turn her audience "to pieces"—and the howling, overlapping subjectivities she deploys vocally to do so—reveals a totalizing preoccupation with disruption in her work that resounds, but does not replicate, the fragmentary experience of surviving sexual trauma. Furthermore, her disruptive style emphasizes spectatorship's limitations, while defamiliarizing the "spectacle" of her Black feminized body onstage. Throughout this chapter, I read Simone's work in a lineage of what Daphne Brooks terms "Afro-alienation acts," which "call attention to the hypervisibility and cultural constructions of blackness in transatlantic culture […] to render racial and gender categories 'strange' and to thus 'disturb' cultural perceptions of identity formation."[4] Afro-alienation acts "erupt […] out of the stillness" of "stagnant signification" inflicted on the Black female body by the dominant order, thus they are "encoded with the traumas of self-fragmentation."[5] Simone's performances prompted audience members' fracture and reflection, even while she constantly drew attention to their differences, claiming the specificities of her experiences as hers alone. Listeners may be left in "pieces," but those pieces are not Simone's.

Through her music, Simone compiled a sonic archive. She also authored an *atlas*. In her goal to transform her audiences to "pieces," Simone guided them towards a reckoning that was as spatial as it was narrative and cultural. By appointing herself as a sort of sonic cartographer and navigator, Simone revealed the constitutive relationship between performance and place.

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[3] See: Nina Simone, *I Put A Spell on You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone* (New York: De Capo Press, 1993), 37, 77.

[4] Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performance of Race and Freedom,1850-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 5.

[5] Afro-Alienation acts "invoke anti-realist forms" following Brechtian and Black feminist models. Simone returned again and again to Bertolt Brecht's dramatic repertoire Scholars debate whether Simone's work can be rightfully classified as "Brechtian," as I briefly explore later. Simone's annihilation of "putative stillness," however, certainly mines Brecht's songbook for her own "manipulation of excess and dissonance." See: Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent,* 5 and "Nina Simone's Triple Play, " *Callaloo* 34, no. 1 (2011), 179.

Simone foisted upon audiences a method I term "listening as incommensurable practice," working from José Esteban Muñoz and Joshua Chambers-Letson, as a pathway for understanding how sexual violence is interwoven in the system of racial capitalism.[6] Simone opens up a place for audiences to examine, in all their incommensurability, how individual crises of rape, including her own, function within broader contexts. Specifically, Simone investigates rape from her personal experience and alongside the "afterlives" of African enslavement in the 20th-century United States, meaning the "skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment," as Saidiya Hartman articulates, and most relevant to Simone, the afterlife Kimberly Juanita Brown adds: the "residue of sexual exploitation" that is mapped onto her body and that she contends with again and again across her musical performances.

This chapter traces the maps Simone sings, their lineages and layers, but it also foregrounds how Simone drew from a repertoire of performance tactics to show the connection between embodiment and geography and to insist that the realities of that nexus are incommensurably measured from person to person. I build on Brooks and Black critical geographic thinkers, including Katherine McKittrick and Tiffany Lethabo King, to suggest that Simone's performances should be thought of as geographic practices. Simone crafted a highly citational style throughout her musical career, weaving across musical traditions to assert her own sharply political and intricately layered sound. Within these traditions, Simone staged a kind of "musical maroonage," as Brooks argues, "raiding the dominant order" of both classical European and mainstream American music to create a sonic landscape that was unapologetically

[6] José Esteban Muñoz, "Race, Sex, and the Incommensurate: Gary Fisher with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick" in *Queer Futures: Reconsidering Ethics, Activist, and the Political*, ed. Elahe Haschemi Yekani, Eveline Killian, and Beatrice Michaelis (Ashgate, 2013) :103–15 and Chambers-Letson, *After the Party,* xx–xxii.

Black, firmly grounded in Simone's vision as an artist, activist, and survivor of sexual and racialized violence.[7] I follow Brooks's argument that Simone's linguistic fugitivity is not simply a re-envisioning of the sonic, but a re-inscribing of the spatial. I consider Simone's "guerilla" method as akin to "stealing away," referring to both the fugitive song sung by enslaved Africans in search of freedom and the survival method they deployed whilst doing so.[8] To "steal away" is to unsettle the connection between property and place by resisting systems of capital ownership and reproduction. "Steal Away," as a song and practice, provides a cogent example for how performance coincides with spatial reality and how place is made and interrogated through Black performance in particular.

As theorists across Black Studies, Geography, and Musicology argue, Black sound is central to Black geographies and functions as a crucial mode of relationality.[9] Places' borders, boundaries, and behaviors are reinforced through performances of repetition, or socially agreed upon "scenarios." Performance accrues meaning through citation; interrupting its reiterated behaviors is a potent mode of spatial and societal intervention. Thus, as I will demonstrate below, Simone used performance to simultaneously disrupt the "putative stillness" projected onto her and the transparency superimposed onto the American landscape, instead rehearsing more dynamic maps and more revolutionary ways to listen.

Listening as Incommensurable Practice

What does it mean to truly listen? What sensations arise when hearing another's story or tuning into the intricate sounds of our shared surroundings? What do you hear, reading this,

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[7] See: Brooks, "Nina Simone's Triple Play," 177-180.
[8] See: Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 65-67.
[9] april l. graham-jackson and Robert Moeller have assembled a helpful online guide to Black Geographies as a discipline for University of California – Berkeley's library. See: "Black Geographies: Getting Started, Berkeley Library – University of California, January 18, 2024, https://guides.lib.berkeley.edu/blackgeographies.

now? In *Listening in Detail*, Alexandra Vazquez considers a listening that "opens up," rather than pins down; her subject matter, Cuban music, is "impossible to pinpoint, but it is nonetheless locatable."[10] Listening, like mapping, leads with history and particularity, while also making room for "detail," difficulty, and transformation—and for something, also, like tenderness.

"Listening as incommensurable practice," as exemplified by Simone, functions as cultural critique and *spatial intervention.* Simone's work foregrounds her perspective as a Black woman raised in North Carolina, a survivor of domestic and sexual violence, and an ardent Black radical organizer during the civil rights movement. She rebukes the notion that space is "transparent," or readily knowable and systematically measurable.[11] "Listening as incommensurable practice" insists that each person—through their own set of readable identities and private memories—navigates space differently, or incommensurably. My personal maps are not the same as yours, by virtue of my own lived and inherited histories.

"Listening" to others' maps of spaces is not a simple practice of "putting yourself in someone else's shoes." Instead, it instructs audiences to sit with the nuances and contexts that make place dynamically unfixed and densely sedimented. At any given moment, multiple maps of any given place exist. Simone's maps illuminate both this multiplicity and her own perspective, thus modeling a way of crafting narrative that both honors and deprioritizes individual experience. This is a vital intervention in dominant narratives about rape, which collect around empathy for the individual in lieu of challenging structural patterns of violence.[12]

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[10] Alexandra Vazquez, *Listening In Detail: Performances of Cuban Music* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 9.

[11] Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

[12] Relatedly, Simone's mapping and performance practice may also be read as a critique of the overemphasis on the (white, upwardly-mobile) individual in urban-planning and white feminist movements of her 1960s contemporaries.

Simone—through theatrical and place-oriented strategies such as disruption, citation, site-conscious staging, and crowd participation—troubles "empathy" as an ideal for audiences witnessing performances about sexual violence, instead advocating for an "ethics of incommensurability."[13] I define "incommensurability" as a "redistributive" mode of relations that rejects capitalist systems of property in favor of understandings of "non-equivalence."[14] Following José Esteban Muñoz, Joshua Chambers-Letson turns to Muñoz on communism to describe the political import of incommensurability in *After the Party*, locating it as a "redistributive" mode of communism:

> In order to foster a world of boundless exchangeability, capitalism flattens difference into equivalence, making singularity into commensurability. In the place of capital's commons of equivalence, communism calls for a commons of incommensurability: a sphere of relation structured less by the flat social fictions of possession, equality, and equivalence, than by a mode of sharing out, just redistribution, and being together in racial and sexual particularity.[15]

Chambers-Letson's "commons of incommensurability," requires "a form of 'being-with, in difference and discord' where racial and sexual difference are not extinguished but shared out with each other."[16] In the context of sexual violence, this "being-with-in-difference" works against capitalist systems of profit, which consider the feminized body as only a site of production; gender as only an identity to be policed; justice as only possible through punishment; and healing from harm as only legible through neat recovery.[17]

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[13] Joshua Chambers-Letson, *After the Party,* xx-xxii.
[14] Chambers-Letson, *After the Party,* xx.
[15] Chambers-Letson, *After the Party,* xx.
[16] Chambers-Letson, *After the Party,* xx-xxi.
[17] Chambers-Letson, *After the Party,* xx-xxi. As discussed in my introduction, Black trans people in the US reported up to 1.5 times more instances of sexual harassment and assault compared to their white peers, and 50% of Black transwomen experience sexual assault in their lifetime according to the 2015 US Transgender Survey. Though the majority of the instances of sexual violence I discuss here involve ciswomen, the vulnerability and targeting of Black trans women must be part of any conversation on rape in the US. See: Sandy E. James, Carter Brown, and Isaiah Wilson, "2015 U.S. Transgender Survey: Report on the Experiences of Black Respondents," National Center for Transgender Equality (2017), accessed 27 January 2025. https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTSBlackRespondentsReport-Nov17.pdf.

In contrast to Muñoz and Chambers-Letson's "commons," empathy elicits comparison, in that it is fundamentally "a projection of oneself into another to better understand [them]."[18] Comparison colludes capitalism in its hunger for "having." I champion the empathy Jill Carter (Anishinaabe) separates from "sympathy" and defines as "feeling with," instead of "for."[19] For Carter, empathy "offers […] no relief until action is formed," however, I also agree with Saidiya Hartman's troubling of empathy's slipperiness. "In making the others' suffering one's own," Hartman considers, "this suffering is occluded by the other's obliteration."[20] Holding onto Carter's "with," I contemplate how Muñoz's and Chambers-Letson's "being-with-in-difference" as might be thought of as a radical mode of relation, beyond empathy, which does not "obliterate the other," as Hartman fears, but realizes their particularity as central to the project of "feeling with" them.[21]

Simone prefigures this radical mode of relation through performance. In lieu of projecting common ground onto her performances, Simone asks spectators to recognize difference and interrogate systems of power. She links her individual survival of abuse with broader patterns of Black women's violation across US American history through lyrically and performatively (re)claiming her body onstage while also engaging in a practice of doubling, or even "triple-play," to borrow Brooks's wording.[22] Simone draws a line between how her Black female body has been historically marked for violation, while also creating a space for redress within the context of her own lived experiences and audience interactions.[23]

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[18] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 24.
[19] Jill Carter, "Discarding Sympathy, Disrupting Catharsis: The Mortification of Indigenous Flesh as Survivance-Intervention," *Theatre Journal* 67, no. 3 (2015): 414.
[20] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 25.
[21] Chambers-Letson, *After the Party*, xx-xxi.
[22] See: Brooks, "Nina Simone's Triple Play."
[23] See: Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe."



Figure 1.1: Nina Simone at Newport Jazz Festival, 1966. Photograph courtesy of rightsholder John Rudoff.

For example, in "Blues for Mama" (1966) Simone affirms and consoles a woman she calls "mama" who is in an abusive relationship; at the Newport Jazz Festival, Simone introduced the song as for "a certain type of woman who has had this kind of experience."[24] "Blues for Mama," which follows a traditional 12-bar blues form, mirrors Black blueswomen's practice of writing and performing songs about domestic abuse in order to chronicle and intervene in racial and sexual violence on personal and national scales.[25] I read Simone as singing back to these foremothers, who become the titular "mama," while also addressing other survivors in the audience and ultimately reassuring herself. Simone was deep in her own abusive marriage at the time, and her memoir reiterates the circumstances of assault described in "Blues for Mama."[26] The grammar in the lyrics differs from the blues genre's more frequent use of first-person;

[24] Salamishah Tillet, "Why Nina Simone Was Always Ahead of Her Time," *The New York Times* (August 2, 2023), https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/02/arts/music/nina-simone-blues-for-mama-newport.html.
[25] See: Daphne Duval Harrison, *Black Pearls: Blues Queens of the 1920s* (Rutgers University Press, 1988); Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminisms: Getrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (Pantheon Books, 1998); and Paige McGinley, *Staging the Blues: From Tent Shows to Tourism* (Duke University Press, 2014).
[26] Simone, *I Put a Spell on You,* 76-78.

through Simone's use of direct address, she shifts the audiences' focus away from their individual experiences, and even her own, and towards an ethics of mutual support.

Simone leaves her audiences "in pieces" in order to instruct them to listen *incommensurably,* instead of *empathetically*. In lieu of projecting common ground onto her performances, Simone asks spectators to recognize difference and interrogate systems of power. She refuses the easy scripts of "empathy" in favor of the more demanding endeavor of relation with attention to particularity.

Understanding incommensurability as an ethics of engagement is crucial when it comes to performances about rape and violation. It is vital when listening to survivors. As I wrote in my Introduction, I have survived my rapes by being in relation to others. Perspective allows me to touch something deeper than empathy and enables me to give and receive care. A practice of incommensurability also empowers me to challenge and critique systems of power, especially those which deem certain survivors—namely, white, upwardly mobile, and cisgendered— as more deserving of justice, more believable, more pure. As I explore in the following two chapters, this exclusionary rhetoric, produced and sustained by white supremacy, has real legal impacts and forecloses material change. Listening with attention to incommensurable experience recognizes survivors' stories within their broader socio-political contexts. This method ideally deters audiences away from hollow narratives of projection and catalyzes them towards projects of complete political transformation—or, simply put, towards abolition.

In order to name how Simone provokes audiences to listen incommensurably, I turn to video and sonic archives, documentary footage, newspaper reviews, and Simone's autobiography, *I Put A Spell on You.* I analyze Simone's critical performance style and varied relations to audiences across venues. I also use Simone's early readings of her hometown of

Tryon, North Carolina to demonstrate how she theorized a politics of relationality and incommensurability from a young age. She repeatedly connected her mappings of Tryon and other cities, such as Philadelphia and New York City, to performance, describing how she navigated certain spaces in detail, thus defamiliarizing space as not "transparent," following McKittrick (See: Introduction), but staged.

Exemplary of Simone's invocations of incommensurable listening are her 1964 performance in Carnegie Hall and later performances of "Four Women." At Carnegie, I read Simone as disrupting the concert hall's spatial scripts through "Pirate Jenny," "Go Limp," and "Mississippi Goddam." Through "Four Women," Simone interrogates conceptions of time and place as linear and contained. She explores how those in power deploy "controlling images" of Black women, following Patricia Hill Collins, throughout US history to rationalize consumption and conquest.[27] For Simone, it's clear that in her "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free," liberation and abolition are a place, even if that site lives in the subjunctive mode—in the imaginative, yet real, realms performance creates.

Into Simone's "Commons"

Simone required her audience's total presence: she often walked off stage where audience members were distracted; she'd chastise "bad" listeners, scolding them to sit down, be quiet, and pay attention. Her collaborators described her music as disciplined as the most challenging classical arrangements.[28] Though Simone frequently praised audiences at classical venues, cherishing their austere attention, she credited her time at Midtown Bar in Atlantic City as

[27] See: Patricia Hill Collins, *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (Routledge, 2002): 69-96.
[28] See: Liz Garbus dir., *What Happened Miss Simone?* (Netflix, 2015), digital.

honing her crowd maintenance skills.[29] In her autobiography, she described her approach towards live shows thusly:

> My attitude to performing was that of a classically trained musician: when you play you give all your concentration to the music because it deserves total respect, and an audience should sit still and be quiet. That's how I played at the Midtown, and my students understood it. If a drunk started shouting out fighting while I was playing, it broke my concentration so I stopped playing until they were quiet, and if they weren't quiet I wouldn't play […] My attitude to live audiences was formed there at the Midtown and it's never changed, no matter who the audience or how big the concert hall. If an audience disrespects me it is insulting the music I play and I will not continue, because if they don't want to listen then I don't want to play. I don't need them either, and if they don't like my attitude then they don't have to come and see me. Others will.[30]

In this excerpt, Simone sets ground rules for witnessing her work—she requires her audience's full attention, otherwise, she will simply refuse to perform. Simone's ethos actively challenges set societal scripts, which cast Black female artists as virtuosic and perpetually primed to entertain. Through her frequent refusals, Simone demands reciprocal spectator-performer relations, premised on mutual respect and recognition. Returning to my formulation of listening as incommensurable practice, Simone clarifies that audiences may only enter a space of transformation with her, of "being with in-difference," if they are present, thoughtful coperformative witnesses, that is, "radically engaged and committed, body-to-body."[31] Moreover, her refusal to perform without their respect—and her declaration of not "needing them"—insists that audiences foremostly recognize *her* as conducting their shared space. Already, often before her performance was fully underway, Simone had flipped the stage's script: where typically white men with capital controlled place, implicitly and explicitly, Simone

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[29] This is not to say the intensive listening Simone beckoned was solely the domain of concert halls; activists from the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) would play Simone's songs at their parties, places for political preparation and pleasure that, too, required a high level of concentration and care. See: SNCC Digital Gateway. n.d., "Inside SNCC," accessed January 27, 2025, https://snccdigital.org/inside-sncc/sncc-culture/.
[30] Nina Simone, *I Put A Spell On You,* 52.
[31] See: Soyini Madison on Dwight Conquergood, "Co-Performative Witnessing," *Cultural Series* 21, no. 6 (2007): 827.

claimed spatial command and withheld entertainment if audiences did not recognize her artistry, authority, and agency.

Simone sharpened her spatial and audience management skills at Midtown Bar. She also bloomed as a performer, developing her signature experimental and referential style. At Midtown, Simone began merging the classical music she was trained in with the popular music bar managers expected her to perform. She also sang for the first time, locating her voice as a "third layer," which "complement[ed] the other two layers, [her] right and left hands."[32] Simone revised lyrics and sonic elements from popular songs, improvising their refrains, looping and weaving them into her piano work.[33] In doing so, she "created something new," something she said "came out of [her]," a more "loose" and "relaxed" musicality, through which she found a generative well of artistic inspiration, "almost as deep as the pleasure [she] got from playing classical music."[34]

Classical music was Simone's first love. Well before her Atlantic City days, she trained in classical music for sixteen years. Throughout her girlhood, she studied under the tutelage of her teacher, "Miss Mazzy," who became like family to her.[35] Simone's community of Tryon funded her musical education, donating to a scholarship "Mazzy" set up. After being rejected by the Curtis Institute of Music because of her race, Simone played at nightclubs, including Midtown, to make money for her family, who had recently moved from Tryon to Philadelphia. On the Atlantic City boardwalk, she transformed from Eunice Waymon, her given name, into Nina Simone, fusing an old boyfriend's nickname ("Nina," for "little") with French actress,

[32] Simone, *I Put A Spell On You,* 51.
[33] Simone's method brings to mind playwright Suzan-Lori Parks's "Rep & Rev" style. See: Parks, *The America Play and Other Works* (New York: Theatre Communications Group), 8-9.
[34] Simone, *I Put A Spell On You*, 51.
[35] Simone, *I Put A Spell On You,* 24.

Simone Signoret—fittingly "adult" namesakes, after all, the purpose of her name change was to hide her nocturnal activities from her Methodist preacher mother.

Though Simone was a lifelong lover and practitioner of classical music—citing Bach, Czerny, and Liszt as her favorites—her first experiences with music were in the church, playing piano at the Southern revivals she attended with her mother. Simone's belief in music's power to transform the listener perhaps blossomed then. She recalls the music as "so intense you just went out of yourself."[36] Throughout her career, Simone wedded perspective with sensation, echoing the feelings of rapture she described at these revivals. Her uncompromisingly Black radical music combined expansive accounts of "the times" and insightful political strategies with her own embodied affects—her deeply felt longings for action, sex, romance, change, resolution, and acceptance.

Simone developed her capacious and rigorous style of performance techniques at Midtown, with "Mazzy" and in the Black Southern church. She used these methods to attest to and *complicate* listening as a politically and personally transformative activity throughout her career. She did this in particular with her songs that testified to and interrogated racial and sexual violence. Moreover, Simone's musical and narrative style worked within a lineage of Black blueswomen, whose mapping strategies challenged ideas of the pastoral (read: safe) American South in their music. These Black female artists, whose fame reached its height during America's "Great Migration,"[37] recruited performance in order to situate their fraught relationships to mobility's dangers and demands. Like Simone did later on, these foremothers

[36] Simone, *I Put A Spell On You,* 19.
[37] Historians refer to the period in American history (from the 1910s to the 1970s) in which Black Southerners moved to Northeastern, Midwestern, and Western states as the "Great Migration." I have always disliked this term, however, because it also refers to the large, circular movement of animals, namely wildebeests, across Africa that occurs every year, indirectly linking Black Americans to animals.

instructed their audiences on how to read place *through* explicit theatricality. As scholars Angela Davis and Paige McGinley have illustrated, Blues artists, such as Ma Rainey and Sister Rosetta Tharpe, disputed the racial-gender divide in popular music, which elevated white men as iterant pioneers of sound and space.

Briefly diverting from Simone, I find it important to highlight how her predecessors defamiliarized space through performance; I do this is not in service of establishing a teleological account of Black women's musical performance in the American South, but to elucidate how Simone both created within and expanded a repertoire of Black feminist performance and placemaking. Importantly, Rainey and Tharpe also relied on audience participation, theatricality, and meta-commentary to rehearse and provoke their own critical geographic performance practices.[38] Ma Rainey, for example, crafted travel-themed sets to stir longing and thrill in her audience, while revealing the constructed-ness of the "scenic South." Her song, "Traveling Blues," is about a female protagonist's agency; as Angela Davis asserts, it is a "powerful refutation" of blues tropes, defying the notion that "when a man gets the blues, he hops a train and rides, [but] when a woman gets the blues, she lays down and cries."[39] Through playing *up* the "staginess" of the South with a sartorial wink, Rainey robbed it of its authenticity. She broke down perceived notions of who may be allowed to travel, arguing that Black women, too, can *hop a train and ride*.

Tharpe also disrupted the bucolic fictions of the South and the American road through her conscious theatricality. For example, during her 1964 *Blues and Gospel Train* performance in

[38] See: Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (New York: Penguin Random House, 1998); Paige McGinley, *Staging the Blues: From Tent Shows to Tourism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); and Gayle Wald, *Shout, sister, shout! The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 188.
[39] Davis, *Blues Legacies,* 74.

Manchester, England, Tharpe challenged the colonial staging of the US South designed by the show's promoters, George Weiss and Joe Boyd.[40] A self-styled vision of cosmopolitan elegance and contemporary rock, Tharpe wore a sequined white coat and wielded an electric guitar, refusing to dress to the "half-Hollywood, half-Disneyland fantasy of a Deep South rural rail depot" backdrop behind her.[41] She subverted the lyrics to her closing number, "Trouble in Mind," which originally culminated with the narrator's suicidal ideation. Replacing defeat with action—and countering the same clichés as Rainey—Tharpe did not imagine "lay[ing] [her] head / on some lonesome railroad line," but instead sang that she was "go[ing] down to New Orleans" to give the man who did her "wrong" a piece of mind. Finally, after a rocking guitar solo, Tharpe prompted her white British audience: "Pretty good for a woman, ain't it?" correcting mainstream rock n' roll narratives that would remove her as a primary originator of the artform.[42] Tharpe explodes the limitations of the transit motifs rendered by the stage's scenery and song's initial lyricism, which would contain her to static sorrow. Disrupting the same representational stillness as Simone, both Rainey and Tharpe, and their cohort of Black blueswomen, engineer spatial scripts where their movements are not defined by captivity, but by their own abilities to map and remap space through performance.

I read Rainey and Tharpe's deconstructions of staged space and interactions with audience members in conversation with Simone's career-long, critical geographic project, in which she repeatedly cultivated a commons of "being-with-in-difference" with her audiences, establishing conditions for transformation again and again. Even prior to her stardom, Simone

[40] George Wein is an American promoter who founded the Newport folk and jazz festivals. Wein hired white Harvard graduate, Joe Boyd, to organize the two-week Blues and Gospel Caravan tour around Britain, which included the broadcasted and abbreviated version of the show, the *Blues and Gospel Train.* For more info on these men and the Blues and Gospel Caravan's logistics. See: Wald, *Shout, sister, shout!,* 186-188.
[41] McGinley, *Staging the Blues*, 158.
[42] Wald, *Shout, sister, shout!*, 184.

fused incommensurable practice, personal narrative, and spatial and social critique through her readings of Tryon, North Carolina. For example, Simone commences the very first sentence of her memoir not with her own life or artistry, but by announcing that in "1855 in North Carolina a shoot-out took place" between "white settlers" and "Indians."[43] She locates Tryon's formal origin in the construction of a railroad company and the white settlers' conquest. In the next paragraph, still on the autobiography's first page, Simone recounts "one Indian who managed to stay alive" amidst settler violence. This woman, Simone's great-great-grandmother, married an enslaved African. Simone narrates an old family photograph for the reader, focusing in on her grandmother, whose "light-skin" was "the result of a plantation relationship my family has never been too interested in exploring."[44] Simone goes on to detail her understanding of Tryon as a transient and remote place, informed by the town's railroad history and her dad's work as a truck driver. She also analyzes Tryon's racial relations, calling it "a checkerboard type of living, with areas that were totally white and a few pockets of blacks;" in other words, Tryon's Black and white communities were proximate, but segregated.[45]

Simone packs so much into these introductory pages of her memoir. She inaugurates her reader not through her fame, but by providing a narrative map of her upbringing, of the place that raised her. Her map extends generations before her birth, retracing how white settler conquest, a slaveowner's implied rape of her grandmother, the industrialization of the railroad, and racial segregation all factor into and constitute the grounds on which she grew. Immediately, racial and sexual violence are twined to Simone's understanding of the land and of her origins. By initiating

[43] Even while Simone's writing narrates her admirable critical geographic practice, it is not without fault; for example, in this section, she rehearses common stereotypes about Natives such as referring to this tribe as "the last band" and "hostile." See: Simone, *I Put A Spell On You,* 1-2.
[44] Simone, *I Put A Spell On You*, 1.
[45] Simone, *I Put A Spell On You,* 4.

her story with an accounting of place, Simone primes her readers to examine their own relationships to land. Moreover, her writing and performance strategies mirror one another: on both page and stage, Simone appoints herself as mapmaker and navigator, imploring her audiences to be present and interrogate place.

As I described earlier, Simone launched her concerts by ensuring everyone in the space was attentive. She situated herself as storyteller, artist, and guide. Then, throughout her musical sets, she unequivocally located "being-with-in-difference" as a participatory strategy; she did this by referencing her own body and pointing to herself. For example, in some performances of "Four Women," she gestured to her own natural hair before saying "one of these [four] women has hair like mine." Throughout her career, Simone marked her own Blackness and "sex" in front of white audiences, proudly and unmistakably claiming her own identity. Her performances of "Ain't Got No/I Got Life" are one powerful instance of this. The song is a cover from the 1967 musical *Hair* by Gerome Ragni and James Rado, originally sung by white protagonist Claude after he decides to defy the Vietnam War draft.[46] In her classic citational fashion, Simone reappropriates the song, changing lyrics like "I got my ass" to "I got my sex," and incorporates earlier lines from the musical in which *Hair*'s Black characters reflect on their disillusionment living in America ("I'm Black/Ain't Got No"). Through her altered medley of the songs, Simone catalogs her body parts—her hair, brains, ears, "boobies," neck, fingers, lips, feet, toes, liver, back, and blood, adding on her "heart" and "soul"—declaring them her own through her repetition of "I got my…" Her performance linguistically reverses the historic parceling of Black female "flesh" on the auction block where "it was common practice for bidders to feel between

[46] While a more in-depth reading of *Hair* is out of the scope of this dissertation, it is important to critique elements of *Hair,* the musical's appropriation of Native terms and relatively one-dimensional Black characters, for instance, while also recognizing that it provided Black actors with the most roles in a musical since *Showboat* (1927).

women's legs, examine their hips, and fondle their breasts."[47] Simone seizes herself back—or, in Amber Musser's words, "reterritorializes her flesh"[48]—therefore rejecting and critiquing the "charged nexus of possession and sexuality" projected onto Black women by white spectators. Refusing the segmentation of her body into pieces of property, Simone instead claims each part herself, including her "heart," "sex," and "soul," as constituting her livelihood; her whole, embodied self, profoundly her own, is her "source of power."[49]

Simone's performances of "Ain't Go No/I Got Life" also provide a model for how she figured her own intimate experiences with sexual violation into her specific historical context as a Black American woman—all while requiring rigorous listening from her audience. Simone started performing "Ain't Got No/I Got Life" during the late 1960s, a grief-ridden time for her politically, professionally, and personally. Her dear friend Lorraine Hansberry had died. James Earl Ray assassinated Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.,[50] which Simone ascertained as "no freak tragedy, it was the traditional white American tactic for getting rid of the Black leaders it couldn't suppress in any other way," placing King's murder alongside Malcolm X and Medgar Evers's.[51] By 1970, she had left her husband and manager, Andy Stroud, who was "wrapped around [her] like a snake," influencing all of her finances and business arrangements.[52] He still controlled her money after their divorce, severely limiting Simone's freedom as a single mother *and* musician. Simone and Stroud's relationship was tumultuous; he physically abused her often.

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[47] Harman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 64.
[48] See Amber Jamilla Musser's *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), in particular her conclusion, which discusses Simone's "Ain't Got No/I Got Life" directly.
[49] See: Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: the erotic as power," (New York: Out & Out Books, 1978).
[50] As Coretta Scott herself has stated, several pieces of evidence point towards King's assassination being a multi-level conspiracy, involving local, state, and federal government agencies. See: Tom Jackman, "Who killed Martin Luther King Jr.? His family believes James Earl Ray was framed," *The Washington Post* (March 30, 2018), www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/03/30/who-killed-martin-luther-king-jr-his-family-believes-james-earl-ray-was-framed/.
[51] Simone, *I Put A Spell On You,* 114.
[52] Simone, *I Put A Spell On You,* 116.

Early in their relationship, as Simone recounts in her memoir, Stroud held a gun to her head and raped her: "I sat tied up like his prisoner, bleeding and shaking, scared out of my skin. After five hours he stood me up, kicked over the chair and took me into my bedroom. He tied me to the bed and forced himself on me," she writes.[53]

Within this devastating context, Simone's triumphant ode to her body and self resonates on individual, historic, and national scales. At her 1969 performance of "Ain't Got No/I Got My Life" in Germany, Simone concluded the song with a thrilling flourish, as she typically did. However, this time, she added two components: First, she stood up to dance, repeating "I got my life." She rocked to the beat with her gaze downward, seemingly entering a private release of her own. Then, she returned to the piano, concluding the song with the following new lyrics:

> I got my arms
> I got my hands
> Got my music
> Got my ears to hear music by and I'm so grateful
> So grateful
> And my eyes to see colors by
> And I'm so grateful
> For that way I know beauty
> I got life.[54]

Simone references the parts of her that she uses to make her music: her hands, ears, and eyes. She marries her artistry to her reclamation of her body, boldly loving both as her own. Through her music, Simone maps a way back to herself, stitching together those parts fragmented by violation. Her song is the thread that sutures. By including her eyes, which allowed her to "see colors," Simone not only links sound and sight, suggesting that listening is more than an auditory practice, but informs her audiences that "see[ing] color" is central to her artistic ethos. Later on

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[53] Simone, *I Put A Spell On You,* 77.
[54] "Nina Simone -Backlash Blues/I Got Life/Revolution – LIVE 1970 [Reelin' In The Years Archive]," ReelinIntheYears66, uploaded November 11, 2021, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j6yAjxSMSbE&ab_channel=ReelinInTheYears66.

in the concert, Simone shouts out the "ten soul brothers" among her mostly white audience. This moment, along with her celebration that she can "see color" and "know beauty," became a regular part of Simone's performance. Across concerts and venues, Simone would frequently hail Black listeners, crafting a sonic space for them inside her concerts, *especially* in rooms filled largely with white people. For example, at a concert at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, before singing "Young, Gifted, and Black," Simone said: "I know there are only 300 Black students, so this song is dedicated only to you."[55] Simone did not foreclose the active participation of non-Black audience members—in fact, as I've argued, she required their disciplined engagement. However, she marked how even in the transformative space of her performances, where she sought to enter a self-described "mass hypnosis" with listeners, "being-with-in-difference" was a necessary prerequisite for joining her radical commons.

Simone transported her audiences to another place. She compared her most affecting performances to her early memories of "being transported in church" and to a bullfight she once witnessed in Barcelona in a memoir passage worth citing in full:

> Something descends upon you and you are gone, taken away by a spirit that is outside of you… they actually killed the bull in Spain, whereas [at the Holly Roller Church] they had revival meetings where the death and sacrifice were only symbolic. But it was the same sense of being transformed, of celebrating something deep, something very deep. That's what I learned about performing—that it was real, and I had the ability to make people *feel* on a deep level. [56]

Simone describes performance as a "sharing out," which has the capacity to literally transfigure the commons built between artist and audience. "Sharing out" warrants "just redistribution," as Chambers-Letson outlines, because its "commons" is based in "being together in racial and sexual particularity," rather than assessing rates of exchangeability and equivalence.[57] Thus, it

[55] Simone quoted in Garbus, *What Happened Miss Simone?* at 5:52:57.
[56] Simone, *I Put A Spell On You,* 92.
[57] Chambers-Letson, *After the Party*, xx.

might be thought of a revision of Dwight Conquergood's anthropologic method of "deep hanging out," which encourages ethnographers to spend long, informal periods of time with their "subjects."[58] It is notable that, while "deep hanging out" privileges quality time, the method's objective remains its final product: the most illustrative, or seemingly "true," anthropological study of a group of people. "Sharing out" is not without intention, however, its hinges most upon collective transformation. Each member should "feel" on a deep level, all contributing to a "symbolic" sacrifice; in contrast, the researcher of a study gains knowledge and information from his subjects as compensation for time spent, while the subjects may garner nothing at all. This is not to say anthropologic study or "deep hanging out" is bad, but it is to say that "being together" in its produced environments is fundamentally uneven. Chambers-Letson in his theorization of a "commons of incommensurability," and Simone in her curation of those commons, warns against a utopic realm in which the "sharing out" sometimes experienced in performance is not without difference, conflict, and particularity. Returning to Simone's evocation of performance's metamorphic potential, she describes surrogation through the bull and the "no less real" church revivals' symbolic immolation as celebrations of "something very deep." Following her language of transformation, I wonder what metaphoric effigy Simone conjured for herself and her concert-goers to sacrifice? Was it different each time? Was it various iterations of America, in all its histories that hurt, its vexations and broken promises—"goddam"?

In order to travel together, to reach that "higher class" and "state of grace," in which audiences would be "pieces," Simone insisted upon their presence and foreclosed their empathy in favor of a deeper mode of relation. Yet, in my own navigation of Simone's archives, I cannot

[58] See: Dwight Conquergood, *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 827.

help but wonder what happened in cases in which audience members were not up to the challenge, in which their listening fell short of Simone's aims. One concert of Simone's intrigues and unsettles me in particular: in 1963, Simone performed at Washington and Lee University's Fancy Dress celebration, an annual ball with a strict dress code, preceded by a cocktail party. That year, the ball was themed "Civil War," with many students dressing as notable Confederates, and the afterparty was "Playboy." Simone performed the evening after the "Civil War" ball, in a gymnasium still outfitted in accordance with the "Playboy" theme. A student dressed as Robert E. Lee led the ceremony, with "dance officers and fraternity presidents and their dates… form[ing] an American flag with unfurled […] paper streamers."[59] The planning committee decorated the dining hall to resemble "the Curtis-Lee Mansion […] where General Lee was entertaining the military commanders and the civilian statesman of the newly reunited nation."[60] The "Curtis-Lee Mansion" was formerly a working plantation, the house itself built by enslaved Africans. The Fancy Dress weekend atmosphere as a decorated tableaux of the "scenic South"—white supremacy made pastoral through *Gone With the Wind*-styled costumes. Student oral narratives and newspaper accounts recount Fancy Dress weekend's overall decorum of white, upper-class collegiate revelry.[61] One restaurant manager recalled locals' complaints of "the sight of students and/or dates staggering down the sidewalks and throwing up in driveways."[62] At the ball itself, Washington and Lee's student paper, *The Ring-Tum Phi,*

[59] "Fancy Dress Ball for 1963," *The Washington and Lee Alumni Magazine* 38, no. 1 (March 1963): 18-19. Accessed via Washington and Lee University Library digital archives.
[60] "Fancy Dress," *The Washington and Lee Alumni Magazine.*
[61] To better understand the environment of the Fancy Dress Ball and Washington and Lee more generally in the 1960s, I consulted alumni magazines, class yearbooks, and the student paper, as well as oral history narratives (Coll. 0239 – Mame Warren Collection) available on the Washington and Lee Library site. See: Mame Warren Collection, WLU Coll. 0239, Special Collections and Archives, James G. Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, VA.
[62] Harry Meem, "Mayflower Manager Cites Cocktail Party Episodes," *The Ring-tum Phi* (February 1, 1963), accessed via Washington and Lee University Library.

reported, "the costumes range[d] from Northern to Southern Civil War uniforms to 'Rhett Butler'" with "flags, platforms, and columns […] to enhance the effect;" the desired "effect" being the Curtis-Lee plantation house.[63] Besides Simone and other entertainers, all guests would have been white as Washington and Lee did not allow Black students' admission until the following year. In the student newspaper announcements of Simone's visit, the authors locate her as a "Jazz singer"[64]—a label she despised, calling it "a white term to define Black people."[65]

Why would Simone, entering the peak of her political activism, perform at an event that seems to represent everything she loathed, one where her safety might be jeopardized? Most practically, Simone may have needed to give as many concerts as possible as a professional artist: she was recovering from a devastating bout of illness, likely polio, and had given birth to her daughter a few months prior. Finances were of tremendous import for her young family. Further, her husband managed her, so it is probable she did not book this gig at all. Yet, Simone commonly performed at universities throughout her career, perhaps revealing her belief in music as education, as well as illustrating her awareness that colleges were key sites of Civil Rights protest—even Washington and Lee's student body, though broadly conservative, was embroiled in debate after the Board of the Trustees rejected the University Christian Association's proposal to invite Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. the academic year prior.

As demonstrated above, Simone powerfully and repeatedly declared her own agency at every performance since her days at Midtown Bar. I am certain Fancy Dress was no exception. In my scouring of university archives, however, I have been unable to find detailed accounts of Simone's performance that night. Reporting on the Fancy Dress weekend festivities, Washington

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[63] Meem, "Mayflower Manager Cites," *The Ring-tum Phi.*
[64] Steve Guild, "Nina Simone Here for Fancy Dress Concert," *The Ring-tum Phi* (December 14, 1962), accessed via Washington and Lee University Library.
[65] Simone, *I Put A Spell On You,* 69.

and Lee's alumni magazine recounts "a few unreconstructed rebels felt [bandleader Stan Rubin's] choice of the [abolitionist] Battle Hymn of the Republic […] was subject to question," implying a strong sentiment of Southern pride at the weekend's events, to the point of outspoken spectators.[66]

Simone's performance style at Washington and Lee at the "Playboy"-themed gymnasium disrupted the scene and its static, racist presumptions of its Southern past. Her repertoire was not as overtly political at the time, however, it bore traces of the radical experimentation and sonic dissonance to come. Simone's most famous single then was her cover of George and Ira Gershwin's "I Loves You Porgy," which she performed in a tender and intricate fashion. Music journalist Sarah Tomlison rightfully critiques that the song's success as the only one on Simone's debut album "previously popularized by black women musicians" reveals the limitations of the general consumer public as it fit "audience expectations of Black women musicianship."[67] Simone was playing "Porgy" less frequently by 1963; though she may have sang it at Washington and Lee, it's most likely Simone delivered a similar set list to the one she would perform at Carnegie Hall a few months later. Simone's first Carnegie concert—which precedes the one I will analyze in the next section of this chapter, showcased her creative ability to rework and sample across genres, highlighting her elegant itinerant sound. Reviewing the '63 Carnegie show, John S. Wilson wrote: "Miss Simone ranged from Saint-Saens to Oscar Brown Jr., from what she described as 'a dirty folk song' (a sly tale of frustrated medieval seduction) to an American work song, from Bessie Smith blues to a French pop tune and from Gershwin to a

[66] "The 1963 Fancy Dress Ball: Beautiful Evans Hall Is Setting For Civil War Centennial Theme," *The Alumni Magazine of Washington and Lee University* 38, no. 1 (Winter 1963): 19.
[67] Sarah Tomlison, "'And I Want You To Walk Down Freedom's Road:' Rethinking Resistance in the Music of Nina Simone, 1958-1963" (Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, 2016), 55.

sentimental ballad of her own creation."[68] Working from the same inventory of songs at Washington and Lee, Simone trespassed genre to evoke and stage her own fugitivity amongst her "Southern" surroundings. Simone's early career "cross-over" musicality foretold her later "triple play," drawing again from Brooks, through which she deployed multiple subjectivities to forward her own elusiveness and disrupt the representational "stasis" of the archetypal Black female singer. Even if the night's attendees did not deeply listen to Simone, she remapped the space where they were situated, crossing borders set for her, proving that, as she declared above, she did not *need* an audience at all. She exceeded her violent surroundings through the layered sonic fugitivity that would become her signature.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I explore how Simone scored sonic maps through her performances, suggesting that she imbued her songs on racial-sexual violence with her unique critical geographic sense. I turn to her 1964 Carnegie Hall concert to make this argument. I then read Simone's song "Four Women" as a final, insurgent example of her critical geographic work and its strong tie to ending sexual violence before concluding this chapter. Ultimately, I suggest that Simone's maps instruct another manner of being in relation, one premised on engagement and abolition over individualism and empathy. With her allegiance to disruption and citational craft, Simone's performances seem to say: empathy is impossible, but educating yourself is not. Education is no less than a project of total transformation.

Carnegie Hall, 1964

On a March evening in 1964, Nina Simone transformed Carnegie Hall's cosmopolitan stage into a site of maroonage. She performed a revision of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's

[68] John S. Wilson, "Nina Simone Sings at Carnegie Hall: Contralto and Pianist Offer a Diversified Program," *The New York Times* (April 13, 1963), accessed via ProQuest.

theatrical standard, “Pirate Jenny,” and debuted her now-famous protest song, “Mississippi Goddam,” for the varnished hall’s predominantly white, liberal audience. Since Simone’s first solo-performance at Carnegie Hall the year prior, she had sharpened her set list’s political candor, shifting from plaintive ballads and instrumental covers to songs that explicitly testified to her experiences within the civil rights movement.

Simone’s 1964 Carnegie Hall performance and its accompanying live album denotes just one example of her critical geographical work. There Simone performed a map for navigating the times, providing practical strategies for insurgence and survival amongst Black women. Through her lyrics and mode of performance, Simone theorized that geographies of carcerality and Black resistance extend far beyond the cataclysmic “moment” of the 1960s.

Following my earlier discussion of Ma Rainey and Sister Rosetta Tharpe, I situate Simone within a lineage of Black women artists who set the record straight both on their genre-defining creativity and their mobility as agential artists and travelers through fraught U.S. American landscapes. I imagine these artists and theorists as cowriting a genealogy of sonic truth telling. Like Tharpe and Rainey, along with contemporary artists like Beyoncé, SZA, and Solange, Simone problematized America’s white supremacist geography, while empowering her movement across it. Brooks importantly points out how Simone’s “formal disturbances,” particularly acute in a setting as grandiose and lily-white as Carnegie Hall, also agitate the power dynamics between white audiences and Black performers. Simone, through her fugitive “crossover” style and “spectacular acts of distanciation,” “defamiliarize[ed] cultural expectations of where black women can and should articulate their voices and musicianship aesthetically and politically.”[69]

[69] Brooks, “Nina Simone’s Triple Play,” 179.

Simone grounds her songs in her experiences as a Black Southerner and her own *not non-violent* revolutionary practice, recruiting theatrical tactics to critique the spaces she navigates from concert halls such as Carnegie to the US American South to the national political stage.[70] Simone and blueswomen demonstrate how songs are guides for negotiating space. As I argued in my introduction, maps, by definition, are navigational tools and projections of their authors' perspectives. Colonial cartographers rehearse scenarios of ownership and conquest through mapmaking. Returning to my extension of Mishuana Goeman's critique of J.B. Harley's 1988 essay, in which he claimed that maps are written only by those in power, enslaved Africans' fugitive songs provide a powerful example of maps scored by performance and protest. In a collection of her late plays, Black radical and close friend to Simone, Lorraine Hansberry, cites two songs sung by enslaved Africans traveling the "midnight trains" of the Underground Railroad. [71] Folk songs such as "Follow the Drinking Gourd" and "Steal Away" are hallowed maps, containing in their subterfuge practical instructions for Black fugitives following rivers, trees, and stars towards their freedom dreams.[72] The former's lyrics gradually moves through each of the important riverways on a fugitive's journey; the "Drinking Gourd" refers to the Northern big dipper constellation and lyrics like "dead trees will show you the way" provide

[70] Simone is quoted as describing herself as "not nonviolent" upon meeting Martin Luther King Jr. See: Alan Schackman, Alan and Liz Garbus, "'I Am Not Nonviolent': New Nina Simone Film Captures Singer and Activist's Uncompromising Voice," interview by Juan González and Amy Goodman. *Democracy Now!* (24 June, 2015), www.democracynow.org/2015/6/24/new_nina_simone_documentary_what_happened.

[71] Simone credits her political awakening to Hansberry, writing: "… I was always aware of what the vanguard black artists and thinkers were concerned with, but I wasn't an activist in any sense. I heard the conversations flow around me at Langston's or in the Blue Note with Jimmy Baldwin; I laughed at the political jokes at the Village Gate and a political awareness seeped into me without my having even to think about it. But I wasn't taking the trouble to educate myself in an organized way—when would I find the time? It would take a special kind of friend really to pull me into the ideas of the Black Movement and force me to accept that I had to take politics seriously. That special friend was Lorraine Hansberry, the first black writer to have a hit Broadway play—*Raisin in the Sun,* 1958—and the person who first took me out of myself and allowed me to see the bigger picture." See: Simone, *I Put A Spell On You*, 86-87.

[72] Black liberation is a not yet fully realized project. My phrasing of "freedom dreams" comes from Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (2002).

alternative compasses in the absence of evening stars—moss creeps on the northern side of trees, its fertile growth like handrails in the dark night.[73] Like quilt codes, another example of enslaved Africans' inventive mapping, these fugitive songs were "hidden in plain sight;" they evidence an intimate understanding of place, one that contrasts white settlers' obsession with ownership of it.[74]

"Steal Away" further unsettles the connection between property and place.. Enslaved Africans used the phrase "stealing the meeting" to refer to clandestine gatherings, "as if to highlight the appropriation of space and expropriation of the object of property necessary to make these meetings possible," Saidiya Hartman argues.[75] "'Flights' from captivity were referred to as 'stealing away,'" she continues, and the phrase "designated a wide range of activities from praise meetings, quilting parties, and dances to illicit visits with lovers and family on neighboring plantations."[76] Deployed by Nat Turner and likely written by him, "Steal Away" and its Black singers tender a map that exposes, counters, and ultimately moves beyond white territorializations of space and apprehensions of Black mobility. Thus, "stealing away," as an insurgent refrain, links the enslaved persons' strategic traversals of physical geographies— the plantation, the gathering space, and the road—their "condition as a legal form of unlawful or amoral seizure," or what Spillers terms the "violent severing of the captive body from its motive will"[77] Through their performances and transmissions of "Steal Away," Black singers flourished

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[73] Irwin Silber, "Notes on 'Follow the Drinking Gourd' and 'Steal Away' from *Songs of the Civil War*," in *Les Blancs: The Collected Last Plays of Lorraine Hansberry*, ed. Robert Nemiroff, (Vintage Books, 1997), 218-220.
[74] See: James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 27 and Monique Mojica, "In Plain Sight: Inscripted Earth and Invisible Realities," *New Canadian Realisms: New Essays on Canadian Theatre, Volume 2,* ed. by Robert Warrior and Kim Solga (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2012).
[75] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 65.
[76] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 66.
[77] Hartman is directly working from Hortense Spillers here. See: Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 66 and Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987), 65-81.

their own form of cartography, one that rejected geographies defined through white possession.[78] They respatialized their own "stolen away" bodies and the places they communed in as "site[s] of sensual activity, sociality, and possibility."[79] This reappropriation of the "stolen" body is particularly radical in the context of acts of rape and violation committed against Black people during enslavement. To reclaim flesh as one's own is to object to being made into "unrapeable" property. "Stealing away" from the plantation and "stealing away" one's own body was also a direct attack on white slaveowners' systems of profit, which relied on their productive and unpunishable rapes of Black women.



Figure 1.2. Nina Simone and Lorraine Hansberry singing together. Music Division, The New York Public Library. "Singing in small group with Lorraine Hansberry and Nina Simone" New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed March 11, 2025. https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/5d9a7e60-2cf4-0135-0613-0fc77b59adf9.

[78] See: Aileen Moreto Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (University of Minnesota, 2015) and Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World 1492-1640* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).
[79] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 66

Simone's insurgent work carries on the navigational songs of enslaved Africans. Brooks locates Simone's "poetics of sonic alienation," composed of her disruptive and "experimental" interpretations of popular songs, as "musical maroonage," or citing Houston Baker, "guerilla action […] carried out within linguistic territories."[80] In my close readings below, I consider how Simone rewrites the spatial through her linguistic fugitivity; Simone, too, respatializes her "stolen away" body in order to issue and imagine a map of 1960s America that is not defined through the ethics of property and production at the core of its racial caste system. Simone's maps, conveyed through performance, foreground information critical to navigating, surviving, and hopefully ending sexual violence from her particular vantage point as a Black woman in 20th-century America. Close readings of Simone's songs reveal how, through incommensurable practice, she charted for audiences the co-constitutive relationship between the white supremacist capitalist management of space and of Black feminized bodies, while disrupting these cycles with her own vocal screams and overlapping subjectivities. The result "invents" another type of order, one premised on "frictive" relation instead of dominance.[81]

"Pirate Jenny"

"Steal Away"'s singers rejected geographies defined through white possession, while taking back its terms.[82] In a similar appropriative move, Simone folds a lineage of African insurrection within the European "show tune" "Pirate Jenny."[83] Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill scripted "Pirate

[80] Houston Baker, "Caliban's Triple Play," *Critical Inquiry* 1, no. 13 (1986), 196 and Brooks, "Nina Simone's Triple Play," 179.
[81] My use of the word "frictive" builds from its usage in Queer Studies; in particular, I am drawing from Ramón Rivera-Servera (2012); Martin Manalansan (2014); and Kareem Khubchandani (2020).
[82] See: Aileen Moreto Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (University of Minnesota, 2015) and Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World 1492-1640* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).
[83] Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* is based on the 1728 ballad opera *The Beggar's Opera* written by John Gay with music arranged by Johann Christoph Pepusch. Brecht's *Threepenny* is adapted from Elisabeth Hauptmann's translation of *Beggar's Opera*; all of *Threepenny*'s music is original by Kurt Weill with the exception of the opening melody, which is retained from Pepusch's arrangement. See: Stephen McNeff, "*The Threepenny Opera*" In *The*

Jenny" for their satire of the Weimar Republic, *The Threepenny Opera.* Brecht and Weill's classic "anti-opera" typifies Brecht's theory of distanciation.[84] The pair valued abstraction and a certain coldness in delivery, and they disparaged artists who relied on pathos and pity to impact their audiences.[85] German studies scholar Russel Berman argues that Simone's covers are "anything but Brechtian," instead pronouncing "distance from distanciation" through their "proximity and precision" and "racial, regional, and class specificity."[86] Brooks suggests that Simone is "less invested" in Brechtian ideology, refocusing our attention on Simone's generative distortions of Brecht and Weill's work:[87]

> Simone's invocation of their work [...] is a project less invested in remaining faithful to the literal tenets of Brechtian ideology and more focused on producing interpretative deformations of Brechtian text that paradoxically generate an alienation effect; *her work dares audiences to see and hear "America" on a different frequency.* Rather than mounting a dichotomy wherein Brecht 'stages […] collectivity' while Simone 'dwells on a private subjective response to political events,' my aim here is to demonstrate the ways that Nina Simone innovates and enacts her own distinct critique of tyranny and apathy in western contemporary culture, and in the process, stops the audience from losing themselves in the romance of the black female singing voice.[88]

Simone's directive to "see and hear America on a different frequency" extends spatially: a frequency literally describes the number of times an event occurs in a set unit; Simone's "frequency" demonstrates the unrelenting quality of racial and sexual violence in the US and

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Cambridge Companion to Brecht, ed. Peter Thomson and Glendry Sacks (Cambridge University Press, [1994] 2006), 56-67.

[84] Brooks, "Nina Simone's Triple Play," 179.

[85] See: Brooks, "Nina Simone's Triple Play," 182 and Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (The Free Press, 1977), 40.

[86] Russell A. Berman, "Sounds Familiar? Nina Simone's Performances of Brecht/Weill Songs," in *Sound Matters: Essays on Acoustics of Modern German Culture*, ed. Nora M. Alter and Lutz Koepnick (Berghahn Books, 2003): 177-179.

[87] Brooks, "Nina Simone's Triple Play," 182. Brooks is citing Russell Berman, "Sounds Familiar?"180 and Farah Griffin, "When Malindy Sings: A Meditation on Black Women's Vocality," *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies,* eds. Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin (New York; Columbia University Press, 2004): 102-125.

[88] Brooks, "Nina Simone's Triple Play," 182. Brooks also places Simone in conversation with her contemporary Moms Mabley, asserting both as brilliant "satirists" of Americans race relations. For further discussion on Mabley as cultural critic, see Katelyn Hale Wood, *Cracking Up: Black Feminist Comedy in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century United States* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2021).

how that incessance shapes her and other Black women's navigations of public space. Seeing and hearing America on a different frequency also means challenging "America" as a knowable place. As Simone halts white spectators' "romanticization of the black female singer," she also troubles their transparent idealizations of America and its apparent geographies.

Simone sang "Pirate Jenny" third in her set list, two covers: George and Ira Gershwin's showtune, "I Loves You Porgy," her first major hit; and George Stone's "Plain Gold Ring."[89] "Porgy" may have lulled her audience into a false sense of security for what was to come, while "Plain Gold Ring" established a creeping, rueful ambience narrated by the "other woman." In "Plain Gold Ring," Simone begins to howl. Officially under her "hypnosis" now, Simone further disquiets her audience through "Pirate Jenny," setting the stage for the different "frequency" of what constitutes "American," which she would cement in her damning, closing number, "Mississippi Goddam."

Brecht and Weill's "Pirate Jenny" is sung by Polly Peachum, taking on Jenny the maid's revenge fantasy on the townspeople who mistreat her. Simone transfers the setting to a "crummy Southern town," where she is "forced to scrub floors," while "gentlemen" watch. As in the original, Simone's "Pirate Jenny" character sees a "black freighter" ship in the distance and imagines, or perhaps enacts, a plot to shackle and kill her subjugators. Recounting his personal connection to the song, poet-critic Hanif Abdurraquib notes that Simone's version is "so jarring" because she understands that "black people have a different relationship with boats, with chains,

[89] Music journalist Sarah Tomlison rightfully critiques that "I Loves You Porgy"'s success, as the only one on Simone's debut album "previously popularized by black women musicians," reveals the limitations of the general consumer public as it fit "audience expectations of Black women musicianship." See: Tomlison, "'And I Want You to Walk Down Freedom's Road:' Rethinking Resistance in the Music of Nina Simone, 1958-1963," MA thesis (University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, 2016), 55. Kitty White originally sang "Plain Gold Ring" in 1956; Stone, the song's author, also worked under the songwriting aliases Earl Burrows, Jack Hammer, and T.T. Taylor.

with the South, with freedom and the haunting that comes with not having it."[90] Simone also knows well that Black *women* have a different relationship to "forced" domestic labor and being "watched" by the "gentlemen" who coerce them. Through her invocation of the "freighter" and forced labor, Simone summons the geographies of the slave ship and the plantation, interposing them into the concert hall. As her Jenny spites those who "gawk" at her, Simone frustrates her Carnegie audience's easy spectatorship of her performance, reminding non-Black (and male) concert-goers of their fundamentally different, or incommensurable, relationships to the terrains she summons and the politics of display.

Simone's "Pirate Jenny" contrasts the original not just contextually, but sonically. Where actress Lotte Lenya performed the *Threepenny* number with technical freneticism at a noticeably faster pace, Simone is unapologetic and measured, savoring each beat of her harrowing lilt and thundering piano. Simone's "Pirate Jenny" maintains the original's repetitive rhythm, but introduces interpretive freedom and variance; as she shifts tempo and accents and sustains dissonant chords, Simone withholds fulfillment from the audience, increases musical tension, and reaffirms that she is in command of the melody. Through asserting her control over space and time and intentionally making her voice more challenging for audiences to track, Simone acts out what Brooks calls "a spectacular performance of *subterfuge*."[91] Simone's "subterfuge" conjures insurrection and white elites' misrecognition of it, embodying the Black geographic method of "stealing away." Much like "Steal Away" reclaims "theft" and projects it back onto the slaveowner, "Pirate Jenny" invokes "piracy," as a discourse often used against Black

[90] Hanif Abdurraquib, Nina Simone Was Very Black." In *They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us: Essays* (Two Dollar Radio, 2017), 194–95.
[91] Brooks, "Nina Simone's Triple Play," 180.

rebellion—think of the "looting" rhetoric projected onto Black Lives Matter protestors—to illustrate the colonizer-capitalist as the real plunderer.

Furthermore, Simone's performance replicates the spatial movements of maroonage: Simone's Jenny escapes after the ship's rebels "flat[ten]" the town, perhaps alluding to fire's central role in many emancipation plots, including enslaved people's organized burning of New York in 1712;[92] the song culminates with her flight from the gentlemen's captive gaze, as Simone/Jenny "disappears out to sea," joining the pirates' community. *Threepenny*'s Polly/Jenny prefaces the song by saying she "has no family," only a "dream"; in her performance, Lenya adopts aloof gestures of regality, often turning a distant smile upwards and grandiosely waving her arms overhead.[93] In contrast, Simone's Polly/Jenny is not playacting a fantasy, but recounting a revolutionary plot: when Simone sings "you'll never guess to who you're talking," she elongates the phrase with a sneer, mocking the men who, as Brooks surmises, "fail to read the bloody revolution brewing in [their] midst."[94] As she oscillates between extended utterances and sharply spoken retorts, cackles, and whispers, Simone's voice itself becomes fugitive and evades capture. Simone raids the song and stage, supplanting African traditions of maroonage into a German theatrical standard in a grandiose classical music hall.

While her Northern crowd could have distanced themselves from the racism she sang about later on in "Mississippi Goddam," the disconcerting "Pirate Jenny" may have been much harder to deflect. This may be why Simone presented "Pirate Jenny" first, intentionally unnerving her audiences in preparation for the remainder of her set. Simone's piano hunts the

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[92] See Jill Lepore, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan* (Vintage Books, 2005). Note that Lepore's book primarily focuses on the events of a later 1741 uprising.
[93] "Kurt Weill & Bertolt Brecht – Pirate Jenny (sung by Lotte Lenya)," uploaded by Mr. 2, featuring Lotte Lenya ca. 1966, *YouTube* (25 April, 2013), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZecKsm0Mfw&ab_channel=Mr.Egerman.
[94] Brooks, "Nina Simone's Triple Play, 181.

listener with its pounding, as she turns Carnegie Hall into a scene of shipboard insurrection. Earlier, I suggested that place and performance are made through repetition. Performance is particularly equipped to interrupt violent repetitions. Through performance, Simone ruptures the slave ship's psychic grounds and Carnegie Hall's spatial script. She jolts her audience out of the passive consumption the hall's architecture of fine, frontward-facing red-velvet chairs encourages. Reveling in vocal excess, Simone's screeches halt the cycle of repetition that would render her body a commodity defined by its capacity for multiplication. She *refuses* to be the virtuosic Black songstress that her audience may desire and which the ostentatious stage's "scenario" anticipates.

At her conclusion, Simone whispers into stillness that her victims be killed "right now." Her decisive command counters white supremacist violence and the demand that the Black pursuit of justice "go slow," which she would critique later in "Mississippi Goddam." Finishing "Pirate Jenny" with a spectral shout—"That'll learn ya!"—Simone instructs her audience how to read her body and the spaces she remaps, while refusing legibility.

"Go Limp"

If Simone's haunting and opaque "Pirate Jenny" embodied a practice of fugitive alienation, "Go Limp," covered two tracks later, brought the audience close as she corralled them into a call-and-response refrain not unlike a nursery rhyme in tone and content. *Too roo la, too roo la, too rool li ay*, Simone queued making her Carnegie crowd mimic the tune back.

In "Go Limp," Nina Simone revises a protest song written for the 1958 Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament by Alex Comfort, famous for his anti-militarist politics and 1972 nonfiction manual *The Joy of Sex.*[95] In both Comfort and Simone's versions, the song depicts a

[95] See: Alex Comfort, *The Joy of Sex* (Modest Securities Ltd., 1972) and Claire Rayner, "Alex Comfort," *The Guardian* (March 27, 2000), www.theguardian.com/news/2000/mar/28/guardianobituaries.

young woman attempting to remain sexually innocent amidst the hostile advances of fellow male protestors. At the beginning of the song, the woman pacifies her mother's worries, assuring her that she'll return from the "march" a "virgin maid," enumerating how she'll safeguard her virtue: "with a brick in my handbag / a smile on my face / and barbed wire in my underwear / to shed off disgrace." By the song's end, its protagonist has endured sexual advances from "a young man […] with a gleam in his eye," slept three nights on a "hard classroom floor," and, following her organizing briefing's implicit guidance, "gone perfectly limp" for the young man. The song concludes optimistically—the narrator's assailant has left his name and address and even though the protagonist is now pregnant, her child "won't have to march" if she and the movement "win." Lyrically and narratively, "Go Limp" seems to satirize the passivity and nonviolent approach of some activist groups—the speaker's attempts to protect herself from "disgrace" are thwarted when, as the lyrics tell us, she follows the "N-A-A-C-P" ethos to "go limp" in the face of attack. Even if she puts a positive spin on it at the end of the song, the woman's "brick" and "barbed-wire underwear" remain ineffective. "Go limp" also refers to the protest tactic of total muscular relaxation that makes it more difficult for police to carry away protestors. Protest leaders would have trained their cohorts to "go limp" when an officer tried to drag them off to be arrested, guidance that is both practical and bespeaks the state cruelty rampant at many of these incidents—only once a body is "dead weight," or becomes heavy, does the officer register the level of force they are using. In the song, Simone's amused tone is confusing; nonviolence is mocked, tongue-in-cheek, "go limp" is offered as a half-ironic, half-serious instructive, and meanwhile her lyrics attest to the real horrors and stakes of political organizing. Simone depicts protesting as arduous and dangerous for young women, even if worthwhile, and seems to say, by transporting the song to the NAACP setting, that nonviolent organizing circles are not the

reprieve from harm they may consider themselves to be. In the lyrics, the speaker is assaulted by another marcher, insinuating gendered violence is still a reality in activist communities. This critique foreshadows Simone's "Four Women," which testifies to the unique oppression Black women face as a result of their Blackness and gender presentations.

Simone's Carnegie Hall performance of "Go Limp" amplifies the song's disorienting qualities. At the Carnegie Hall concert and on at least one other occasion, Simone feigns her own befuddlement, acting as if she forgot the song's plot and her place in it ("Have I told you about Mama yet?" she intonates to the crowd). Simone's almost verbatim repetitions of her "confusion" reveal her "forgetting" as part of her script. Simone prompts the audience to help her "remember," as she encourages and praises their recitation of the song's simplistic "too roo la, too roo la, too rool li ay" refrain ("You've got it! You've got it!" she exclaims). At one point, between the first chorus and second verse, Simone instructs the audience: "You get the gist of the song now? When we get to the chorus again, I expect you to sing with lust." Recordings of "Go Limp" reveal that Simone desired, even advocated, for audiences' vocal participation: she musically "holds for laughs," often slowing down and quieting her accompaniment for them; interestingly, towards the end of the song, Simone creates a secondary voice of her own as she leaps an octave, creating a sonic space and echo that she alone can reach.



Figure 1.3: Nina Simone performing in the Netherlands. Kippa - overige foto's Reeks 1 - Nina Simone - Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision, Netherlands - CC BY-NC-ND.

When I first heard "Go Limp," I felt uneasy— Simone describes a woman, devoted to the civil rights movement, who chooses not to resist her own rape. She makes her audience complicit in the man's advances, coaching them to "sing with lust," joining in on their laughter, and, of course, leading them in a whimsical call-and-response. That Simone makes her spectators perform their amusement is key—"Go Limp" is right before "Mississippi Goddam," which Simone does not formally introduce. Subtly, as she critiques nonviolence in both songs, she suggests that, as a political strategy, it is insufficient to effect material change.[96] Simone's wariness of nonviolence is indicative of the era in which she performed; that spring, Congress had not yet passed the Civil Rights Act, in spite of major political demonstrations, including the 1963 March on Washington, and just that fall, John F. Kennedy was assassinated and white supremacists bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, causing the death of four young Black girls. Along with the strategy of nonviolence, Simone seems to critique, too,

[96] Simone, *I Put A Spell On You,* 94.

the expectations white audiences historically have placed on Black performers to instruct them on race and stand-in for Blues authenticity when she half-sings, half-says in an aside: "And if I have a great concert / Maybe I won't have to sing those folk songs again." Lamp-shading her "great concert" hall setting and expressing a fatigue at the "folk songs" stereotypically associated with her, Simone draws attention to the labor of her performance. Simone's irreverent tone in "Go Limp" also points to the futility of performance that fails to provoke its audience. Moreover, the "Go Limp" lyrics and Simone's theatrical "forgetfulness" suggest a practice of opacity. Though the song's narrator "goes limp" and does not resist the young man's forcefulness, she does not provide consent. Simone's befuddling use of humor constructs a wall between the audience and herself, obstructing them from transparently "reading" her. I am reminded of Zora Neale Hurston's "theory of tactics":

> The theory behind our tactics: 'The white man is always trying to know into somebody else's business. All right, I'll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle. He can read my writing but he sho' can't read my mind. I'll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize it and go away. Then I'll say my say and sing my song.[97]

With "too roo la, too roo la, too rool li ay," and to some extent "Go Limp" as a whole, Simone gives her audience "something to play with" before she "sings her song"—in this case, "Mississippi Goddam." Simultaneously, Simone cues her listeners to understand things are not always as they appear; "Go Limp" slips on the appearance of witty, yet flighty and fun, commentary, when really the subject matter is much more dire and damning. Returning to McKittrick's "transparent space," this troubling sets up Simone's geographic piece de resistance, a sustained indictment and unsettling of the American landscape.

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[97] Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men,* (New York: Harper, 1990 [1935]).

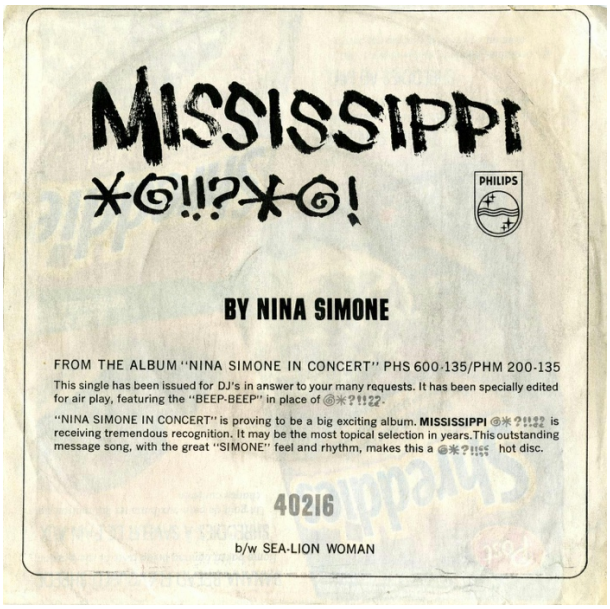


Figure 1.4: Record sleeve for the single release of "Mississippi Goddam" by Nina Simone, from the album *Nina Simone in Concert*. (Courtesy of Carnegie Hall Rose Archives).

"Mississippi Goddam"

Simone's "showtune for a show that has not been written yet" is in many ways her signature song, embodying both her musical expertise and strident Black radical politics. She wrote and composed "Mississippi Goddam" in the wake of the murders of both Medgar Evers and the four Black girls in Birmingham. Simone debuted "Mississippi Goddam" shortly before her Carnegie show, however, the New York concert would mark its premiere to a wider audience and most major recording.

Carrying the navigational pulse of enslaved Africans' songs, Simone's "Mississippi Goddam" maneuvers and scores the American landscape's anti-Blackness. In the lyrics she tracks white supremacist violence across the South; however, she ultimately locates white terrorists' threats across her many "paths" and daily routines: violence is chronic, seeping into and merging past, present, and future tenses. Simone's catalog of the landscape testified to her terror and exhaustion and indicted the supposed transparency of Mississippi's land regulation. Following the Supreme Court's landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, white

Mississippians formed two organizations to counter desegregation. The first was the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, a state agency proposed by the Mississippi House of Representatives and approved in 1956, which notably investigated and retaliated, via physical violence and economic recompense, against Black Mississippians even cursorily involved in the civil rights struggle. A white planter and plantation owner, Robert Patterson, initiated the second state-sanctioned white supremacist organization in 1960s Mississippi: motivated in part by his own claims to land in the delta, as well as fear that Black citizens would "outnumber" him, Patterson created the Citizens' Council, which collaborated with "elected officials, members of law enforcement, and White [sic] business leaders […] to detect and discourage local civil rights activity through the collective economic power that its members held."[98] Though the Citizens' Council started with Patterson in Indianola, Mississippi, its influence quickly spread beyond the state, and members created chapters in surrounding Southern states, as well as in Northern cities including Cleveland, Chicago, St. Louis, and Los Angeles.[99] The Mississippi Sovereignty Commission funded the Citizens' Council, donating a total of $193,500 from 1960-64, and Medgar Evers's murderer Byron De La Beckwith was an active member of both the Council and the Ku Klux Klan. I provide this context not to rehearse how acute racial injustice was in 1960s Mississippi, although it is important to remember the depth of state-incentivized persecution of Black Southerners during an American era often heralded for its progress, but to underscore even more the geographical incision of Simone's protest song. In explicitly naming anti-Blackness as persistently everywhere, mundane in its extremity, Simone more accurately maps 1960s Mississippi than state-manufactured maps of the region. Or, put differently, her song gets at a

[98] Stephanie R. Rolph, "The Citizens' Council," Mississippi History Now, last modified October 2019, https://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/the-citizens-council.
[99] Neil R. McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-64* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 138.

truth about place that aerial, paper maps elide. Consider these lyrics from the first verse of "Mississippi Goddam:"

> Can't you see it, can't
> you feel it
> It's all in the air
> I can't stand the pressure much longer
> Somebody say a prayer

Bringing to mind Christina Sharpe's notion of "the weather," or the everyday "climate of anti-Blackness," Simone implores her predominantly white Northern audience to witness what, for her, is all around.[100] Anti-Blackness constitutes Simone's very "air," altering its pressure like an eardrum ready to burst from the sheer force of altitude. Simone's characterization of the "weather" she endures as a Black woman aptly renders the "air" of white supremacy, which permeates each level of the "goddam" Mississippian climate. Simone further explored the pervasiveness of racial and gendered violence in subsequent performances of "Mississippi Goddam," in which she updated lyrics to cite current events, including protests and riots in St. Augustine, Selma, and Watts, Los Angeles as well as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. Through these alterations, Simone reveals her unrest is not limited to Mississippi, while also, to repeat an earlier phrase, adding details to a "sonic archive" of Black history.

Even though Simone concentrates her ire on Mississippi, she destabilizes the presumption that anti-Black geographies are solely the terrain of the "goddam" Deep South by disrupting Carnegie Hall's typically decorous environment and appealing to her audience directly: "Can't you see it / Can't you feel it?" She demands listeners pay disciplined attention to, what for her, is the weather of American existence. Furthermore, Simone disturbs linear time and place with her script-flipping repetitions of "too slow"—calling out the racist rhetoric that positions Black

[100] See: Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 106.

people as "too slow," she argues that *justice* is "too slow." "Slowness" functions on multiple levels as yet another intervention in white, upper-class culture's investment in propriety. Politely pursuing "slow" change is an inadequate means of material social transformation. This argument manifests most clearly in Simone's third verse:

> Picket lines, school boycotts
> They try to say it's a communist plot
> All I want is equality
> For my sister, my brother, my people and me
>
> Yes, you lied to me all these years
> You told me to wash and clean my ears
> And talk real fine just like a lady
> And you'd stop calling me Sister Sadie[101]

Note the change of address in this verse: Simone goes from calling out those who persecute civil rights activists as communists, a strategy deployed constantly by the Citizens' Council and Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, to saying that "*you* lied to me all these years [emphasis mine]." While the "they" who accuse protestors of "a communist plot" more likely refers to those with political authority and influence, such as Citizens' Council members, the "you" Simone confronts is the Carnegie Hall audience. She turns to them, as she has throughout the set and as was customary of her performance style, to reproach the very "lady-like" behavior expected of Carnegie performers. Her critique is unmistakably one concerning *performance;* taking on the idiom to "wash and clean [her] ears," and the directive to "talk real fine just like a

[101] "Sister Sadie" may reference the jazz standard "Sister Sadie," popularized by James Moody at the time; however, Simone is more likely citing the minor character "Sadie" in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Sadie is fugitive Jim's wife and is enslaved by Widow Douglas and Miss Watson, white women who represent the hypocrisy of genteel Christian society. With "Sister Sadie," Simone seems to be calling out white Christian etiquette, particularly amongst white women, in which Black women are only seen in relationship to (and in service of) whites—as "Sister Sadies." In her essay on "Mississippi Goddam," Nadine Cohodas writes that Simone's "Sadie" might stand in "for all the demeaning moments when condescending whites refused to address blacks with courtesy titles no matter their age or position." See: Nadine Cohodas, 'Mississippi Goddam' – Nina Simone (1964)," Library of Congress, National Recording Preservation Foundation (2018), www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/documents/MississippiGoddam.pdf.

lady," Simone contests (white) audiences' attempts to "civilize" and control her manners of listening and speaking, while rebuking racist discourse that depicts Black people as dirty and impure (in need of washing), inarticulate ("talk real fine"), and, for Black women in particular, overly masculine ("like a lady"). Here, Simone also condemns Black respectability politics as counterproductive reactions to stereotype. By transitioning from "they" to "you," Simone implies Thus, she confronts her Northern crowd and the white hegemonic space of Carnegie Hall.

Simone's vexation at her surroundings is consistent throughout "Mississippi Goddam." She declares early in the song "I don't belong here / I don't belong there," immediately after pleading to the "lord" to "have mercy on this land of mine." In this stanza, she explores her uneasy relationship to American land. Simone resolutely does not "belong here" nor "there;" she feels out of place throughout the country, perhaps due to the daily danger for Blacks in the U.S., which she testifies to in the song, and her very presence in America being a product of her ancestors' enslavement. And yet she prays, singing: "this land of *mine*." Even though Simone feels alienated from the land where she resides, she claims it as her own so much that she turns to divine grace. Simone's map underscores both the relentless, reiterative danger she faces in her daily navigation of space and her profoundly ambivalent relationship to place itself. America's grounds are haunted by the ever-present specter of violence and unanswered prayers for Simone.

Simone emphasizes language's limitations in "Mississippi Goddam." And yet she uses language to *damn* Mississippi. "The double work of Simone's curse," Brooks argues, is "to engage in a fraught relationship with a God that she now rejects and yet simultaneously needs in order to fulfill her condemnation of the South."[102] Her "damn" is an Austenian utterance in the and act. To "damn" someone is to call on a higher power for the sake of their condemnation. By

[102] Brooks, "Nina Simone's Triple Play," 188.

"damning" the American South, Simone *does something* to the land. She acts upon it. Simone may be "damning" her listeners as well; however, she may also be opening up space for them to issue their own "damning" of America, in all their incommensurable entrances into their cursing. Her "goddam" also reveals the futility of language. Simone is so disturbed by "Mississippi" that the structure of her sentence falls apart: instead of naming Mississippi's emotional or physical impact on her as she does for the other states, she just says "goddam." The failure of language to testify to the effects of violence would be explored through her screams and howls just a few years later with "Four Women."

"Four Women"

> Let's face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. "Peaches," and "Brown Sugar," "Sapphire" and "Earth Mother," "Aunty," "Granny," God's "Holy Fool," a "Miss Ebony First," or "Black Woman at the Podium": I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented.[103]
>
> – Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," 1987

The lyrics of "Four Women," organized in four stanzas, follow four Black women, each representing an anti-Black female stereotype. Each stanza concludes with the refrain, "What do they call me? My name is…"[104] The women—Aunt Sarah, Saffronia, Sweet Thing, and Peaches, in order—all correlate to what Patricia Hill Collins theorizes as "controlling images."[105] Simone invokes the "mammy," "tragic mulatto," "Jezebel," and "Sapphire," respectively. Hortense Spillers initiates her landmark essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," quoted above, with the same structure as Simone's "Four Women." Both treatises

[103] Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby," 65.
[104] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 65.
[105] See: Collins, *Black feminist thought,* 69-96.

deconstruct how white dominant culture marks the Black female body through a history of sexual violation, which is evidenced through the creation of the very tropes both Spillers and Simone investigate.

Simone draws a historic continuum between these stereotypical figures in relationship to sexual violence and what Kimberly Juanita Brown terms the "afterimages" of enslavement.[106] Through Simone's insurgent final and prolonged note—her wailing hold on "My name is *Peaches*"—she takes the song's peak of suspension and rupture and uses it to embody a sonics of dissent.[107] Simone's fleshy rebellion counters catastrophe's singular grammar, as Simone gathers meaning from Black feminist collectivity and through her interruption of her own body as "marked" text.[108]

In filmed performances of "Four Women," including one in Holland from 1965, Simone settles into the piano. Gesturing to her own natural hair, she says "one of these women has hair like mine," setting up her own positionality and prompting audiences to perhaps reflect on theirs.[109] Her song starts with Aunt Sarah as she sings: "My skin is black / My arms long / My hair is wooly / My back is strong / Strong enough to take the pain / Inflicted again and again / What do they call me? / My name is Aunt Sarah." Simone's straightforward instrumental composition directs the audience's focus to her lyrics, which follow the above pattern for each woman. With the character of Aunt Sarah—the enslaved laborer, made to be simultaneously asexual and always available for sexual violation—Simone enunciates a beginning "which

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[106] Kimberly Juanita Brown, *The Repeating Body: Slavery's Visual Resonance in the Contemporary* (Duke University Press, 2009), 1-6.
[107] Simone, "Four Women" and Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 81.
[108] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 65.
[109] "Four Women – Nina Simone 1965," *YouTube,* uploaded by Mr. Wolf (February 7, 2022), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKkVkQCna9g&ab_channel=Mr.Wolf.

precedes [her].”[110] By initiating her song with Aunt Sarah, Simone instructs her listeners—many of whom would have been well-meaning white civil rights activists—that an accounting for the crimes against these “four women” *must* commence with what Spillers calls the inaugural “materialized scene of unprotected female flesh—of female flesh ‘ungendered.’”[111] Spillers argues two decades after Simone, that assigning gender and particularly white womanhood’s “matriarchist value” to Black women represents “a fatal misunderstanding” (see Introduction).[112] Thus, Spillers articulates that violation against the gendered female must be read differently in the context of Blackness and Black flesh’s “ungendering” at the “suspended” site of the Middle Passage.[113] Simone’s scene with Aunt Sarah harkens back to Frederick Douglass’s Aunt Hester, whose infamous scream was Douglass’s “blood-stained gate, [his] entrance to the hell of slavery.”[114] Just as Simone’s beginning precedes her, Douglass’s initiation into slavery’s rupturing “hell” precedes him—enunciated through sound, or what Fred Moten theorizes as “proof that objects resist,”[115] Simone and Douglass’s recollections of their “aunts” point towards a catastrophic grammar that does not conclude, but repeats through marking another “captive body.”[116]

After Aunt Sarah, Simone adopts the roles of “Saffronia” and “Sweet Thing,” whose stories both illustrate racial capitalism’s dependence on the sexual exploitation of Black women. Saffronia, who has “yellow” skin and lives “between two worlds,” recounts that “my father was

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[110] My phrasing here is a reference to Sarah Broom’s deeply geographic memoir of her family’s history in New Orleans, which inspires my work here. See: Sarah Broom, *The Yellow House* (Grove Atlantic, 2019).
[111] Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 68.
[112] Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 80.
[113] Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 80.
[114] Frederick Douglass, “Chapter 1 (Aunt Hester’s Scream),” *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), 63.
[115] Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 1.
[116] Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 67.

rich and white / he forced my mother late one night."[117] Simone's "Saffronia" indirectly references *partus sequitur ventrum,* the 1626 Virginia law that decreed a child's slave status followed their mother's; this decree absolved white enslavers who raped Black women and in fact further incentivized them because any children resulting from the rape would increase the enslaver's capital by generating more human property.[118] "Saffronia" uses her own body as the text that betrays this sordid history; her mother's rape is proven by Saffronia's skin. Simone's next character, "Sweet Thing," represents a sex worker, with lines like: "Whose little girl am I? / Anyone who has money to buy." Though sex work is work, when placed alongside the rest of the women in this song, it seems as though Simone is making a point about the limited options afforded to Black women in a culture that devalues them and reduces them to a body, or sweet "thing." Both Sweet Thing and Saffronia's names allude to the dynamics in which the hypersexualized Black woman's body is turned into a commodity, a process bell hooks terms "eating the other."[119] Sweet Thing invokes the circulation and consumption of sugar, which was central to the slave trade and became synonymous with Black female flesh. Kara Walker explores this conflation in her 2014 art piece, *A Subtlety: Or the Marvelous Sugar Baby,* a larger-than-life-size installation of a "mammy" sphinx figure made entirely of sugar in an old Domino warehouse.[120] Saffron is a spice used to add flavor in dishes, thus Saffronia speaks to the operation "within commodity culture, [in which] ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture," as bell hooks argues.[121] Both Sweet

[117] Simone, "Four Women."
[118] See: Morgan, "Partus Sequiter Ventrum," 1-17.
[119] bell hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (South End Press, 1992), 21-22.
[120] Kara Walker, *A Subtlety: Or the Marvelous Sugar Baby…,* 2014.
[121] hooks, "Eating the Other," 21.

Thing and Saffronia make plain how the commodification and sexual violation of Black women are rooted in histories of and present iterations of African enslavement.

Finally, and most crucially, Simone brings her audience back to Aunt Sarah at the song's conclusion: her voice now closer to militant howl, she cries out, "I'm awfully bitter these days / Because my parents were slaves."[122] "Four Women" has a seemingly chronological structure, with each "controlling image" occupying a sequential moment in American history. Simone places them in relationship to each other and brings them into the present tense ("My skin *is*…" "What *do* they call me?" "My name *is*…") to show that these racist tropes and their effects endure and though sang chronologically, are not linear. Simone locates her "parents" as enslaved, condensing her genealogy to show that Aunt Sarah, and the afterlives of slavery, remain in the present. With her final verse, Simone halts the rhyme scheme with "I'll kill the first mother I see!" and challenges the song's repetitive structure by only stating her name once—this time with elongated, defiant scream. In extending "Peaches" to the point of excess, Simone talks back to the white supremacist systems that would see her body as solely a site of production.[123] "Excess" is taken up on Simone's own terms, her belt both sustained and controlled as she seizes back the name that would identify her only through her sex.[124] While "Four Women" up until this point follows a relatively static rhythm and smaller range, engendering a hypnotic quality, Simone breaks her song's spell, suspending "My name is..." and hovering at her voice's crackle, until she finally gives her voice over to screaming resolve. Simone's scream folds into Aunt Hester's within what Fred Moten calls "scene[s] of objection."[125] Simone transgresses across

[122] Simone, "Four Women."
[123] Working from Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012).
[124] Peaches is both the literal fruit that bears more fruit, but also slang for vagina.
[125] Moten, *In the Break.*

registers, perspectives, and generations, forming what Brooks calls a fugitivity that "announce[s] itself in shifting and subjective positions, and which, in turn, creates a productive excess that obfuscates the putative transparency of the black female singer."[126] At her performance's apex, Simone "stands *in the flesh"* and sounds against the dominant order, which would read her scream's "provocative intensity" as "nothing but the call of a wild animal," as Edouard Glissant critiques.[127] Simone's recalcitrant scream instead extends the insurgent language of her ancestors to name the reiterations of violence that mark their bodies, while breaking these cycles open wide.

Coda: "How Sweet It Would Be If I Found I Could Fly"

Nina Simone demands absolute rigor from her listener. For me there is always more to hear and to learn, and Simone gifts her listener transformation, again and again, as she requires our discipline.

Joshua Chambers-Letson, from whom I build "listening as incommensurable practice," inaugurates one of his sustained meditations on Simone with her track "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free," where for a second, Simone soars. As Chambers-Letson notes, her voice "climbs the octave up the word 'wish' into the upper register."[128] She sings:

> How sweet it would be if I found I could fly.
> I'd soar to the sun and look down at the sea.
> Then I'd sing cause I'd know how it feels to be free.

[126] Daphne Brooks, "Nina Simone's Triple Play," *Callaloo* 34, no. 1 (2011), 181.
[127] See: Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 81; Moten, *In the Break,* 8; and Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (University of Michigan Press, [1989] 1997),
123-124.
[128] Chambers-Letson, *After the Party*, 36.

Alongside these lyrics, Chambers-Letson includes Hiroshige Utagawa's 1857 *ukiyo-e* (woodblock print), *Fukagawa Susaki and Jumantsubo,* which dramatizes an eagle's sweeping view of the earth's snow-covered hills, its landslides and cresting waves. "Hiroshige's print mobilized the aesthetic encounter to give his audiences (mostly middle and working-class Edo [Tokyo] spectators the sense of flying," Chambers-Letson writes.[129] Viewing the print one imagines that, for an instant, you are glimpsing at the passage of time—not as some masterful god, but as a bird, who will fly and fall, but will know what it means to be free, to feel it in your wings. Simone's final stanza of "I Wish I Knew How It Feels to Be Free," where she takes flight, and now this Hiroshige print, will always remind me of the Greek myth of Philomela. In the story, Philomela, after being raped and mutilated by her sister's husband, transforms into a nightingale. Many times, I have glanced out my window or stared into trees seeking solace in birds, imagining I could shift shapes like Philomela. What would it mean to sense flight that feels forever out of reach? Simone teaches her listeners that empathy is impossible, but education—and with that, transformation—is not. Being rendered to pieces is a devastation, yet through the shards, you might create something radical, each fragment imbued with lessons learned. The bird above the sea writes an alternate lineage of the aerial, one not premised on the colonial cartographer's conquest or empire's surveilling eye, but on songs passed and shared, an embodied map felt flying high.

[129] Chambers-Letson, *After the Party*, 36.

CHAPTER TWO

"Sound can create the wound and then stitch it:"[1]
Mapping Multi-Sensorial Listening and Sexual Violence in the Work of Tanya Tagaq

"The lights join my song with a sound of their own," Tanya Tagaq writes in *Split Tooth*, a text which defies genre categorization. "A high-pitched ringing mixed with the crackling snap of electricity. I can feel it on my skin and in my belly. A dog howls, and I can also hear someone weeping in agony a long ways away, but a long time ago."[2]

High ringing, crackling snaps, canine howls, and anguished weeps, distant as lightyears. In a few sentences, Tanya Tagaq ushers her readers into a realm of sound. I begin with Tagaq's words in hopes that retracing them here may do what they once did for me—Tagaq's language opens a portal of feeling and resonance that reorients my senses. Her world is one of textured sounds: not just howls, rings, and snaps, but giggles and grunts, echoes and whispers, and sighs and shrieks.

When I first read Tagaq's *Split Tooth* and heard her throat singing, for which she is most well-known, I felt it in my body: her songs and stories crawled across my arms and chest, unsettling me. The more I paid attention, the more crawling shifted to soothing. From my settler positionality, Tagaq challenged what xwélmexw (Stó:lō) writer and music scholar Dylan Robinson calls shxwelítemelh xwlala:m, or "hungry listening" Robinson's "hungry listening" cannot be reduced to racial identity, but instead names "settler colonial forms of perception" that are often "normalized and unmarked" in the United States and Canada.[3] As Tagaq unsettled me,

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[1] Tanya Tagaq, *Split Tooth* (Viking Press, 2018), 56.
[2] Tagaq, *Split Tooth*, 56-7.
[3] Dylan Robinson, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* (University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 2-3. It is important to note that while these "settler colonial forms" may appear "normalized and unmarked" to some, this is by no means a natural nor uniform perception. My citation of Robinson here points towards to how settler colonial listening and sensory paradigms are made and sustained structures, not inherent ones. Furthermore, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson writes: "For Indigenous people, white possession is not unmarked, unnamed, or invisible; it is hypervisible." I return to this idea, and Moreton-Robinson, in my following chapter, as I

I started to disentangle the "'civilizing' sensory paradigm" woven into structures of "hungry listening" that I have learned and grown up alongside.[4] That process means decentralizing and questioning my readings of sound as "content" primed for my consumption and pleasure and instead "reorient[ing]" towards sound as having its own unique "life, agency, and subjectivity."[5] The "sensory," then, may not be so readily "civiliz[ed]."[6]

Tagaq's sounds layer across each other; they are absorbed not simply through ears or eyes, but rather land on "skin" and grow inside stomachs.[7] In the passage above, Tagaq writes of a communion with the Northern Lights: typically thought of as a visual phenomenon, Tagaq testifies to the lights' "song" and its activation of the body.[8] While the lights' sounds evade geophysicists' understanding—they have yet to ascertain a scientific reason for their call—residents of the High North, including Tagaq, have always heard the voice of the aurora borealis.[9] They describe it as a mix of static, thunder, and birdsong.[10] For Tagaq's narrator in *Split Tooth*, her exchange with the lights is so visceral that she feels it on her "belly" and "skin." As she surrenders to the lights, their emerald prisms "sharpen" into the faces of her "Aunties' and Great-grandmothers'" and become "ancestors and future children."[11] The aurora are "healing

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examine what it means when we say histories are "unmarked," buried, or forgotten, particularly in relationship to geography—unmarked, buried, and forgotten for whom? See: Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xiii.

[4] Robinson, *Hungry Listening,* 3.

[5] Robinson, *Hungry Listening,* 15.

[6] Robinson, *Hungry Listening,* 3.

[7] In *Split Tooth,* Tagaq writes: "How presumptuous to assume that an experience is limited to your own two eyes." Tagaq, *Split Tooth*, 117.

[8] For more background on the acoustics of the Northern Lights and their role in Arctic culture, see: Caspar Henderson, "The Northern Lights Make Music," *Nautilus*, January 30, 2024, https://nautil.us/the-northern-lights-make-music-504237/; Ned Rozell, "Straining to Hear the Voice of the Aurora," *Geographical Institute, University of Alaska Fairbanks*, October 19, 1995, https://nautil.us/the-northern-lights-make-music-504237/; and Carolin Crawford, "The Sound of the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights)," Gresham College, virtual lecture, uploaded February 1, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zcef943eoiQ&ab_channel=GreshamCollege.

[9] The High North refers to the world's Arctic and subarctic regions; it is the ancestral home of the Inuit, as well as the Aleut, Yupik, and Saami peoples. This area includes the nations of Canada, Greenland, Russia, and the United States (Alaska).

[10] Rozell, "Straining" and Crawford, "The Sound of the Aurora Borealis."

[11] Tagaq, *Split Tooth,* 57.

and death-dealing," and when *Split Tooth*'s speaker returns inside, she is transformed: she discovers larvae from the lights "glowing green" in her nose; her chest and throat "hurt;" and her "world [is] turn[ed] upside down."[12] The Northern Lights have beheld and changed her across several frequencies—sound, touch, sight, and vibration—prompting a deepened engagement with her body, environment, and kin that Tagaq explores throughout the remainder of the book.

In *Split Tooth*, Tagaq melds poetry, autofiction, sketches, dreams, and memoir to chronicle an Inuk woman's coming-of-age in her Arctic home of Ikaluktutiak (Cambridge Bay, Nunavut). *Split Tooth*'s speaker is about ten years Tagaq's senior: the book begins in 1975, Tagaq's birth year. Although Tagaq and her speaker share several biographical similarities—most notably, growing up in Nunavut—*Split Tooth* is not an autobiography.[13] What it models instead is a decentering of the "I" that is expected in stories depicting sexual violence and often demanded in Truth and Reconciliation testimonies.[14] While Tagaq's speaker navigates and witnesses several forms of sexual abuse, she does so in explicit concert with the land and community around her. Throughout *Split Tooth*, Tagaq writes with an activating language that encourages readers to consider agency's complexity even in scenes depicting extreme force. Tagaq similarly wields this dynamism and its transformative potential in her live performances. Like Nina Simone, she instructs audiences towards more capacious practices of listening, which account for spectators' positionalities and places' histories. Tagaq does this while intervening in the narrative expectations placed upon Native artists, eschewing tropes of tragedy and requests for reconciliation in favor of a politics of joy and contention. Further, she develops a sovereignty which guides her collaborative mapmaking practice—in reading Tagaq's performances and

[12] Tagaq, *Split Tooth*, 57.
[13] Nunavut's name comes from the Inuktitut (a language of the Inuit people) word for "our land."
[14] See: Jill Carter, "Discarding Sympathy, Disrupting Catharsis: The Mortification of Indigenous Flesh as Survivance-Intervention," *Theatre Journal* 67, no. 3 (October 2015): 413-432 .

artwork as maps, a geography of the Arctic unfolds, one that is grounded in sexual autonomy and tribal self-determination, not conquest and resource extraction.

Split Tooth is best read as an alternate entry point into Tagaq's sonic universe. By the time Tagaq released *Split Tooth* in 2018, she was renowned for her throat singing. Tagaq reached widespread acclaim (and criticism) in 2014 when she won Canada's Polaris Music Prize for her third full-length album, *Animism*, beating out more mainstream artists like Drake and Arcade Fire. The Polaris is Canada's most prestigious music prize and honors the best of the year's recorded music; it is often heralded as a symbol of national Canadian pride and excellence.[15] As I discuss in detail later, staunch "animal rights" advocates vilified Tagaq for months prior to and after the awards for her support of Indigenous seal hunting practices. Abusers threatened Tagaq's life online, calling her a "savage" and "scum."[16] In an act of refusal and celebration of Inuit ways of life, Tagaq wore seal-hide cuffs on stage for her Polaris performance—a show which the award's committee described as "the most memorable in [their] history."[17]

In addition to her five studio albums, Tagaq has worked closely with Bjork, the Kronos Quartet, and composer and vocalist Christine Duncan. In recent years, she has started collaborating with a "choir" of fellow Inuit throat singers (although, she says she is still searching for a "cooler" term than the rather Western "choir") which includes Nancy Mike, Varna Marianne Nielsen, Cynthia Pitsiulak, and Charlotte Angugaattiaq Qaminiq. I saw Tagaq perform with these women and the Kronos Quartet at a 2024 concert at Brown University and again with Duncan at The Royal Conservatory of Music's commemoration of the National Day

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[15] For an extended critique of multiculturalism within Canada's national identity and the arts, see Robinson, particularly their chapter on "Feeling Reconciliation" (201-233) and note on page 283. Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 201-233; 283.

[16] See: Elizabeth Rule, "Seals, Selfies, and the Settler State: Indigenous Motherhood and Gendered Violence in Canada," *American Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (2018): 741-754.

[17] Tanya Tagaq, "Breath of the Inuit: Tanya Tagaq Interviewed," interview by John Freeman, *The Quietus,* January 280, 2015, https://thequietus.com/interviews/tanya-tagaq-animism-interview/.

of Truth and Reconciliation that same year: throughout this chapter, I read and return to these concerts, prioritizing my experiences as an audience member and how Tagaq guided me to listen incommensurably. To reiterate from my previous chapter, listening incommensurably means a practice of engaging with others' stories with the aim of not reductive empathy but, following Joshua Chambers-Letson, "being-with" one another 'in difference and discord,'" so that "racial and sexual difference are not extinguished but shared out with each other."[18] I also analyze Tagaq's set at the Polaris gala as a key moment in Tagaq's ascent to mainstream recognition and one where, even amidst this acclaim, she critiqued Canadian nationalism and crafted a sovereign space on stage.



Figure 2.1: Tanya Tagaq performing at Polaris Prize Gala in 2014. Photo copyright of Curtis Sindrey/Aesthetic Magazine Toronto.

[18] See: Joshua Chambers-Letson, *After the Party: A Manifesto of Queer of Color Life* (New York University Press, 2018), xx. Chambers-Letson's "commons of incommensurability" builds from José Esteban Muñoz's "Race, Sex, and the Incommensurate: Gary Fisher and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick," in *Queer Futures: Reconsidering Ethics, Activist, and the Political*, eds. Elahe Haschemi Yekani, Eveline Killian and Beatrice Michaelis (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2013): 103-15.

In this section of my dissertation, I argue that Tagaq's sound opens up multi-sensorial modes of listening that are premised on a land-centered ethics of agency.[19] Tagaq illustrates paths towards sexual and spatial sovereignty and repair that are grounded not in hierarchized narratives of individual harm, but through embodied explorations of what practices of survival and relationality look like amidst, and in spite of, the U.S. and Canada's ongoing projects of conquest. Though sovereignty is a weighted term, I follow Sarah Deer's definition of it as both a "political" and "personal" "description of self-determination."[20] Deer, citing the work of Indigenous anti-violence activists, vitally discerns that "self-determination for individual [rape] survivors and self-determination for tribal nations are closely connected […] It is impossible to have a truly self-determining nation when its members have been denied self-determination over their own bodies."[21] While Deer recognizes myriad social and legal issues central to tribal nations' right to sovereignty, she argues that "rape should be the number one priority for tribal nations" because "all other challenges faced by [them] are linked to the history and trauma of rape."[22]

Rape and colonization are interconnected in an experiential sense—as Deer writes, both are defined by an outsider's "hostile" invasion of a body and soul or land and culture, respectively—and they are inseparable on a systemic one. Deer clarifies:

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[19] My thinking on multi-sensorial listening is indebted to my dear friend and colleague, Sophia Cocozza, who theorizes this term through the lenses of musicology and disability studies. Though my use of the multi-sensorial relies more on a performance-based approach, it is helpful to retrace this term in its musicological context. See: Sophia Cocozza, "Listening Otherwise" (Thesis, Tufts University, 2022), ProQuest (29169370), as well as Nina Sun Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice* (Duke University Press, 2015); and Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (Bloomsbury, 2013).

[20] Sarah Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xv.

[21] Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape,* xvi. Deer's argument is, as she notes, "informed by activist materials describes the parallels between sovereignty of nations and sovereignty of women (Deer, 171). See also: Brenda Hill, *Ending Violence Against Native Women from the Roots Up: An Overview of Shelter and Advocacy Program Development Supporting Women's Sovereignty* (Rapid City, S. Dak.: Sacred Circle, National Resource Center to End Violence against Native Women, 2009), 2.

[22] Deer, "The Beginning and End of Rape," xv.

> The crisis of rape in tribal communities is inextricably linked to the way in which the United States developed and sustained a legal system that has usurped the sovereign authority of tribal nations… and failed Native women by supplanting women-centered societies with patriarchal, oppressive structures that condone and thrive on violence as a way to control and oppress members of marginalized communities.[23]

Deer's observations that self-determination functions on coalescent tribal and personal levels translates profoundly into Tagaq's "sounding" of spatial and sexual sovereignty through performance. While Deer researches from a specifically Native American legal and sociological climate, Tagaq's work operates within unique Inuit contexts. As I explore throughout this chapter, Tagaq's linking of rape and colonization is informed by Canada's quest to claim Arctic lands and its resources through their attempted cultural genocide of the Inuit, and the nation's ongoing failure to intervene in the so-called "phenomena" of missing and murdered Native women, girls, and Two-Spirit persons (commonly referred to by organizers and journalists as MMIWG2S). These "crimes," of course, are not discrete, but fit into what Audra Simpson terms as the Canadian state's "character," which "seeks to destroy that which it is not," in other words that which is non-white, feminine, and queer.[24] Native women represent a "fundamental challenge" to the state's "legitimacy" because "they embod[y] and signal something radically different to Euro-Canadian governance."[25] I follow MMIWG2S activists and Native Studies scholars in examining Canada's attempts to "eliminate, contain, hide, and, in other ways, 'disappear'" Indigenous women and youth through such measures as the Indian Act, residential schools, and federal and judiciary neglect. With attention to these histories, I ask how Tagaq

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[23] Deer, "The Beginning and End of Rape," xiv.
[24] Audra Simpson, "The State is a Man: Theresa Spence, Loretta Saunders, and the Gender of Settler Sovereignty," *Theory & event* 19, no. 4 (2016): 2, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/633280. My quotation of "crimes" corroborates Simpson's critique of the term, in which she notes that: "As a crime [the problem of murdered and missing Native women] appears to have no context no structure animating it, no materiality besides a legal transgression." See: Simpson, "The State is a Man," 2.
[25] Simpson, "The State is a Man," 6.

reveals the ways in which *performance*, with its attention to the body, is necessary to produce complex stories about sexual violence and sovereignty.

In this chapter, I start with an overview of throat singing's history and role as a relational practice grounded in Inuit knowledge systems. Then, through reading her performances at Brown, Polaris, and the Royal Conservatory, as well as portions of *Split Tooth*, I illuminate three strategies Tagaq invokes to "sound" sovereignty: 1.) laughter as joy and refusal; 2.) multi-sensorial listening as a rejection of the singularity of sound within narratives of sexual violence; and 3.) contention as cutting through what Audra Simpson, following Jodi Byrd, has called "the acoustic mess of settlement."[26] Throughout each of these strategies I analyze how Tagaq and other Inuit artists forward an embodied and land-based sovereignty through performance. Finally, I conclude with a meditation on the recent mini-series, *True Detective: Night Country*, which Tagaq worked closely on. I argue that *Night Country* interrogates the historically invasive genre of crime drama through its centering of Inuit women's land-based listening and storytelling strategies. By bringing strategies of sounding sovereignty to prestige television, Tagaq and her collaborators demonstrate the capaciousness of Indigenous maps across mediums and make a resolute argument for reproductive justice-centered and Indigenous knowledge-based approaches to justice.

Throat Singing, Land Listening

Katajjaq (Throat Singing) in Context: The Form's History in Inuit Culture and Colonial Canada

Tanya Tagaq did not hear throat singing until her twenties on a tape that her mom sent her, but it resonated immediately. "I think [throat singing] is something that pulled at my roots,"

[26] Simpson, "The State is a Man," 2. Simpson is drawing from Byrd's "cacophony." See: Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xxvi-xxxi.

she shared in an interview with *The Quietus.* "I felt it right away and had no problem making any of the sounds."[27] Tagaq's mother sent the tape as a reprieve for her daughter's homesickness. She had just moved to Halifax for art school, where "the cultural differences were very vast," Tagaq reflects. She recalls that she "was super lonely and getting upset at always being the only Inuk around." The tape offered solace: "When my mom sent me a tape of some throat singing and I heard the land on it, I got so happy."[28]

That Tagaq, one of the world's most renowned Inuit performers, did not learn throat singing with a partner, how it is traditionally sung, or hear it until she moved away from the Arctic is notable. Tagaq grew up in Nunavut in the late 20th century, deep in the aftermath of Canada's increased colonization efforts of the 1940s and 50s. During that time, spurred by the Canadian state's goal of complete sovereignty over the Arctic, including the highly sought-after Northwest Passage, government officials assigned all Inuit identification numbers and forcibly enrolled their youth in residential schools.[29]At these schools, instructors compelled Inuit children to learn English and abandon their Inuktitut language and cultural belief systems.[30] Residential schools' curricula replaced Inuit artforms and traditions, including throat singing, with intensive labor responsibilities and base-level reading lessons.[31]

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[27] Tanya Tagaq, "Breath of the Inuit: Tanya Tagaq Interviewed," interview by John Freeman, *Quietus*, January 28, 2015, digital, https://thequietus.com/interviews/tanya-tagaq-animism-interview/.

[28] Tanya Tagaq, "Tanya Tagaq talks Björk, Throat singing and the Polaris Prize | Red Bull Music Academy," interview by Anupa Mistry, *Red Bull Music Academy*, October 7, 2016, transcript, https://www.redbullmusicacademy.com/lectures/tanya-tagaq-lecture.

[29] For a detailed account of the colonization of the Northwest Passage, particularly its connection to U.S. and Canadian territorial expansion and Native sovereignty, see Sean Fraga's forthcoming book *Ocean Fever: Steam Power, Transpacific Trade, and the American Colonization of Puget Sound* (Yale University Press, forthcoming) and his roundtable contribution, "From Sea to Sea: The Northwest Passage, Early America, and the Push to the Pacific Ocean" for *The Panorama: Expansive Views from the Journal of the Early Republic*, June 6, 2022, https://thepanorama.shear.org/2022/06/06/from-sea-to-sea-the-northwest-passage-early-america-and-the-push-to-the-pacific-ocean/.

[30] There are several Inuit languages. Inukitut is one of the principle ones and is spoken in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

[31] A deep dive into the Arctic residential school archives demonstrates more explicitly the educational goals and curricula of such institutions and, not shockingly, illustrates instructors and founders' racist and paternalistic

In addition to their harshly disciplined restrictions of Inuit culture, school staff and missionaries also abused Inuit children and adolescents—rape, beatings, and other abuses of power were disturbingly common.[32] Since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's investigation in 2008, at least 3,000 to 6,000 children have been identified as having died in residential school, though Tagaq theorizes that the "the number amongst our talkings is closer to 25,000 or 30,000 children."[33] In her 2016 interview with the Red Bull Music Academy, Tagaq shared that she has personally spoken to rape survivors from residential schools; in some of those cases, after priests non-consensually impregnated their victims, nuns gave the women forced abortions or killed their newborns in on-site furnaces.[34] Across several interviews and live performances, Tagaq stresses that this period of Canadian assault on Inuit life is "so recent her mom remembers it."[35] "[These were] very terrible things that [were] right before my time,"

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attitudes towards the Inuit. You can study more about one school in particular, Turquetil Hall, which residential school survivors largely consider one of the most egregious institutions in Canada: Lorraine Brandson, "Turquetil Hall Roman Catholic participation in education of the Central Arctic Inuit 1955-1969," April 11, 1991 (2014-054-001, Special Collections, Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre, Algoma University Libraries, Saulte Ste. Marie, ON, Canada): https://chesterfield-inlet.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Turquetil-Hall-1955-1969-2015-054_001_004-Part-1.pdf. See also: Cathy Cockey, *Paulatuuq Oral History Project: Inuvialuit Elders Share Their Stories* (Inuvik, NWT: Parks Canada, 2004); Murielle Ida Nagy, *Yukon North Slope Inuvialuit History* (Whitehorse, Yukon: Yukon Tourism, Heritage Branch, 1994); Tommy T. Thrasher, *Footprints to the Stars: The Story of My Life, These Are the Footprints of My Ancestors That I Followed, If You Follow Them Too, You will Make It* (Inuvik, NWT: Boreal Books, 2009); and The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools: The Inuit and Northern Experience*, *The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume 2* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015).

[32] See above.

[33] Tagaq, interview by Mistry.

[34] This story is cited about Tagaq in her interview by Mistry. The following sources detail several of the instances Tagaq may have been referring to (and, sadly, testify to their regularity): Jack Agness, *Behind Closed Doors: Stories from the Kanloops Indian Residential School* (Theytus Books, 2025); Kevin D. Annett, "Imposing Measures to Prevent Birth and Procreation," *Hidden From History: The Canadian Holocaust,* 3rd edition (International Tribunal into Crimes of Church and State, The Friends and Relatives of the Disappeared, 2010), 102-120; and Jonathan Van Maren, "Residential schools, forced abortion, and the graves of children," *The Bridgehead* (November 16, 2022), https://thebridgehead.ca/2022/11/16/residential-schools-abortion-and-the-graves-of-children/.

[35] Tanya Tagaq quoted at "Climate Change: Our Response as Artivists," Brown University, Martinos Auditorium, Granoff Center for the Creative Arts (March 12, 2024).

Tagaq says, “It’s our whole country’s legacy and every single person’s responsibility to understand.”[36]

During her adolescence, Tagaq attended Akaitcho Hall in Yellowknife, one of Canada’s last residential schools.[37] There, teachers stressed the importance of not only the English language, but of white colonial values and knowledge systems. Tagaq barely had a place to speak Inuktitut, let alone learn throat singing. Still, in describing her discovery, Tagaq emphasizes the musical form’s relational qualities. Simply hearing throat singing served as a salve for Tagaq’s isolation: it reunited her with the land and its importance within Inuit culture. Sound, in Tagaq’s anecdote, functions as memory—the way hearing a song from your childhood or the accent of a beloved family member from a stranger might suddenly jolt you back home. Distinct to Tagaq, as an Inuk woman, however, is that sound’s memory is synonymous with land.

Embodied Listening: Modeling Consent and Land as Archive and Teacher

Tagaq taught herself how to throat sing alone, but as she has described and demonstrated with other performers, the practice is customarily between partners, most often played to pass the time during hunts. Throat singing, or katajjaq, is typically performed as a competition between two Inuit women. In it, the women stand opposite each other and make a shared rhythmic pattern through voiced and unvoiced sounds, until one of them laughs and, thus, “loses” the contest. One singer establishes the initial pattern and her partner fills it gaps, fitting their voices together “like puzzle pieces,” Tagaq reflects.[38] Throughout the game, the singers may switch roles, alternating who is the leader and who is the follower. “It’s not meant to be this big spiritual thing,” Tagaq

[36] Tagaq, interview by Mistry.
[37] Tagaq, interview by Mistry.
[38] Tagaq, interview by Freeman.

shared in the same Red Bull Music Academy talk. Throat singing is more so a sportive test to see who has "the most lung capacity and quickest mind to switch back and forth."[39] Because laughter, or "breaking" the song's rhythm, signals the match's end, throat singers tend to teasingly attempt to "throw off" their partner: "you can eat garlic or make faces […] to win the competition," Tagaq offers, recalling games with her cousin. "It's very friendly and very joyous."

Throat singing mirrors the land, translating its stories into sounds. "It's a mimicry of the land and animals and circumstance," Tagaq explains. She and fellow throat singers can detect what each rhythm pattern invokes.[40] One of Tagaq's favorites is a "really endearing" song that recounts "a small husky pup" as it chases sled dogs to play with, but keeps slipping on the ice.[41] Imitation of the land and its beings is central to constructing the "puzzle" of each song. So, in addition to generating closeness and pleasure for Inuit women during long and cold days, katajjaq, in its rendering of the Arctic landscape, also serves as a living map of the surrounding ecosystem. Through sonic collaboration, early throat singers told the stories of the world around them, surely supplying vital information for survival, while also modeling modes of paying attention to their communities. Throat singers' mimicking of the land, their maps made through sound, exist on a geographic plane that is both intimate and sovereign—in order to even participate in a throat singing game, singers must have the requisite knowledge of the land around them: its quirks, crannies, rhythms, and seasons. Their sonic maps always remains inaccessible to colonial readers and audiences who are not attuned to or familiar with the lands' intricate realities. Instead of unfettered access to Inuk maps of the Arctic, what Qallunaat (non-

[39] Tagaq, interview by Mistry.
[40] Tagaq, interview by Mistry.
[41] Tagaq, interview by Mistry.

Inuit) audiences, including myself, might learn through watching throat singers' performances is how to better listen to the land and be in relationship with one another.

During a panel at Brown University, I watched Tagaq and her partner demonstrate throat singing: I was struck by how incredibly absorbed the women were in one another. Throat singers must face each other, hip-to-hip, and cradle one another's forearms, so they almost resemble intertwined branches of a deep-breathing tree. The breath and song that passes between them becomes a shared thing, an exhaled exaltation, alive just past their mouths. The women create the sound together and its very stitching is the world around them. Thus, they craft a music that rearranges themselves as *participants in* and storytellers of their environment.

Nikki Komaksiutiksak (Inuk), throat singer and Executive Director of Tunngasugit, an organization that helps Inuit transition into city living, illustrates katajjaq's beginnings by retelling one of her grandmother's stories. In it, "a group of men went out hunting" and never returned to their community; two women journeyed to the ocean to look for them and then, when the search appeared hopeless, the women "started mimicking different animal noises with their throats" and "that's how they caught their food to feed their children."[42] This story reveals qanuqtuurunnarniq, or a resourcefulness central to the Inuk value system, as well as the women's intimacy with the environment around them: in order to accurately mimic an animal's sounds, you would need to listen to and study the species quite closely. Furthermore, the women had to trust that the world beyond their immediate reach held enough to nurture and support them—in this case, they go to the ocean and use the gift of paying attention to secure food for their families.

[42] Nikki Komaksiutiksak quoted in "Meet the Inuit throat singers revitalizing the tradition and engaging new audiences," interview by Dannielle Piper, *Unreserved,* CBC Radio, digital (April 21, 2024): https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/meet-the-inuit-throat-singers-revitalizing-the-tradition-and-engaging-new-audiences-1.7178956.

This story strikes me as one about deciding to participate in the world around you rather than surrendering to sorrow and difficulty.[43] It reminds me of a Myaamia story that I learned about while at Miami University of Ohio.[44] In the story, a young girl named Ahkwaniswa becomes frustrated with her environment: a chorus of frogs keeps her up all night; she runs into a cottonwood tree and bangs her head in her absentmindedness; and she kicks her foot on a hard stone.[45] The tree and stone tell Ahkwaniswa that they have been on the land since her "grandfather hiked these woods," back when "it was a great prairie;" they implore Ahkwaniswa to "look up, down, and all around" and witness the knowledge and memory already imbedded in the land.[46]

Although these respective Indigenous stories are not my own, their emphasis on observing and choosing to engage in your environment resonates deeply with my experience as a survivor of sexual violence. If living through sexual trauma causes the very walls of a survivor's world to transform, so that they no longer *are* safe, electing to notice and orient towards the interdependence, autonomy, and beauty of your surrounding natural world is a radical act.

Some of the earliest steps of my healing began with letting myself find refuge in rain-freshened air; to observe, without attachment, the rabbits and turkeys passing along my street. Each day, I studied the cycles of one tree just outside my window: I witnessed it transition from bare-branched in January's frost to sprouting tepid blossoms in the spring; summer's green lush gave way, at last, to a crimson-orange that burned astonishingly bright in autumn's light. The

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[43] This argument and much of my methodology and analysis in this section is informed by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's "Land As Pedagogy," *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017): 145-74.
[44] Miami University of Ohio, my undergraduate institution, exists on stolen land from the Myaami people. The Myaamia Center, where I read this story and which is housed through Miami University, is dedicated to the needs of the Myaamia people and promoting Myaamia language, cultural, and history.
[45] "ahkwaniswa neehi anikwa (Young Girl and Squirrel)," *asiihkiwi neehi kiisikwi: myaamionki (Earth and Sky: The Place of the Myaamiaki,*(Miami Tribe of Oklahoma: 2011), 4.
[46] "ahkwaniswa neehi anikwa (Young Girl and Squirrel)," 4.

plain wisdom of that tree reminded me that when my body felt like a dead tree in winter it would bloom again—even if my leaves looked differently than they did in seasons' past. Slowly, through these observations, my body became a secure place for me to observe and to understand as connected to its external surroundings.

This perspective, where land is alive and "pedagogical," runs counter to the Euro-Christian belief that communication between women and non-humans is shameful, if not "profane," to cite Vanessa Watts (Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee).[47] Tagaq's initiation into throat singing, in which she "heard the land," resonates with playwright Monique Mojica's (Guna and Rappahannock nations) Indigenous research methodology "that speaks to the embodiment of place."[48] Mojica writes that "the land *is* our archive and our embodied relationship to the land defines Indigenous identities, history, science, cosmology, literature—and our performance."[49] For Tagaq, the throat singing tape functioned as an invitation back into the land's archive. While Euro-Western narratives of musical prodigies might emphasize Tagaq's isolation and seemingly natural artistic ability —that she "felt it right away and had no problem making any of the sounds"—this would be a serious misreading of Tagaq's story. Tagaq's "hearing of the land" *is* a kind of accompaniment.[50] Her immediate connection to throat

[47] See Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy," 145-74. My critique of Euro-Christian belief systems mostly refers to Catholicism, as that was the primary religion that enforced the residential school system in Canada, but also to sects of the Anglican and Presbyterian denominations. My use of the word "profane" here stems from Vanessa Watts's important work, which I discuss more in the following paragraphs: Vanessa Watts, "Indigenous place-thought & agency amongst humans and non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!)," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2, no. 1 (2013): 25.

[48] Monique Mojica, "In Plain Sight: Inscripted Earth and Invisible Realities," *New Canadian Realisms,* eds. Roberta Baker and Kim Solga (Toronto, ON: Playwrights Canada Press, 2012): 219.

[49] Mojica, "In Plain Sight," 219. Mojica's methodology, along with Tagaq's performance practice, might also be thought of alongside Winona Wheeler's (Manitoba) reflection that "the land is mnemonic [with] its own set of memories." See: Wheeler quoted in Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008): xxiv.

[50] Tagaq, interview by Freeman. For further meditation on accompaniment as method, particularly amongst activist and community-based networks, see: Martín Renzo Rosales, LaShaune P. Johnson, and Alexander Rödlach, *Research as Accompaniment: Solidarity and Community Partnerships for Transformative Action* (Routledge, 2024).

singing may be read not as a trope of musical prodigy, but of Tagaq's own intimacy with the land and her body. Consider the tactical and embodied quality of Tagaq's listening that she illustrates in her encounter with the tape:

> I remember, with the cassette tape, listening to it and flipping it over and over and over and over again and then just feeling the vibration in my throat, and throat singing in the shower every morning. My roommates are like, 'What the fuck are you doing in there?' Throat singing came in and woke up my bones a little bit. It made sense. It was a way to take some of my culture and have it in me.[51]

Tagaq's narrativization reads like an archetype of transformation, or even birth—the sound moves from the recorded object to inside of her, budding in her throat and invigorating her very "bones." The land, and throat singers invocation of it, is the signal that awakens Tagaq and changes her; thus, the land, as active agent, acts upon Tagaq, who opens herself up to transformation. Tagaq attunes to her own relationship with the land in spite of her roommates' judgements and confused ears ("What the fuck are you doing in there?"). Tagaq's kinship with the land and its connection to her own body models a sonic and geographic practice defined through attunement, rather than mastery—one that need not be legible or audible to Qallunaat listeners at all.

In her illuminating essay on Indigenous "place-thought" and agency, Watts (quoted above) further distinguishes Indigenous theories of attunement, or an emphasis on relation and agency, from Euro-Western worldviews of mastery, or the worship of discipline and control. She writes that Euro-Western "societies were built upon domination over nature because of a perception that human arrangements with the animal world were unnecessary, if not dangerous."[52] Contrast this with Nikki Komaksiutiksak's family story about throat singing and the practice more generally—if Euro-Western thought hinges upon separation, or the

[51] Tagaq, interview by Mistry.
[52] Watts, "Indigenous place-thought and agency," 25.

"epistemology-ontology" divide between humans and the rest of the world, then of course Inuit throat singing would be wrongfully twisted into something demonic.

Though the nuns and missionaries operating residential schools allowed students to engage in Christian choirs, they forbade throat singing along with other Inuit knowledge forms. Tagaq, with her signature humor, has shared that katajjaq "was banned because it was too cool and sexy."[53] She's not wrong: throat singing *is* cool and sexy. The profound engagement it requires to one's own body and the body of a singing partner exemplifies reciprocity and creativity, harnessing the eroticism Audre Lorde writes of as "providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit" and joy "with another person."[54] Such disciplined attention runs completely counter to white supremacist Western modes of artmaking and placemaking, which champion the sole, virtuosic master of the craft and reigning authority of the land.[55] If the colonial approach to place is predicated on property and resource development, then practices of sustained connection, which rely on respect for the other party's autonomy and rebuke transparency in favor of intricate entanglement, illustrate a potent alternative value system. Even more to the point of my dissertation, I cannot think of a more complete opposite of rape than the heightened awareness of your partner necessary for throat singing: it is a practice built on the basis of not just consent, but creation—the antithesis of obliteration.[56]

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[53] Tanya Tagaq quoted at "Tanya Tagaq and Kronos Quartet," The Lindemann Performance Arts Center, Brown University (March 17, 2024).
[54]Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," (Out & Out Books, 1978): 89.
[55] See: Juliette Singh, *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Duke University Press, 2017).
[56] For a thoughtful exploration on what partnership and collaboration may offer see: Oliva Michiko Gagnon and James McMaster, "The Between," *Women & performance* 29, no. 3 (2019): 211-17.

Throat singing, as a practice, is consistent with Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ), which translates to "that which Inuit have always known to be true."[57] Inuk art history scholar Heather Igloliorte expands this translation, writing: "While the Inuktitut phrase [IQ] is often simply translated as 'Inuit traditional knowledge,' it can be more accurately understood to encompass the complex matrix of Inuit environmental knowledge, societal values, cosmology, worldviews, and language."[58] As Igloliorte notes, though "the tenets of [IQ] have always existed in Inuit society," it "is not without relevance or application in modern Inuit life; *it is a living knowledge.*"[59] In her scholarship, Igloliorte theorizes how to curate Inuit art according to IQ. She emphasizes the importance of structuring exhibits through IQ's tenets, which include:

1. Pijitsirniq (or the concept of serving)
2. Aajiiqatigiingniq (or the concept of consensus decision-making)
3. Pilimmaksarniq (or the concept of skills and knowledge acquisition)
4. Piliriqatigiingniq (or the concept of collaborative relationships or working together for a common purpose)
5. Avatimik Kamattiarniq (or the concept of environmental stewardship)
6. Qanuqtuurunnarniq (or the concept of being resourceful to solve problems)[60]

These tenets are woven into katajjaq, pronouncing it as a distinctly Inuk practice, born out of and sustained by its particular Arctic environment and matrilineal cultural context. Further, as Igloliorte explains, IQ principles are transmitted through socialization (inunnguiniq) and Inuit oral histories (unikkaatuat). Throat singing, like IQ, is premised on valuing the knowledge that directly comes from being in relationship with all human and non-human beings around you. White settler attempts to suppress katajjaq (and other Inuit ways of living), particularly the Catholic Church's, signal a stifling of reciprocity and expression in favor of force and repression.

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[57] See: Shirley Tagalik, "*Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit:* The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Supporting Wellness in Inuit Communities in Nunavut," *National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2009*, https://www.ccnsa-nccah.ca/docs/health/FS-InuitQaujimajatuqangitWellnessNunavut-Tagalik-EN.pdf.
[58] Heather Igliorte, "Curating Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: Inuit Knowledge in the Qallunaat Art Museum," *artjournal* (2017): 102.
[59] Igliorte, "Curating Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit," 102. Emphasis mine.
[60] Tagalik, "*Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*," 2.

Canadian Catholic missionaries' anxiety over katajjaq demonstrates, perhaps, how much of a threat IQ is to colonial conquest—remember Audra Simpson's observations that the state seeks to disappear and destroy what most endangers its legitimacy.

Kaatajjaq is invention and refusal.[61] It creates both sonic sovereign space between Indigenous performers and resists settler logics of extraction. I now turn us to the Brown IGNITE Concert that I attended, as well as *Split Tooth* and other live performances of Tagaq's—namely her Polaris Prize and National Day of Truth and Reconciliation performances—to read Tagaq's strategies of refusal and demands of accountability that she enacts with her live audiences. To do so, I move through three strategies Tagaq deploys to sound sovereignty: laughter, joining, and contention.

"Sound Can Be a Spear Or a Needle:"[62] Or, Three Ways of Sounding Sovereignty

Sovereign Laughter

I had the privilege of seeing Tagaq perform in March of 2024 as part of her week-long residency with Brown University Arts' IGNITE Series.[63] When I recall her concert, I remember her laughter most vividly.

That warm spring's blue evening, inside Brown's sparkling new concert hall, Tagaq laughed throughout her performance: she laughed as she offered a short lesson on Inuit throat singing history to the audience; she laughed as she stole quiet, gentle moments on stage with her choir; and she laughed as she joked about being a throat singing "bottom" in the post-show

[61] For more on "generative refusal," see Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 177-78 and 243-45; for "cartography of refusal," see Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Duke University Press, 2014), 33-35.
[62] Tagaq, *Split Tooth,* 56.
[63] For more information on Brown's IGNITE series see: "About the IGNITE Series," Brown University, last accessed January 27, 2025, https://arts.brown.edu/programs/ignite.

talkback.[64] One of Tagaq's laughs, however, lingers with me the most. I can still hear it ricocheting across the concert hall.

Tagaq explained the title of her final song for the evening: "I called this song 'Colonizer'…" a pause; "Because we have been colonized." Laughter erupted from her, wholly unrestrained. Her candid tone, its full-bodied lack of pretense, emphasized the obviousness of her remark. Tagaq named the stark truth of colonization without decoration. In doing so, she prompted the Qallunaat in her audience, including myself, to meditate on their positionality within the space, while also foregrounding humor and refusing palatability. On stage, Tagaq and the other women shared a moment of recognition—more laughter, some nodding, and a few humming affirmations—but it was quick: before her audience could fully register her comment or their surprise, Tagaq launched into her song "Colonizer," folding us back into her sonic universe.

Tagaq's laughter—and her comment that she gave "Colonizer" its title because "[her people] have been colonized"—crystallizes how Tagaq harnesses sound to disrupt place, or rather to tell the truth about it. Like Nina Simone, Tagaq's laughter and howls interrupt places' scripts and invoke a commons of incommensurability.[65] Whereas Simone's screams seized back the sonic excess produced by the transatlantic slave trades' logics of multiplication, Tagaq's performances erupt, rather than "forced stillness," the silence implied by the Western colonial project of Native elimination.[66]

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[64] Tagaq quoted at "Tanya Tagaq and Kronos Quartet."
[65] See: Chambers-Letson, *After the Party*, xx-11.
[66] See previous chapter on Simone and Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe." For more on silence implied by Western colonial project of elimination see: Simpson, "State is A Man," Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409; and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui's follow-up to Wolfe, 'A structure, not an event': Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity,'" *Lateral* 5, no. 1 (2016).

Tagaq's spatial and sonic sovereignty refuses to "break silence" by affirming that Inuit survivors of colonization were never "silent" to begin with. Tagaq and her choir's songs reverberate the land and its stories: they interweave throat singing's traditional form of mimicry with Tagaq's signature punk sound and its anti-establishment ethos.[67] In her discussion of her Brown Arts' performance, Tagaq offered that "any sort of art-making is reflective of [the artist's] environment;"[68] Tagaq's art reflects her environment doubly by condemning the effects of the Arctic's colonization and through honoring the lands and people it has attempted to annihilate. Or, as she says: "They tried to remove our culture from us, but we have survived."[69]

Tagaq's critique of conquest and simultaneous celebration of what Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor has called "survivance," or an Indigenous "active sense of presence," illustrates a consciousness in which, despite colonial attacks, non-human entities and Native people have always "refus[ed] to die."[70] Tagaq announces this "active presence," which lies at the heart of political and personal self-determination, by speaking stories of the land, independent of linear time, and laughing back at colonization itself. Her songs are "renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry"— they continue, or pass on, Inuit knowledge and geographies while also reprehending colonial stereotypes of the "crying Indian" or passive and past-tense Native.[71]

Tagaq writes that sound can be "a spear or a needle" in the *Split Tooth* excerpt quoted in this section's title: the same is true for laughter, which can cut deep and stitch together. Humor

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[67] For more on the punk roots of Tagaq's music see: "The sounds of Inuit throat singer Tanya Tagaq," *60 Minutes,* CBS News, May 5, 2019, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-sounds-of-inuit-throat-singer-tanya-tagaq-60-minutes-2019-05-05/#. For a comprehensive history of punk genre, see Kelefa Sanneh, "Punk," *Major Labels: A History of Popular Musi in Seven Genres* (Penguin Press, 2021), 216-276.
[68] Tagaq quoted by Brown Arts Institute (@BaiBrownU) "IGNITE SPOTLIGHT: Tanya Tagaq," Instagram, August 30, 2024.
[69] Tagaq quoted by Brown Arts Institute.
[70] Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (University of Nebraska Press, 1999), vii.
[71] Vizenor, *Manifest Manners,* vii.

can be a jeering weapon or the "best medicine." It confronts and gathers; it ridicules and reflects. Sonically, laughter creates friction: its sound interrupts speech and song; it bubbles up and ruptures through organized sound. In throat singing, laughter serves as punctuation. As I discussed earlier, throat singing games end when one partner makes the other laugh, thus breaking her concentration. Laughter marks the end of one song and opens an invitation to begin another: in this manner, it organizes narrative timing in way that diverges from Euro-Western tradition. Though Tagaq and her choir did not compete or laugh during their songs, they still used laughter, along with voice and instrumentation (and costume and gesture!), to mark their own sovereign space within the bounds of the concert hall. Interestingly, because in both traditional throat singing contests and the concert's songs women's laughter signals the song's end, their laughter is both diegetic and non-diegetic; it exists inside of the song's narrative and also outside of it. Sound, then, is also *never silent*; it is an "active presence" guiding throat singers' performance, and laughter itself is part of the map.

Socially and spatially, laughter differentiates those who "get it" from those who do not. It has the power to refigure the rules and beats of a communal place. Similar to how throat singers enter into a shared space when they co-author their maps, a joke-teller and their audience create a felt place inside the world of their joke, even if only for the laugh's duration. In her study of Black feminist comics of the 20th and 21st centuries, Katelyn Hale Wood positions Black feminist comedians and their audience members as "co-creators in a politics of joy and resistance," intervening in the white masculinist comedic tradition in which the audience is the joke-teller's passive adversary. [72] She contends that Black feminist comedians "use performance to name, critique, and dismantle white heteropatriarchy." Here, laughter signifies active

[72] Katelyn Hale Wood, *Cracking Up: Black Feminist Comedy in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century United States* (University of Iowa Press, 2021), 7.

recognition—something is "funny because it's true," as the saying goes —and can create a generative commons rooted in that affirmation. Working from an Inuit context, Tagaq uses laughter to tell the truth and connect with other Native people in the concert hall. In moments where Tagaq comedically addressed her audience—like with her "colonizer" comment—she and the other women on stage would exchange expressions of validation, or perhaps commiseration. Her humor crafted an "irreconcilable space of Aboriginality," to cite Dylan Robinson and David Garneau, between herself and other Inuit performers that at once marked a tangible, if minor, sovereign space in Brown's Concert Hall and that cut through the liberal varnish of settler colonial space through its explicit truth-telling.[73]



Figure 2.2: Tanya Tagaq onstage with Kronos Quartet and fellow throat-singers Nancy Mike, Cynthia Pitsiulak, Charlotte Angugaattiaq Qaminiq, and Varna Marianne Nielsen during the second half of her concert at Brown University, March 2024. Screenshot from video uploaded by Brown Arts Institute on YouTube, November 26, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fhoKohBu7c&t=33s&ab_channel=BAIBrownU.

Tagaq's laughter with the other Native women reverberated across other moments of the concert. During interludes between songs, Tagaq would extend an affectionate gesture towards

[73] See Robinson, *Hungry Listening,* 24 and David Garneau, "Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation: Art, Curation, and Healing," in *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and beyond Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission,* ed. Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press), 26.

another singer and they would share a private laugh. Repeatedly, Tagaq used humor and care to designate sovereign space in what could be read as a quite colonial concert hall. I argue that her tending to sovereign space functioned as what Robinson calls "sensate sovereignty," in which "written, visual, and aural obstructions" effectively "blockade" Indigenous knowledge from settler extraction and consumption.[74] Robinson's "sensate sovereignty" works from Glen Coulthard's "advocation of the blockade" as a "crucial act of negation" which seeks "to impede or block the flow of resources" at the core of "the colonial accumulation of capital in settler-political economies like Canada's."[75]

What was funny about Tagaq's "colonizer" comment resonated differently across Native and non-Native audience members; it "blocked" settlers' participation in the joke, so that, in a moment of productive discomfort, I wondered, briefly, if I was "supposed" to laugh. Even more so, it caused me to ruminate on the reality of Tagaq's remark: where did the truth of colonization fit into her performance, and where did I fit into it? In the setting of a prestigious New England university's concert hall, I thought about how colonization operates in academic and elite art spaces. What was my role, as a non-Inuit audience member, in challenging the flow of colonization in that environment? At the beginning of the concert, Tagaq condemned non-Inuit musicians and concert programmers who all too often "use throat singing as an ingredient in their stew," without meaningfully collaborating with Inuit artists. Her "colonizer" joke, which came before her final song of the concert, felt like a callback to that earlier critique. Tagaq used humor to remind audiences of the political stakes of Indigenous performance, particularly for

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[74] Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 24.
[75] See: Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 50 and Robinson, *Hungry Listening,* 24. For more on blockade as anti- and decolonial strategy see: Coulthard, "#IdleNoMore in Historical Context," in *The Winter We Danced: Voices from the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement,* ed. Kino-nda-niimi Collective (Arbeiter Ring Press, 2014), 32-36 and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *A Short History of the Blockade: Giant Beavers, Diplomacy, and Regeneration in Nishnaabewin* (University of Alberta Press, 2021).

mixed settler and Native crowds, and to assert her command over the performance space. Further, her "we"—"because *we* have been colonized"—functioned as its own linguistic "blockade," obstructing settler innocence and passive art consumption. This was underscored by Tagaq in the post-show talkback when she joked to many spectators: "Thanks for letting me call you guys colonizers!"[76]

Through this linguistic reversal, Tagaq laughed "back" at her colonial oppressors. In doing so, she followed a long tradition of Native people using humor, parody, and obfuscation to critique and satirize colonizers, while also refusing to be stereotyped into tragic figures. As a recent example, in 2006, Inuk writer and satirist Zebedee Nungak and filmmaker Mark Sandiford collaborated on a short film titled *Qallunaat! Why White People Are Funny.* The film, starring an Inuit cast, "pokes fun at the ways in which Inuit people have been treated as 'exotic' documentary subjects by turning the lens onto the strange behaviors of Qallunaat."[77] Throughout the "ethnographic comedy," the filmmakers deploy recognizable "documentary" tropes, including interspersing real black-and-white archival footage of Inuit subjects against contemporary interviews. They construct a faux research center called the "Qallunaat Studies Institute," in which Inuit social scientists study white settler behaviors. The film reappropriates the colonial scenario of the ethnographic documentary, exemplified by Robert J. Flaherty's infamous 1922 silent film, *Nanook of the North,* while also defamiliarizing and de-neutralizing Qallunaat culture.[78]

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[76] Tagaq quoted at "Tanya Tagaq and Kronos Quartet."
[77] *Qallunaat! Why White People Are Funny*, directed by Mark Sandiford and Zebedee Nungak, (2006; National Film Board of Canada, 2023), digital.
[78] *Nanook of the North,* directed by Robert J. Flaherty, 1922, posted January 4, 2020, by André Bourbeau, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkW14Lu1IBo&ab_channel=Andr%C3%A9Bourbeau.

Nanook of the North, an ethnographic documentary financed by a French fur company, purportedly follows an Inuk family across the Arctic landscape and centers the titular father figure of "Nanook." The film is an implicit text which ghosts *Qallunaat!* and arguably all Western media representations of the Arctic. Tagaq herself has critiqued *Nanook* as the world's "first glimpse of our culture" in her performances of *Tanya Tagaq in Concert With Nanook of the North*, in which she sings "with and over" the film.[79] Both harnessing the voice and body's ability to speak (or sing) "back" to racist representation, Tagaq's concert and *Qallunaat!* bring Flaherty's film into focus in order to shatter and refuse the "violent reductiveness" of its "colonial optic," as Olivia Michiko Gagnon outlines in her essay on Tagaq's *Nanook* performance.[80]

This "optic," however, is not limited to visuality: as Gagnon argues, Flaherty's film relies "on the racist trope of the noble savage and […] (feigned) Indigenous naiveté," a well-rehearsed "scenario" of the colonial-Native encounter.[81] Flaherty staged his stereotypical scripts not just visually or textually, but through body and sound; while filming, Flaherty instructed Inuit actors to perform according to his colonial fantasies of their "backwardness"—switching out guns for harpoons, for example—even while members of the Inukjuak community worked "as technicians, camera operators, film developers, and production assistants," according to research

[79] Tanya Tagaq quoted in VK Preston, "*Tanya Tagaq in Concert with* Nanook of the North by Tanya Tagaq, Robert J. Flaherty (review)," *Theatre Journal* 68, no. 4 (2016): 649-50. This article also provides a brief performance history of Tagaq's "concert" with *Nanook.* To summarize: in 2012, the Toronto International Film Festival commissioned Tagaq's performance. She has since performed *Tanya Tagaq in Concert With Nanook of the North* at the Dublin Fringe Festival (2014) and the Under the Radar Festival in New York City (2016).
[80] Olivia Michiko Gagnon, "Singing with *Nanook of the North:* On Tanya Tagaq, Feeling Entangled, and Colonial Archives of Indigeneity," *ASAP/Journal* 5, no. 1 (2020): 49.
[81] Gagnon, "Singing with *Nanook*," 53-54. For more on the "scenario" of the colonial-Native encounter see Diana Taylor's theorization (13) and reading of Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit…* in "Scenarios of Discovery: Reflections on Performance and Ethnography," *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Duke University Press, 2003), 53-78.

conducted by anthropologist Faya Ginsburg.[82] Both Tagaq's performance and the *Qallunaat!* film's citations of *Nanook of the North* serve not just to offer a counter-visual of the ethnographic film, but to foreground alternative embodied understandings of the Arctic land and Inuit culture. Even in Flaherty's film, however, audiences might see how Inuit actors challenged *Nanook*'s colonial scenario through revealing its artifice and implying a multi-sensoriality of sound. In a relevant and oft-cited scene early in the film, a white trader introduces "Nanook," played by Inuk actor Allakariallak, to the "modern" technology of the gramophone: "Nanook" thoroughly inspects the device, laughs to the camera, and eventually takes the vinyl from the trader and bites it repeatedly. Because Flaherty's film is silent, all "noise" from this scene comes either from the prescriptive title cards that frame the sequence or from audiences' imaginations as they observe the winding of the gramophone and Allakariallak's amusement directed at the camera lens. Michelle Raheja, in her essay on visual sovereignty, suggests that "Nanook's response might register one thing to his non-Inuit audience and another to members of an Inuit community who recognize the cultural code of his smile."[83] Allakariallak's "breaking of the fourth wall" when he laughs directly to the camera lampshades, perhaps, the very constructed-ness of the encounter; Allakariallak is aware he is being asked to play a particular part and hints to viewers that they are watching a mise-en-scéne—not reality. Furthermore, whether or not his biting of the record is in jest or not, it stresses a multi-sensorial quality to sound that exceeds the ethnographic film's reductive staging. Sound *does* have texture and taste: in a basic sense, think

[82] Faye Ginsburg, "Screen Memories: Resignifying the Traditional Indigenous Media," in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain,* ed. Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abulughod, and Brian Larkin (University of California, Press, 2002), 39.
[83] Michelle H. Raheja, "Reading Nanook's Smile: Visual Sovereignty, Indigenous Revisions of Ethnography, and 'Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner),'' *American Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (2007): 1160.

about how often speaking voices are described as "rough," "smooth," "cold," "warm," or "sweet."

To summarize, a colonial optic's "violent reductiveness" is not, contrary to what the word "optic" suggests, limited to a flattening of seeing, but also of hearing. To this end, Gagnon highlights how the "complexity" of Tagaq's improvisation of "an extraordinarily beautiful, tensely charged, and deeply affective accompaniment," both "animates and disrupts the [Flaherty's film's] static (and silent) colonial representations of the North."[84] The intricacy of Tagaq's vocal production is significant here; just as a settler colonial perspective reduces Inuit responses to the former's technologies of sound, it also over-simplifies the detail, skill, and attention required for Inuit art-making and throat singing. Consider the quote Robinson begins *Hungry Listening* with, in which avant-garde and classical Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer, widely known for introducing the concept of the "soundscape," likens "Eskimo singing" to "Sir Winston Churchill clearing his throat."[85] In reality, throat singing requires, as I have discussed, not only an incredible attention to the performer's body, singing partner, and surrounding environment, but a practiced control over inhalations and exhalations, as Tagaq has demonstrated at her Brown panel and in several online videos.[86]

This flattening of sound, which I place in conversation with Robinson's "hungry listening" as a settler orientation and "'civilizing' sensory paradigm that has been imposed on

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[84] Gagnon, "Singing with *Nanook,*" 49.
[85] Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 1 and R. Murray Schaefer, "On the Limits of Nationalism in Canadian Music," *Tamarack Review* 18 (Winter, 1961): 71-78.
[86] See: Tagaq, "Climate Change: Our Response as Artivists;" Tagaq, interview with Mistry; and "Tanya Tagaq – Description of Throat Singing," posted July 7, 2009, by Emily Ayer, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Phr1HVwrjlQ&ab_channel=EmilyAyer. Composer Anna Pidgorna's dissertation also does a fantastic job of breaking down the vocal complexity of Tagaq's music from a more technical perspective: Pidgorna, "Moaning with Pleasure and Keening through Pain: Eroticism in the Work of Patti Smith, Björk and Tanya Tagaq," (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2020), 138-185, ProQuest (27737134).

Indigenous people," is something I witnessed firsthand at Tagaq's Brown Arts' concert.[87] Waiting in line, I listened to some patrons ponder what precisely throat singing was: "Ear, nose, throat, whatever you want to call it," one older white woman reflected, "I heard it sounds like dragon's breath." Immediately relegating Tagaq's craft to the fantastical ("dragon"), this concert-goer's flippant conflation of "ear, nose, throat" betrays a greater white settler sentiment, in which Inuk music is a primal and unpolished "thing." Inuit performers reveal, largely through humor, that settler's "tin ears," to cite a famous case (see: *Delgamukw v. the Queen*) are productive only insofar as that they reaffirm that Indigenous cultural production is not made for settler consumption.[88]

In addition to not catering to aural legibility, Inuit performers also flip laughter back onto Qallunaat, by illustrating that it is colonial ways of living that are actually ridiculous. Similarly, through Tagaq's invocation of the Arctic and her Inuit community's complexity, she emphasizes that it is the "colonizer" who fails to navigate the North, not the Native. Or, as Gagnon writes, citing Tagaq, "what [*Nanook of the North*'s director] Flaherty couldn't see were culturally specific forms of humor, moments of joy, the complexity of life lived on harsh terrain."[89]

In the *Qallunaat!* mockumentary film, Inuit actors use Tagaq's same strategy of critically linking settlers' failure to *navigate* with their failure to *hear.* In an early scene of the film, Inuk elder Philipoosie Kunilusie imitates a "typical Qallunaat government official." His "official" is bumbling and intelligible to the point where the film's narrator advises: "Don't try to make sense of what he is saying […] It might not make sense in any official language."[90] Kunulusie's parody is a clever reversal of white settlers' inability to distinguish Inuktitut names, which led to their

[87] Robinson, *Hungry Listening,* 3.
[88] For Robinson's analysis on this case see Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 37-47.
[89] Gagnon, "Singing with *Nanook,*" 49.
[90] Philipoosie Kunilusie quoted in *Qallunaat!* (2006).

assigning Inuit identification numbers. At one point, an in-character Kunulusie asks an Inuk woman for her name, to which she responds, "I forgot mine at home," garnering laughs from the rest of the elders in the room. Later in the film, a group of Inuit women deploy this humorous critical-geographic strategy to criticize how the Canadian State sought to control Inuit hygiene and land relations. In that scene, a younger woman, Lena Ellsworth,[91] shows three older Inuit woman and one man *The Book of Wisdom for Eskimo* (1947), a "manual" the Canadian state circulated as they were advancing land claims to the Arctic through increased policing of Inuit communities following the second world war.[92] *The Book* is emblematic of the state's paternalism towards Inuit people: seven of the eighteen chapters concern cleanliness.[93] One chapter, "A Clean Body," in particular is compulsively concerned with "scrubb[ing] clean" "sore"-infested, "poison"-filled, and "lice"-ridden "dirty skin."[94] Elsewhere in *The Book*, the authority figures within the State and broader British empire are framed as all-knowing, trustworthy saviors: the "King" is described as "helping all the children in his lands;" male "doctors" cure "sickness" and "teach" Inuit women how to avoid illness; and, in one sketch, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is explicitly labeled as "the Eskimo's friend."[95] As Ellsworth

[91] I think Ellsworth is Inuk but it is not explicitly stated.
[92] During this time, Canada was also pursuing a more "active role, through the United Nations and the World Health Organization, in bringing the benefits of 'civilization' to so-called Third Countries,"[92] note social scientists Paule McNicoll, Frank Tester, and Peter Kulchyski in their superb analysis of *The Book.* See: Paule McNicoll, Frank Tester, and Peter Kulchyski. "Arctic Abstersion: The Book of Wisdom for Eskimo, Modernism and Inuit Assimilation." *Études/Inuit/Studies* 23, no. 1/2 (1999): 201, http://www.jstor.org/stable/42870951.
[93] The book also has chapter titles that include: "The Clean Camp," "The Clean Body," and "The Clean Igloo." See: *The Book of Wisdom for Eskimo*, issued by the Bureau of Northwest Territories and Yukon Lands, Parks and Resources Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, with translations by Samuel G. Ford and sketches by Betty Kosior (1947), accessed via Government of Canada Publications website: https://publications.gc.ca/site/archivee-archived.html?url=https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2017/aanc-inac/R5-388-1947.pdf.
[94] *The Book of Wisdom for Eskimo*, 9.
[95] *The Book of Wisdom for Eskimo:* 19-20; 16-17. In their article, McNicoll, Tester, and Kulchyski point out—supported by five years of interviews with Inuit about their opinions of *The Book*—that, in addition to exercising racist logics of Native "dirtiness" and disorder, *The Book*'s advice was for the most part "inappropriate," evidencing that the authors had no *actual* comprehension of how to survive in the Arctic. See: McNicoll et al., "Arctic Abtersion," 210.

reads the "Clean Air," "Clean Body," and "Crying in New Baby" chapters of the book aloud, all four women laugh hysterically and exhale with exasperation to one another. Ellsworth's selection in chapters is significant: these three chapters respectively instruct Inuit about their lands' air; how to care for their own bodies; and how to soothe and nurse their infants. The logics on display in these sections are incredibly harmful—the authors' emphasis on the inherent "dirtiness" of the Inuit people and scientific regulation of pregnant women's bodies are emblematic of the exact rhetoric the Canadian state used to rationalize the forced sterilization of thousands of Indigenous women for seven decades.[96] I read the women's shared laughter at the *Book of Eskimo Wisdom* as a joyful denouncing of colonial abuse and instruction, particularly as it pertains to the regulation of Native women's bodies and livelihoods.

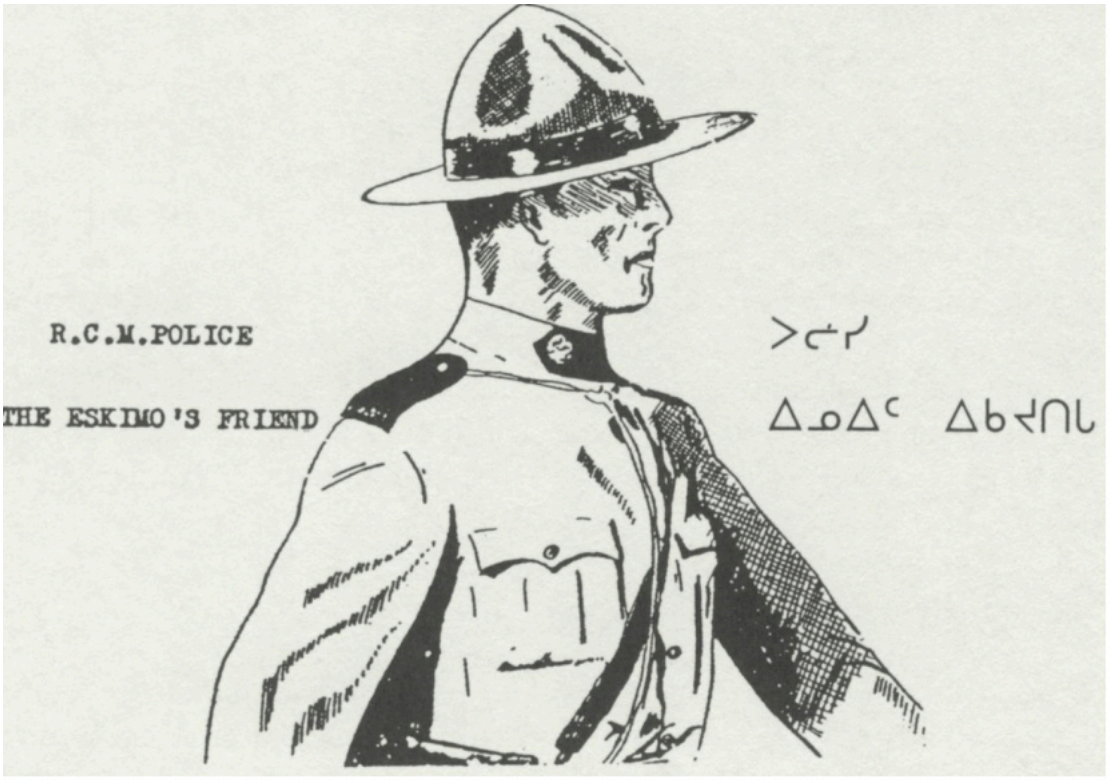


Figure 2.4: Excerpt from *The Book of Wisdom for Eskimo,* 19. Screenshot by author.

[96] See: "Forced Sterilization of Indigenous Women in Canada," *International Justice Resource Center*, https://ijrcenter.org/forced-sterilization-of-indigenous-women-in-canada/.

Both of these scenes—Kunilusie's impression of the official and the women laughing at *The Book of Eskimo Wisdom*—humorously underscore a deeper truth that non-Inuit are the ones who are actually incapable of navigating sound and space in the Arctic.[97] Like Tagaq does in her performances and commentary, in *Qallunaat!* Inuit actors and interviewees make this failure startlingly clear through a sense of humor that at once teases white settlers' inability to navigate the Arctic, while reveling in an Inuk critical geography or deep *knowing* of the land. The Inuk woman who jokes that she "left [her name] at home" declares relation ("home"), while also highlighting the non-Inuit government official's incompetence through her own performance of obfuscation; it is a moment that recalls Nina Simone's feigned distractedness in her live performances of "Go Limp"—where Simone used confusion to claim opacity and lampshade white audiences' simplistic grasp of Civil Rights politics, the Inuk woman affects forgetfulness to enact a sovereignty against settler colonial capture. The "pretend" government official cannot hear her Inuktitut name because it belongs at "home." On stage, Tagaq does something similar in her creation of sovereign space. She both blockades reductive colonial renderings of the Arctic and Inuit performance traditions, while asserting sovereignty through music made in intricate concert with the land and her katajjaq collaborators.

Tagaq, through humor and performance, calls out settler-colonial legacies of paternalism and consumption, while also creating a space of self-determination: she derides the "colonizer," while holding space for the Inuit women's multi-layered agency, grief, and pleasure. I am reminded again of Tagaq's comment that throat singing was banned for being "too cool and

[97] Another telling scene: the film later mocks Qallanaat's preoccupation with camping and outdoor expeditions despite having "no practical experience," but an excess of "top of the line gear." In a montage depicting white settler ineptitude against the natural elements, the film's narrator highlights how hikers "forgo local knowledge" in their quest to play-act adventure.

sexy;" it's a humorous remark, but is also a reminder that the right to feel and express joy is political. As Katelyn Hale Wood writes in *Cracking Up,* laughter is also joyous—it is healing and affirming as both a physical and emotional release. Further, sex educator Emily Nagoski stresses "confidence and joy" as essential for women learning to trust their bodies and celebrate their sexualities, especially in the aftermath of assault and in a shame-based culture.[98] She defines confidence as "knowing what is true about your body, mind, sexuality, and life" and joy as "loving" that truth.[99] "Joy is the hard part," Nagoski clarifies.[100] Tagaq is a truthteller, as I've argued, but she also is an intrepid advocate of embodied joy; as a performer, she reveals how these two ideals complement each other—how one can relish in humor and pleasure, even when sharing difficult truths.

Joy is interwoven in throat singing for Tagaq. I take seriously her "hear[ing] the land" when she first listened throat singing on tape, and it "mak[ing] her so happy."[101] With this description, Tagaq makes clear both the practice's intimacy with land and its centrality of pleasure. Just like the land, "happiness" is foundational to the very structure of throat singing, which ends with laughter. Laughter, as a song's conclusion, models narrative structures not premised on neat resolution, but on connection and joy—it is an ending that opens up, rather than collapses and contains.

Joining Sound

Just as Tagaq refuses a singularity of sound, she challenges a singularity of narrative. Here, I return to *Split Tooth;* I argue that the text, along with Tagaq's live performances and

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[98] Nagoski is writing in a US-context, but her insights are still relevant here. See: Emily Nagoski, *Come As You Are: The Surprising New Science That Will Transform Your Sex Life* (Simon & Schuster, 2015), 279-80.
[99] Nagoski, *Come as You Are,* 283-284.
[100] Nagoski, *Come as You Are,* 283-284. Also, relevant to this dissertation, Nagoski contrasts the map and terrain of "our sexual scripts." See: Nagoski, *Come As You Are*, 285.
[101] Tagaq, interview by Mistry.

musical catalogue, rejects the impulse to privilege isolated incidents of violation. *Split Tooth* shares this strategy of depicting sexual abuse with other works of writing that have nourished me throughout my own healing process: memoirs, including *Know My Name* by Chanel Miller and *In the Dream House* by Carmen Maria Machado, seemingly start with one instance of assault, but unravel to investigate how their stories' broader cultures permit and sustain sexual and domestic violence; novels, such as *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison and the Neapolitan quartet by Elena Ferrante, similarly refuse to condense their narratives to the most shocking instance of violation, but rather place rape in rigorous conversation with the densities of history and place.

These texts, including *Split Tooth*, model a transformative justice approach to narrating sexual violence; *Split Tooth,* through its incorporation of the land's sound and throat singing, asks what *performing* that approach looks like. Tagaq harnesses multi-sensorial sound to illustrate sexual violence in Nunavut through a framework of both transformative justice and Native sovereignty. As a theory and practice, transformative justice asks how "we can respond to violence in ways that not only address the current incident of violence, but also help to transform the conditions that allowed for it to happen," in the words of educator and organizer Mia Mingus.[102] Rather than honing in on a particular moment of abuse, *Split Tooth* conjures a complex portrait of an Inuk woman's navigation of what safety, survival, and sexuality mean to her—within her own body, which has been both harmed and held, trespassed and beloved.

Most crucially in *Split Tooth*, this exploration is inseparable from the land's agency. I use "exploration" intentionally here: as a word most associated with settlers' surveyal of the globe, European empires leaned on a rhetoric of "exploration" to justify conquest. "Exploration" summons all sorts of fraught enterprises and blood-stained voyages, yet, when we strip

[102] Mia Mingus, "Transformative Justice: A Brief Description," *Leaving Evidence* (blog), WordPress, January 9, 2019, https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2019/01/09/transformative-justice-a-brief-description/.

"exploration" back to its most basic definition, it means to "investigate" or "study." Going further back into its etymology, the Latin root of "explore" means to "cry out."[103] Thinking back to the quote that began this chapter, Tagaq's speaker studies her landscape and "cries out" for the Northern lights. Elsewhere in her artistic practice, Tagaq frames the Northern Lights as "bearing witness" to the atrocities of Canada's residential schooling program. Tagaq re-negotiates my understanding of "exploration," as she does my senses, remolding it away from its settler-colonial context to instead signify a listening to and calling out for the land. The "[Northern] lights" join *Split Tooth*'s speaker's song, not as background music or scenery, but as active collaborators with "a sound of their own." This "joining" of sound crafts a being-together premised on ethical engagement—of shared creation guided by respect for the other's autonomy. These are the same ethics that characterize throat singing; this is how, even when Tagaq performs alone, she eviscerates the notion of an individual prodigy: the land is always with her.

Split Tooth is accompanied by an audio edition, in which Tagaq throat sings across passages: she splits open phrases with hums and howls, using her voice as a form of punctuation, not unlike laughter, between poems or as an interlude between places. Her written text is bound by sound and led by the body. Tagaq consistently alludes to various forms of noise and importantly tells her reader where those noises resonate: she turns our attention to sensation, be it through "air so clean you can smell the difference between smooth rock and jagged" or newts crawling in the cave of the speaker's mouth.[104] Tagaq's embodied writing style and its attention the speaker's Arctic environment, invokes an Inuk cultural emphasis on the oral over the textual: "In our oral history, something you say carries more weight than anything you put on paper,

[103] "Explore," Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/explore, accessed January 27, 2025.
[104] Tagaq, *Split Tooth,* 6.

because if you write something it can have all kinds of meanings," John Amagoalik, Inuk politician and Executive Director of the Nunavut Land Claims Project shares.[105] "But if you actually speak it, it's supposed to come from the heart, from you as a person."[106] Although a version of *Split Tooth* is printed "on paper," Tagaq's audiobook and prose deprivileges the written word's authority in favor of the body's sensations.

Tagaq's "joining of sound" and refusal of a singularity of narrative aligns with Indigenous anti-rape activists and scholars, such as Deer, and organizations, such as the Sovereign Bodies Institute. Together, these Native feminists apply sovereignty to the "process of recuperation" survivors of rape and colonization both undergo in seizing back sacred sites that perpetrators have violated. Deer notes that these recuperative processes for Indigenous survivors involve "oral traditions, stories, and traditional belief systems, as well as statutes and contemporary tribal appellate case law that sometimes encompass traditional belief systems."[107] Recuperation, or re-determination of sovereignty, means a material reclamation of the violated site, be that land or body, which includes cultural and personal healing practices. As I referenced in my Introduction, Deer describes the relationship between sovereignty over the land and body thusly:

> Indigenous people across the world share a common experience—namely, intrusion on their lands and culture by an exterior, hostile outsider. Rape victims experience the same dynamic, but it is played out on their bodies and souls rather than on the land.[108]

A struggle I have faced in writing this section, and this chapter and dissertation more broadly, is how to attend to that hostile intrusion, and the depths of its anguish, without organizing my work around pain. Eve Tuck provides an answer in her call for "desire-based" over "damage-centered"

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[105] John Amagoalik quoted in *Qallunaat!* (2006).
[106] John Amagoalik quoted in *Qallunaat!* (2006).
[107] Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape,* xv.
[108] Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape* xiv.

research: "Desire-based research frameworks are concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives," Tuck writes.[109] Drawing from Craig Gingrich-Philbrook, she elaborates that desire-based frameworks "defy the lure to serve as 'advertisements for power' by documenting not only the painful elements of social realities but also the wisdom and hope."[110] Note here that Tuck contrasts "self-determination" with "advertisements for power." A self-determined sovereignty, which I argue Tagaq models, does not deny the violence of "intrusion," but also does not cling to power or wield possession as a weapon. If "sovereignty" technically means "the state of being free from the control or power of another," that "freedom," as with Simone's "I Wish I Knew How to Be Free," must be felt within the body and liberated from mechanics of control.[111] In other words, Tagaq's spatial and sonic sovereignty depends on embodied perspective over shame-based domination.

Tagaq begins *Split Tooth* by immediately wrapping her readers into her sonic world with a scene from the narrator's youth: "1975. Sometimes we would hide in the closet when the drunks came home from the bar."[112] She describes "thumping, screaming, moans, laughter;" an "old woman" who "smother[s]" the children in the closet with her love; "the past… a river that was released by her eyes;" and, finally, her uncle, who "swaying and slurring," with "blood pouring down his face," tells the kids "not to be scared."[113] In the audiobook, Tagaq sings after the uncle's remark, breathy and fast, so that her song is repetitive and high, almost like the squeaking of a mattress. The next page features an illustration of the uncle and his head wound. It also pictures two children, presumably the speaker and a sibling or childhood friend, perched

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[109] Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 416.
[110] Tuck, "Suspending Damage," 416.
[111] "Sovereignty," *Merriam-Webster,* https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sovereignty, accessed 27 Jan. 2025.
[112] Tagaq, *Split Tooth,* 1. Accessed via Kindle.
[113] Tagaq, *Split Tooth,* 1-2.

in the closet looking up at him. Tagaq casts her speaker as attempting to make sense of sound: she hears from inside the closet, a cacophony of high-pitched sounds and then aims to connect them to what she sees: "the river" streaming from the older woman's eyes; "the blood" draining down the man's face. Here, Tagaq immediately shows her reader that *Split Tooth* will concern the interplay between intense, even disorienting, sounds and visceral memories of sorrow and violence. The speaker's task may be finding clarity in that connection within her own recollections.

Tagaq follows this opening scene and illustration with a poem titled "A Day in the Life," which matter-of-factly recounts the mundane sexual abuse of her speaker's grade-school youth:

> It's 9 a.m., late for school
> Grade five is hard
> Rushing, stumbling to get my pants on
> Forgetting to brush my teeth
> Dreading recess
> The boys chase us and hold us down
> Touch our pussies and nonexistent boobs
> I want to be liked
> I guess I must like it
> We head back to class
> The teacher squirming his fingers under my panties
> Under the desk
> He looks around and pretends he's not doing it
> I pretend he's not doing it
> He goes to the next girl and I feel a flash of jealousy
> The air gets thinner and tastes like rot
> School is over
> I leave for the arcade
> Watch out for the old walrus
> The old man likes to touch young pussy
> We try to stay away
> I wonder why nobody kicks him out
> Things are better at home now
> *Three's Company* and a calm air
> Archie comic and Lego
> Goodnight[114]

[114] Tagaq, *Split Tooth,* 4-5.

Tagaq subtly contrasts the narrator's youthful figure ("nonexistent boobs") and feelings (a competitive desire to be "liked" and chosen) with her adult knowledge of the men and boys' abuse. Her regimented, childlike measurement of time—getting ready for school, recess, class, after-school leisure, and bedtime—at first indicates a linear narrative: however, by placing the poem in the present tense and using "we" pronouns, Tagaq reveals how the abuse her narrator and her town's other girls suffer is cyclical. The boys chase and grope an "us," and that "us" then files into a classroom where their teacher "squirms his fingers under [their] panties" and "pretends he's not doing it." They do this every day, not just this one "day." The girls know to "stay away" from the predatory "old man" at the arcade. Tagaq's punctuates the poem with a "goodnight," again accentuating the speaker's youth, while also indicating that the cycle is doomed to repeat when the sun rises and the next "day in the life" begins. In the audiobook, Tagaq sings in a much lower, raspier register than she does at the end of the previous passage. She maintains the repetitive, strident quality that she introduced prior, however where her voice imitated a ceaseless squeaking sound before, now it is closer to a growling drill.

Already, with these first two passages—the scene in the closet and this poem—Tagaq interrupts the idea of an isolated incident of abuse through her repetitive and sonic storytelling. The "thumping [and] screaming" persists from outside her childhood closet and her throat-singing collects around a repeated tone, syllable, or sound. In the "Day in the Life" poem, Tagaq expertly balances narrating her speaker's nuanced experience—"I want to be liked;" "I guess I must like it;" "I feel a flash of jealousy;" "I pretend he's not doing it;" "I wonder why nobody kicks him out"—with firmly showing her reader that sexual abuse is not limited to one character's singular story. Tagaq's speaker includes the other girls in her recounting and, most germane to my argument, she moves not just chronologically across her day, but geographically

across her town. We, as readers, follow Tagaq across the primary sites that she navigates as she tells us about assault at each one. Daily life is bound by place and, for Tagaq's narrator and her peers, place is bound by sexual abuse.

I focus on these first two passages because, through them, Tagaq suggests that sexual trauma is something that reverberates. Throughout *Split Tooth,* Tagaq's speaker recounts, in fragments and echoes, being repeatedly raped at night in her girlhood bedroom. In poem where the narrator first describes her assault, she brings back her earlier phrase, "pretending like nothing happened," although now it applies to her rapist who "jumps off [her]" when someone comes to the door. Afterwards, Tagaq sings the same rapid, squeaking sounds that she did before.[115] By sounding these repetitive intrusions, Tagaq claims the "echo" which pounds into her speaker; as readers, we get the sense that she hears it all around.[116] In recounting her rape, Tagaq focuses on the speaker's body in unflinching detail: she lies "wooden;" "it's not wet down there" she "didn't even have hair yet;" "he keeps trying / Pushing his hard thing / Into a space that has no space / It's dry / The heaving desperation on his breath / The sour fear on mine."[117] Tagaq's rapid singing mirrors the poem's clipped line breaks, but whereas the speaker's language focuses on external events—taking on the dissociative tone of a report—Tagaq's voice plies open a space for the howling she perhaps feels within. While the narrator assumes the role of the numbed survivor, Tagaq's throat-singing seems to fight for that piece of her that is still crying, who cannot configure what has happened into plain language. Tagaq scores moments of witnessing rape similarly: in one episode, a man climbs on top of a young girl sleeping next to

[115] Tagaq, *Split Tooth,* 22.
[116] My phrasing here is indebted to Lilian Mengesha's reading of trauma through her citation of Miller's *Know My Name.* See: Mengesha, *Critical Dreaming: Feminist Performances Across the Indigenous Americas* (New York University Press, Forthcoming 2025).
[117] Tagaq, *Split Tooth,* 22.

the narrator. During this scene, Tagaq's writing focuses on the swell of a country song and how "booze" follows its rhythm as her speaker lays, frozen, staring at a "column of light."[118] Uncoincidentally, Tagaq repeats several of the sounds and images from the earlier poem depicting the speaker's rape: she emphasizes the other girl's youth and the perpetrator's "heavy and thick" breath; as the man "climbs on top" of the girl and removes her clothing, Tagaq's narrator hears "squeaking springs and mewling sounds," as a "strange sensation in [her] belly," like "going down a roller coaster," grows in her stomach. Once it is "over," she cannot "look again;" she just "pretended it wasn't happening."[119] Tagaq's recycling of aural and visual descriptions suggests both the assailant's patterned abuse—he uses the same tactics both times and targets similar victims—as well as the speaker's memories of her assaults, which linger so forcefully they cloud her chronologies of time.

In turning readers towards sound and sensation's multi-dimensionality, Tagaq implores audiences to tune into their own bodies and environments. In moments where the speaker witnesses or experiences sexual violence, her attention turns towards external details: a lamplit shaft through shadow, thickly liquored breath, and whining bedsprings, creased with murmurs and cries. The body becomes another alienated site—its "wooden" "dry[ness]" testifying to the absence of consent and a divorce from sensation. The "haunted" sounds are "relentless[ly] remember[ed]," "acute and general," following Eve Tuck and C. Ree's "glossary of haunting."[120] Tagaq implies—through *sound* as her vehicle—that the trauma of sexual violence may "catch" on, or transfigure, its environment.

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[118] Tagaq, *Split Tooth,* 46.
[119] Tagaq, *Split Tooth,* 46-47.
[120] Eve Tuck and C. Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. by Stacey Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (Left Coast Press, 2013), 642.

In describing this "catching," I am tempted to liken traumatic memory to a hangnail or chain caught on loose thread: the intrusive details snag on the survivor's perception, unraveling their external world. There is some commonality here in how psychoanalysts frame trauma, where, as I described in my introduction, the survivor becomes "possessed by an image or event" and continuously rehashes its disappearance.[121] But the "catching" I read in Tagaq's account, in which traumatic memory quite literally changes both places and people's experiences of them, is more like a totalizing intrusion, in which the remains of violation come to constitute the survivor's material world. The survivor must re-learn how to navigate their transformed surroundings. This shift, from traumatic "possession" to navigation, echoes my introductory argument that we should view sexual assaults not as an aberrations or personal catastrophes, but rather as incommensurable pieces of larger, often mundane, stories that exist within broader cultural systems of domination. As Tuck and Ree argue, this "catching" or "haunting," characterized by "its refusal to stop," has always been present under settler colonialism, or "the management of those who have been made killable, once and future ghosts."[122] What Tagaq makes manifest is how the "acute[ly]" haunting sounds of sexual violence are connected to the particular structures of settler colonialism in Arctic Canada. By weaving in multi-sensorial modes of listening, however, she ensures her narrator's Nunavut is not defined by violence, but by her navigation of an incredibly complex geography of memory and sensation, in which the land and its beings are teachers and sensate agents—if only one takes the time to listen.

[121] See: Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Hopkins Press, 1996), 4-5 and 9.
[122] Tuck and Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," 642.

Performing Contention[123]

In her live performances and interviews, including the panel that I attended at Brown, Tanya Tagaq often speaks to what she calls the "great disconnect" in colonial Western culture: she theorizes a gap in perception, in which people are happy to consume products without criticizing how they came to be. Tagaq references this "disconnect" when discussing the vitriol she endures from PETA activists who disparage traditional Inuit seal-hunting practices. She illustrated a prime example on her Twitter when she responded to Canadian YouTuber, J.J. McCullough, who described a picture of a caribou hunt as an "incredibly gory" "slaughter." Tagaq replied to his Tweet: "The Great Disconnect. We live in a world where you see a McDonald's commercial every few minutes but somehow Inuit hunting is gruesome."[124]

Tagaq's call-out of McCullough's tweet came years after PETA activists violently harassed her online for posting an image of her child with a recently hunted seal. Tagaq shared the image in March 2014 as part of what Indigenous digital activists informally referred to as the "Sealfie" campaign, in which they photographed and published pictures highlighting seal hunts' cultural significance across various social media streams. The campaign was primarily a response to Ellen DeGeneres's $1.5 million dollar donation to the Humane Society, an anti-sealing organization, and her proclamation that seal hunting is "one of the most atrocious and inhumane acts against animals."[125] Read in context, Tagaq's picture reflects a happy and respectful familial memory: in it, her infant daughter is posed comfortably against the slate rocks

[123] My use of contention builds from Audra Simpson's "pedagogies of contention." See: "The State is a Man," 14-16.
[124] Tagaq seems to have since deactivated her Twitter (now X) account, but the rest of her tweet was as follows: "If a hamburger is not gory to you but seeing ribs, bones, and blood is you need a longer tablecloth to cover those suggestive table legs buddy." Tanya Tagaq (@tagaq), "The Great Disconnect," reply to J. J. McCullough, Twitter (now X), August 5, 2021, https://x.com/tagaq/status/1423315709967355910. Tagaq also discussed "the great disconnect" at her Brown "Climate Change" panel (2024).
[125] "Stop Seal Hunting in Canada Now," *The Ellen DeGeneres Show,* April 6, 2011, www.ellentv.com/2011/04/06/stop-seal-hunting-in-canada-now/.

of the Arctic shore, swaddled in a puffy, pale-blue onesie. The seal's sleek body lies next to Tagaq's baby, nearly double her size. In the top-right corner of the image, you can see that blood has stained the stone beneath the seal's head. When describing the photograph, Tagaq said:

> I took that picture long before the "Sealfie" movement at an elder's camp in the middle of nowhere. Some elders were sitting around drinking tea in the summertime and it was very peaceful. A boat pulled up and it was their nephew who had caught a seal. They were so happy to be able to have the seal for the fur, for tanning, and to eat. You can weave the intestines to make rope. Every single part of that beautiful animal is used. One of the traditions is to melt snow in your mouth and then put it into the seal's mouth so their spirit isn't thirsty in the afterlife. It is a deep respect.[126]

Tagaq's rumination on seal-hunting provides an opposite for what she terms "the great disconnect:" she narrates a "peaceful" scene of gathering and stresses that each part of the seal is honored and used. In Inuk culture, the conditions of a seal's death and its consumption are fundamentally premised on connection to the animal, its environment, and the community who will be nourished by it.[127] Just as Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* reduced Inuit life in the Arctic to a colonial optic, environmental activists' attacks on Tagaq, and seal-hunting more broadly, violently flatten Indigenous life in order to perform a claim to land. This misunderstanding is often fatal. As Elizabeth Rule illustrates, Tagaq's tormenters assaulted her "physical well-being, traditions, and motherhood," with a hostility so severe that they photoshopped images of Tagaq's skull stripped down to a "gory sludge" and her daughter being stabbed to death with a traditional seal-hunting instrument.[128] Some of these critics accused Tagaq of being an unfit mother and

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[126] Tagaq, interview by Freeman.

[127] Seal-hunting "constitutes a matter of life and death" in remote regions of Canada because it "provides much-needed income, a source of livelihood, and access to resources," in addition to being cultural significant. See: Elizabeth Rule, "Seals, Selfies, and the Settler State: Indigenous Motherhood and Gendered Violence in Canada," *American Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (December 2018): 745-46.

[128] Tagaq is specifically being stabbed with a hakapik, which Rule describes as "the notorious instrument used to bludgeon seals while not damaging their fur and an iconic symbol of the antisealing movement. See: Rule, "Seals, Selfies, and the Settler State," 744; Kent Driscoll, "Animal Rights Group Puts Nunavut Musician in Cross Hairs over Seal Pelt Debate," *Aboriginal Peoples Television* Network video, 2:57, April 7, 2014, aptn.ca/news/2014/04/07/animalrights-group-puts-nunavut-musician-cross-hairs-seal-pelt-debate/.

called for foster care intervention. I recount these incidents not to rehearse damage, but to emphasize the interconnectedness of these attacks and how they "speak to the larger colonialist effort to end the intergenerational reproduction of Indigenous culture […] through campaigns of violence against Indigenous women," as Rule argues.[129] In her essay on Indigenous motherhood and gendered violence in Canada, Rule clarifies how settler environmentalists' condemnations of Tagaq "exist as contemporary iterations of the enduring, powerful ideologies that once fueled mid-nineteenth and early twentieth-century residential schools, sterilization, and adoption and foster care abuses."[130] By linking harassers' abuse of Tagaq to the Canadian state's centuries-long attempts to control, vanish, and otherwise destroy Indigenous women's bodies, Rule reasserts Audra Simpson's argument that "Canada requires the death and so called 'disappearance' of Indigenous women in order to secure its sovereignty" and that this "sovereign death drive" is inseparable from the definition and operations of "governance" itself.[131]

Tagaq articulates this sovereign death drive—pulling the curtain back on Canada's national mythologies—while also embodying Indigenous survivance, to return to my earlier argument. Tagaq cuts through what she calls "the great disconnect" and what Simpson terms "the acoustic mess of settlement" in order to sound a contentious sovereignty that refuses to reconcile with the State. She indisputably links the murders and disappearances of Native women with other state-incentivized forms of dispossession.[132] Here, I refer to land theft and extraction, but also Canadian policies which: 1.) seek to regulate Native women's reproduction through forced sterilizations and a rhetoric of Catholic purity; 2.) fail to provide meaningful and tribal-centric justice for Native rape victims; and 3.) codify Indian women's "legal death or redefinition

[129] Rule, "Seals, Selfies, and the Settle State," 741.
[130] Rule, "Seals, Selfies, and the Settle State," 741.
[131] Simpson, "The State is A Man," 1.
[132] Simpson, "The State is A Man," 1.

as subjects of white sovereignty," historically through the Indian Act of 1876 and continually through its lingering impacts and policies of forced assimilation, such as seal-hunting taxation and bans, many of which *are* life-and-death.[133]

While the intricacies and maneuverings of the "sovereign death drive" are complex, Tagaq clarifies their patterns through performance. I argue that she does so without sacrificing the nuances of living under a Canadian system of governance that fundamentally relies on her and her peoples' elimination. Instead, Tagaq bends her audiences' ears and guides their bodies towards a mode of attunement that is disciplined to navigate what Byrd defines as the "cacophony" of empire. This cacophony consists of "discordant and competing representations of diasporic arrivals and native lived experiences… that vie for hegemony"[134] that serve "to misdirect and cloud attention from the underlying structures of settler colonialism."[135] In the example of Tagaq's "sealfie," the media's discourse surrounding the image usurped both its intent and Tagaq's attempts to redirect attention to MMIWG2S. In Tagaq's own words: "When there are the names of 1,200 missing and murdered Indigenous women scrolling behind you at a big show like the Polaris gala and people are losing their minds over seals, it's a little terrifying."[136] She elaborated: "They're connected."

Tagaq's projection of the women's names and her comments above model a way to make sense of empire's "cacophony" of sounds. This is precisely what Simpson is referring to when she writes that within "[cacophony's] multiplicity" is "also the riot of noise that requires an ear, and a decipherment, an audibility, but perhaps a willingness to listen."[137] In my previous chapter,

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[133] Simpson, "The State is A Man," 7.
[134] Byrd, *Transit of Empire,* xiii.
[135] Note: Byrd is writing in a US-specific context here. Byrd, *Transit of Empire,* xvii.
[136] Tagaq quoted in "Tanya Tagaq on the Polaris Prize, the seal hunt and the 'sealfie,'" posted September 26, 2014, by CBC News, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wKRz562MY8&ab_channel=CBCNews%3ATheNational.
[137] Simpson , "The State is A Man," 2.

I posited that Simone, following Brooks, instructs audiences to hear America on a "different frequency;" building from the literal definition of frequency as the amount of times an event repeats in a set unit, I argued that Simone orients spectators towards an understanding of anti-Black (and gendered) violence as repetitive and cyclical. Tagaq does something similar. By connecting missing and murdered women's names to her performance, she implored her audience to hear *Canada* on a different frequency, one that clearly names the "underlying structures of settler colonialism" and how they inform the patterned nature of Indigenous femicide.[138] Tagaq's sealskin cuffs further suggested that the protection of Native hunting practices is connected to justice for MMIWG2S. Through embodiment, voice, staging, and commentary, Tagaq redirected spectators away from the State's desire for fleeting sorrow resolved by the performance's end, and instead towards her demands for tribal and personal self-determination. Across her performances and contestations of reconciliation, Tagaq positions her body as a site of need, of choice, and of Indigenous "active presence."[139] That throat singing mirrors the land is vital here in that, under Euro Canadian governance, Indian women's bodies are made to signify land itself.[140] In her mapping of the High North through sovereign sound, Tagaq refuses to cede both body and place. Simpson's insights are illustrative here:

> An Indian woman's body in settler regimes such as the US and Canada is loaded with meaning—signifying other political orders, land itself, the dangerous possibility of reproducing Indian life and most dangerously, other political orders. *Other* life forms, other sovereignties, other forms of political will. Indian women […] transmit the clan, and with that: family, responsibility, relatedness to territory. Feminist scholars have argued that Native women's bodies were the settler eye, like land, and as such in the settler mind, the Native woman is rendered 'unrapeable' (or, highly rapeable) because she was like land, matter to be extracted from, used, sullied, taken from, over and over,

[138] See: Brooks, "Nina Simone's Triple Play," 182 and Byrd, *Transit of Empire,* xiii.
[139] I am building this argument from Simpson's reading of Theresa Spence's protest: "She declared her own body a space for the pronouncement of need, of sovereignty, the site of the decision *not* to eat." See: Simpson, "The State is A Man,: 8.
[140] Simpson, "The State is A Man," 10-11.

> something that is already violated and violatable in a great march to accumulate surplus, to so called 'production.'[141]

Note that Native women are only able to contribute to "production" insofar as they are "made" into cooperative citizens of the State: otherwise they must be disappeared. Tagaq refuses to cooperate and therefore cannot become, in Canada's eyes, a viable reproductive source. This is abundantly clear through Tagaq's performance and post-show behavior at the Polaris Prize Gala: as the cosmopolitan nexus of Canadian music, the gala provided a prime opportunity to subsume Tagaq's deeply Inuit and woman-centered work into a multi-cultural tapestry of nationalist artistic pride, thus rendering her an exemplary liberal subject. But that, of course, is not what happened.

On September 22, 2014, Tagaq took the stage at the Polaris Prize Gala to perform "Uja" and "Umingmak" from her nominated album *Animism.*[142] A choir of 40 singers backed her performance: their voices amplified Tagaq's already intense vocals, folding in sonorous shrieks and screams. The choir singers all hit the same note, punctuating Tagaq's throat singing. Their collective sound sometimes blended with the violin, taking on an acute shrill quality, and sometimes made a wide, "ah"-sound, almost reminiscent of a Gregorian chant. The choir created a texture of exclamation. As Tagaq maneuvered the stage, she flourished her hand in gestures so sharp and expressive the appendage became a character of its own. Her hand, with its pouncing and prowling, conjured the wolves on *Animism*'s cover. Observing Tagaq's hand, one imagines her breathy-guttural voice its narrator and the choir another layer of diegetic sound, perhaps of glacial ice breaking or piercing nearby screams. Five screens framed Tagaq during the Polaris

[141] Simpson, "The State is A Man," 9-10. Here, Simpson is referring specifically to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.
[142] "Tanya Tagaq Uja and Umingmak live Polaris Music Prize 2014," posted October 22, 2018, by Marcia Neel, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pydRzYrEZec&ab_channel=MarciaNeel.

performance: four of which zoomed in on frescoes from Emanuel Vigeland's mausoleum in Oslo, Norway, while one screen set apart to the far left displayed a list of missing and murdered Indigenous women, their names set against a black screen. Vigeland's frescoes interweave human cycles of life and death with dramatic scenes from Christianity; his paintings are provocative with sex and pleasure as a central motif—one section showcases two skeletons locked in an erotic embrace. The mausoleum is renowned by musicians for its exquisite acoustics and has been a source of artistic inspiration for Tagaq since she visited it in 2002.[143] I read her inclusion of its visuals at Polaris as an indictment against the strains of Christianity that have shamed sex and the human body as profane.[144] As Vigeland wrote on the walls of his mausoleum: "When you see a naked human body and are vexed at what you see, then reproach God for what he has created, if you dare."[145]



Figure 2.5: Tanya Tagaq performing at Polaris Prize Gala, 2014. Video uploaded by Marcia Neel, October 22, 2018, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pydRzYrEZec&ab_channel=MarciaNeel.

[143] Alex Hudson, "Tanya Tagaq," *Exclaim!*, November 22, 2015, https://exclaim.ca/music/article/tanya_tagaq-aorta_video.
[144] See earlier citations of Vanessa Watts.
[145] "Tomba Emanuelle," Emmanuel Vigeland Museum website, https://emanuelvigeland.museum.no/mausoleum.htm.

While Tagaq was undoubtedly at the performance's center, the choir, orchestra, and list of names disrupted the archetype of the singular, musical genius, instead spotlighting the collaborative and communal qualities of Tagaq's art. On stage, Tagaq wore a red dress, dyed a deep crimson to honor missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Tagaq often wears red dresses when performing. Her costume choice brings to mind "Red Dress Day," an annual day in Canada in which people hang red dresses as public markers of missing and murdered Native women and girls. Métis artist Jamie Black inspired "Red Dress Day" in 2010 with her REDress project: "We display [the dresses] empty in public places, so people are confronted with the violence women are experiencing," she explains, "but also the presence and power of Indigenous women."[146] Since Black's first installation, each May, people have suspended red gowns from windows and trees, in town squares and on top of city monuments. In 2021, an activist even attached a sundress to British colonizer George Vancouver's statue, so its striking red cloth dripped from his bronze hand in front of City Hall. Like with the garments for "Red Dress Day," Tagaq's clothing simultaneously commemorates those who are gone—killed, disappeared—and reminds her spectators that she and other Native women are still here.

Tagaq is a very physical performer: she often performs barefoot and dances and paces across her stage. At her Polaris concert, Tagaq's movement visually marked the wrongful absence of the women whose names scrolled behind her, while, perhaps, opening up a space for them to step inside the dress and dance with her again. "We say the spirits that have passed see bright colors the best, red in particular," Two-Spirit educator and residential school survivor Lori

[146] Jamie Black quoted in "The REDress Project at the National Museum of the American Indian," posted April 8, 2019, by SmithsonianNMAI, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lH7FuxzrFvs&ab_channel=SmithsonianNMAI.

Campbell (Métis-Cree) has shared.[147] "So hanging the red dresses helps lost spirits find their way home to their loved ones."[148] As Tagaq sings the land, her dress and performance mourn the Native women lost to violence, while also calling their memories back to earth, holding them alongside the place and people who remember them.

In addition to her red dress, Tagaq wore seal-skin cuffs around both of her wrists: as I mentioned above, Tagaq's hand gestures are a signature part of her performances, meaning she attracted a lot of visual focus to her cuffs. Hand-sewn by Yellowknife-based Métis artist Cheryl Fennell, Tagaq's cuffs, like her red dress, were a political choice. Her seal-skin bracelets announced that, in spite of settler environmentalists' death threats and criticisms, Tagaq was not "backing down" on her pro-seal hunting stance. By proudly donning seal-skin cuffs, passed down from her mother and made traditionally by a Native artist, Tagaq also modeled seals' multiple uses and significance in Inuit and Native women's culture. Tagaq's bracelets pointed out the hypocrisy of settlers' "great disconnect," by evidencing their multi-purpose role for Inuit and, through the MMIWG's names, provoking settler audiences to ask themselves: how can I justify fretting over the lives of humanely killed seals when over 1,200 Native women are missing? Tagaq wielded her body as a vessel of protest and a pronouncement of sovereignty. Her performance reminds me of Audra Simpson's reading of Theresa Spence who, in her fasting protest against the Prime Minister and Governor General of Canada, "declared her own body a space for the pronouncement of need, of sovereignty, the site of the decision *not* to eat."[149] In allowing herself to be a critical and unruly figure, Tagaq disrupted national attempts to control and codify her body and artistry. And, through repeatedly using her body and voice to advocate

[147] Lori Campbell quoted in "Red Dress Day: What It Is and How It Began," *CBC Kids News,* May 5, 2025, https://www.cbc.ca/kidsnews/post/red-dress-day-what-it-is-and-how-it-began.
[148] Campbell quoted in "Red Dress Day."
[149] Simpson, "The State is a Man," 8.

for seal-hunting, Tagaq similarly pronounced her own need and sovereignty in her decision to nourish herself and her daughter how she chooses fit.

I witnessed this same unruliness at Tagaq's recent performance at Toronto's Royal Conservatory of Music in commemoration of the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. The entire concert's program was thoughtfully planned to the detail: before entering the concert hall, a family of Mississaugas musicians performed their hand-drum songs outside, instantly marking the space as one of Indigenous song and celebration; Falen Johnson (Mohawk and Tusarora from the Six Nations Grand River Territory), playwright and "Secret Life of Canada" *CBC* podcast co-host, emceed the evening, expertly weaving in humor, reverence, and cultural understanding into the night's commentary.[150] An energetic audience crowded the concert hall: many attendees were clearly fans of Tagaq and the other scheduled performers. Several wore clothing items that were either Indigenous-made or in political support of Native rights—a man in the front row, specifically, wore a t-shirt that read: "Bury the Catholic Churches in Unmarked Graves."

Tagaq emerged in the program's second-act to a rapt and ready audience. She wore a glittering silver dress embroidered with intricate red sequins and high-heels which she kicked off before beginning her song. Tagaq's performance was titled "Qiksaaktuq," which is the Inuktitut word for grief and was "dedicated to missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls, and those who grieve them."[151] One of Tagaq's frequent collaborators, Jean Martin, created an orchestral score, from which Christine Duncan, another frequent collaborator, added hand cues to "freely conduct the brass section," while Tagaq improvised her part in real time. The piece

[150] Still, even in the concert hall's atmosphere of solidarity and celebration, there was friction: the Royal Conservatory is so-named because it was chartered by the British monarchy; first-act performer, Lido Pimienta, shouted-out Palestinians in the fight for decolonization and, next to me, protestors rolled out "Free Palestine" banners, however, after the show, activists on social media reveal the RCM is funded by a pro-Israel group.
[151] Concert program note, Royal Conservatory of Music, September 30, 2024.

was organized in five movements and structured around the Kübler-Ross model of grief's stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. At first, I was curious as to how Tagaq and her collaborators would fit their art into a format that hinges so heavily on resolution, or "acceptance." I wondered: is there an "acceptance" that also sounds like contention? Throughout "Qiksaaktuq," Tagaq forcefully moved across the stage, alternating between focused speed and nearly total stillness. She recruited her hand, as usual, as an extension of her voice. At certain moments, she pointed her finger with such fierce vigor that it seemed to laser into her audience. By the time she reached the final movement of "Qiksaaktuq," "acceptance," the entire audience, from my viewpoint, was not only moved into complete observation, but leaned forward, our stomachs bent across our knees, our hands cradled in our laps. Tagaq stood in the middle of the stage and the orchestra quieted entirely. We waited for her next move or sound: looking around, some of us were unsure whether to applaud. I noticed other audience members tuning in carefully for clues as to if we had reached the number's conclusion. Tagaq moved her hands slowly and gently, as if she were brushing something off of her and then, as if she were wiping away sweat or tears. After a beat too long she glanced up and outwards, beaming into a smile. The audience broke into applause and a standing ovation.

I read this moment not as an instance of solemn "acceptance," but a demand for greater attunement: Tagaq pulled her audience into her interior, but at once renounced a transparent reading of her performance. What "acceptance" means to Tagaq, we may not know. That demanding of interiority, while at once teaching audiences how to better listen, *is* contention. It is an education in how to "stand fully" before the ongoing effects of colonial violence and the powerful of Indigenous survivance. I return to Simpson:

> […] the desire for reconciliation by the Canadian government is a curious one. I am not sure that this is possible or fair to attempt to 'reconcile' with something that is so violent,

> so relentless, unless all people stand fully before the sorts of stories I have assembled, the stories that circulate in our communities, the loss, the gains, the names, and think then about what peace means. The settler state is asking to forgive and to forget, with no land back, no justice and no peace. I find this request for forgiveness by a killing state with what we now know and continue to know to veer towards the absurd if not insult, in spite of conciliatory intent. This is because historical, bodily, and heuristic violence along with the theft are among those things that are really impossible to forgive let alone forget.[152]

There is so much to absorb from Simpson's words: I am trying to hold and hear each of them. The phrase I keep returning to is: "unless all people stand fully before […] the stories that circulate in our communities, the loss, the gains, the names, and think then about what peace means." Tagaq invites audiences to stand before such stories not to facilitate reconciliation, but because, through her telling of them, she weaves a sovereignty of sound through the performance halls, a self-determination that cannot be diminished, and demands not "peace," but transformation.

Coda: Tongues

About halfway through HBO Max's mini-series *True Detective: Night Country*, Tagaq and a community of Indigenous women provide a reprieve from the show's harsh Alaskan setting and grotesque central mystery. The reprieve arrives in the form of a home-birth scene scored by a tender song sung by Tagaq. Up until this point, viewers have been following detectives Liz Danvers (Jodie Foster) and Evangeline Navarro (Kali Reis) as they unravel the story of a group of male scientists who suddenly disappeared from their remote research facility. The series is set in the fictional town of Ennis, Alaska and soundtracked in part by Tagaq, who also—along with several Inuit women—served as an advisor, collaborator, and guest star on the show. The lost men turn up at the end of the pilot: they are frozen naked and mid-scream, their

[152] Simpson, "The State is a Man," 16. The names and stories assembled by Simpson primarily include Spence's hunger strike and the murder of Loretta Saunders.

bodies tangled in terror and mouths fixed firmly in fear. The men look as if they have been awestruck by a gruesome vision in the middle of the bitter-cold Arctic expanse. As they gather evidence, the detectives discover a cut-out tongue hidden amongst the otherwise eerily vacant research center. Detective Navarro, herself part-Inuit, is convinced it belongs to Annie Kowtok, an Iñupiaq woman and local anti-mining activist who was brutally murdered six years ago: by the time the Ennis police discovered Annie's mutilated body, her killers had stabbed her several times and removed her tongue.[153] The town's law enforcers have failed to locate her murderers or make any meaningful progress in the investigation. The unresolved case torments Navarro, who insists the tongue's appearance and scientists' vanishings are connected proof of Ennis's corruption.

In this conclusion, I turn to *Night Country* not just as a further example of Tagaq's multi-sensorial work, but to evidence how her critical geographic practice translates to visual media. Because Tagaq and other Inuit advisors were such central influences in the show's writing and production, *Night Country* is informed by many of the guiding ethos and aesthetics of Tagaq's live performances that I've outlined across this chapter. Here, I am fascinated by the question of medium: how might Tagaq and her collaborators interrogate the genre of prestige crime drama through sovereign sound? What does the filmic language of detective procedural offer and limit? These inquiries inform my following chapter which examines the medium of photography as both historically violating, particularly towards photographers' Black subjects, and potentially liberatory, particularly when read through a lens of performance. Like Tagaq's performance practice, *Night Country* rescripts the scenario of the colonial-Native encounter to center

[153] Navarro has both Inuk and Latinx heritages; one the show's main storylines is Navarro's journey back to her Inuit community. The actress who portrays Navarro, Kali Reis, is Afro-Indigenous of Cape Verdean, Wampanoag, Cherokee, and Nipmuc descent. Reis is a member of the Seaconke Wampanoag Tribe, an unrecognized tribe in Massachusetts.

Indigenous place-based knowledge of the Arctic lands. The crime drama genre is typified by its reification of law and order: the lead detective team—which is almost always made up of a "by-the-book" officer and their rogue foil—probe their mysterious environments and the victims' bodies until the culprit is uncovered, justice is served, and their town is returned to its status quo. *Night Country*, as with Tagaq's work, prompts audiences consider crime not as an aberration contained to one solvable case, but rather to view instances of violence within a greater constellation of settler colonial conquest, Indigenous resistance and care networks, and the land's agency.

Issa López, *Night Country*'s creator and a Mexican filmmaker, said the idea for the season's plot came from her desire to reverse the scenario that incites most crime dramas. She planned it as a "counterpart" to "so many shows, even [past seasons of] *True Detective*," "where it's two men finding and exploring the bodies of brutalized women."[154] In *Night Country*, two female detectives, one of mixed Latina and Inuit heritage, investigate the bodies of men brutalized by the forces of nature. López's revision of the "crime drama" scenario takes on another layer as viewers consider the history of Native bodies, particularly biologically female ones, being mined and scrutinized. These visuals circulate from sensational news reports and true-crime coverage of murdered Indigenous women without due investigation or tribal justice to Western museum spaces, where Native bodies are displayed as archeological objects—a scenario Luiseno visual artist James Luna, and later Erica Lord, explored in their art installations *Artifact Piece* (1987) and *Artifact Piece, Revisited* (2008).[155]

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[154] Issa López quoted in "*Variety's* Showrunners Sitdown: 'True Detective: Night Country' Creator Issa López on Shutting Down Haters and Putting 'Dead, Naked Men' on Screen 'For Fun,'" interview by Katie Arthur, *Variety,* June 6, 2024, https://variety.com/2024/tv/news/true-detective-season-4-finale-season-1-connection-1236025423/.
[155] See: Erica Lorde, "Artifact Piece, Revisited," https://ericalord.com/section/39343-Artifact%20Piece%2C%20Revisited.html.

Night Country seems to ask: what would happen if, instead of being the dead bodies that motivate the male detective's discoveries, women—especially Inuit women—were the primary agents and investigators of the crime drama plot? *True Detective* maintains the same unsettling atmospheric setting required of any "good detective story:"[156] Annie's violent murder haunts the narrative and cryptic images from the lead detectives' past traumas—tire-beaten tracks, drowning parkas, frostbitten limbs, spiraled orange peels, and a well-worn stuffed polar bear—drift in and out of the camera's forever-snowy frame as surreal mirages. This is why the third episode's birthing scene is such a salve: the sensation I felt viewing it was like coming up out of icy-water for air, or stumbling onto shore to find a thick blanket—the cold's bite still lingers and rattles, but is soothed by the promise of recuperation. The scene instructs audiences that the show's Arctic environment is not only one of crime and despair, but also, literally, of life and care.

The birthing scene starts as a flashback from Navarro's perspective; she bangs on the door of a sparse shed, announcing that Annie is under arrest for "trespassing" and "destruction of private property." Navarro enters and confronts Annie who says she'll "need a minute" and reveals that the abandoned building is actually a birthing center; a group of doulas and caretakers, including Tagaq's character, encircle the woman who is giving birth in a round, bright-blue pool. These women nearly all bear kakiniit, or traditional Inuit facial tattoos, on their chins.[157] One woman indirectly addresses Navarro ("What's that bitch doing here?"), to which Annie responds, "she's helping" and asks Navarro to grab water to assist with the birth. As the

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[156] López, interview by Arthur.

[157] Christian missionaries once banned these Inuk markings, and lines on chins are often the first kakiniit that Inuit women receive. See: Jana Angulalik, "Reclaiming agency: Reviving the once banned practice of traditional Inuit tattoos in Canada," *Arctic Focus,* https://www.arcticfocus.org/stories/reclaiming-agency-reviving-once-banned-practice-traditional-inuit-tattoos-canada/; Juanita Taylor, "Etched on the Skin," *CBC News*, October 2, 2021, https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform/inuit-kakiniit-traditional-tattoo/. In *Night Country,* Danvers's Iñupiaq stepdaughter, Leah, and Navarro both receive these tattoos as markers of their joining of the Indigenous community.

pregnant woman delivers her baby, the Inuit women surrounding her extend gestures of emotional and medical support: they reassure her with affirming touches and breathing instructions. At first, after giving birth, the woman's daughter cannot breathe, requiring Annie to perform CPR. Thankfully, the CPR is successful and, as the baby cries and is introduced to her mother, Tagaq hums a lullaby intermixed with her throat-singing inhalations and exhalations. The Inuit women embrace one another and observe the baby and mother with palpable love; a sweet glow infuses the scene. Navarro stands to the side, visually moved, until finally Annie holds out her wrists and says: "Ok, now you can arrest me."



Figure 2.6: Birthing scene from *True Detective: Night Country*. Episode 3. HBO Max, 2024.

The gestures of care in *Night Country's* birthing scene reminded me so thoroughly of Tagaq's interactions with her fellow throat-singers on stage that for a second I was transported back to Brown's resplendent concert hall from the grey cushion of my couch. The birthing center points to a whole geography of Ennis which exists beyond the law enforcement's prosecution and the town mining company's resource extraction. The idea of "trespassing" itself is

interrogated—as audience members following Navarro's perspective, *we* are made to feel as intruders into a sacred space of childbirth. These women's "underground" system of reproductive care—and, later in the show, justice for survivors of gender-based violence—maps a network that is rooted in self-determination and exists outside of, and in some ways in spite of, "official" state structures of governance. Thinking back to the *Book of Eskimo Wisdom* distributed by the Canadian government in 1947, *Night Country*'s portrayal of this network speaks back to a long history of the U.S. and Canadian nation-state's attempts to control Native birthing practices and women's reproductive choices.

Even though Ennis is fictional, it is based on lived experience. Navarro's charges against Annie—trespassing and destruction of private property—resonate with the material struggles and oft-recited rhetoric against Indigenous land protectors.[158] Notably in *Night Country*, Annie actually recruits Officer Navarro, who is also Indigenous, to participate in the birthing ritual, inviting her to transgress her own boundaries as an agent of the state.[159] As viewers, we do not see whether Navarro ended up arresting Annie after the scene—it's reasonable to conclude that she didn't—however, we are invited, through Navarro's eyes, to witness the life-giving import of an Indigenous and feminine circle of care that rejects the state's blind worship of rightful

[158] For example, at Line 3 Pipeline construction sites, deputy sheriffs arrested Anishinaabe protestors for blockading construction with a waaginogaan, a prayer lodge made of interwoven branches shaped into a dome, under the counts of "unlawful assembly" and "illegal trespassing." That the Minnesota police criminalized these women for gathering on their own stolen ancestral land is a cruel irony. "[You're] criminalizing ceremony just like you always have!" one protestor spoke back to the officers.[158] Sitting inside the dome at the foot of the construction site, Anishinaabe women prayed and sang and locked themselves to one another around the lodge; their circular formation and use of song resonates with the Inuit women's birthing scene in *Night Country.* By placing their bodies in front of the pipeline construction equipment, Anishinaabe land defenders visually linked violation of the land with harm to their bodies. They enunciated the land's sacredness through their prayers and water protection songs. While the *Night Country* scene differs from the Line 3 pipeline protests in several important ways, both confrontations reveal the hypocrisy and absurdity of charging Indigenous caretakers, of land and one another, with "trespassing." See: "Chronicles the Fight to Stop the Line 3," *Stop Line 3,* https://www.stopline3.org/#intro; "Blocking Machinery With Their Bodies: Insight the Fight Against an Oil Pipeline," *AJ+,* YouTube, July 29, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZTmXkW5VqI&ab_channel=AJ%2B.

property ownership. This tension is deepened by the fact that, as the show explores in further detail, many of Ennis's Indigenous women are having stillborn children and pregnancy complications as a result of pollution wrought by the town's mining company.

It is important to note that the kinship between these women extended into the creation of the show, too: in an interview, the show's creator Issa López shared that Inuit advisors were involved at every stage of the show's production, even cooking food for the production crew that used "ingredients that [the Inuit community] consume and hunt."[160] "One of the first things [the show's Inuit advisors] said is people have always come to Alaska to *take*," López recalls. "They come to Alaska to take gold, to take oil, to take gas […] and nothing ever returns to us. And I felt that that was a guideline that I could lead with for the series. So we had these advisors who went through every page, every line, every dialogue, and gave us a compass."[161] López's intervention in settler "taking" extends to the motivating conflict of *Night Country*—that it is the men who have gone missing, not the Indigenous women. As viewers watch each episode unfold, Navarro inches closer to "returning" to her Inuit community to the point where the show ends not with an unmasking of its central crime's mystery, but with Navarro abandoning the force altogether to live a freer life on the land.

In the final episode of the series, *Night Country* drives home its polestar of telling "a different story." Viewers find out that Annie was murdered not by Alaskans angered by her anti-mining protests, as police authorities framed, but by the scientists who disappeared and died of frostbite at the start of the show. These men, all seemingly "nice," if a bit nerdy, violently retaliated against Annie when she found and destroyed their research that would further a contamination project. The men's experiments were the cause of Ennis's increased water

[160] López, interview by Arthur.
[161] López, interview by Arthur.

toxicity, which the mining company had been covering up for their own capital gain. Upon realizing that the scientists murdered Annie, the circle of Native women, many of which appeared as birth-workers earlier, kidnapped the scientists and surrendered them to the Arctic elements. When detectives Navarro and Danvers ask the women why they didn't report the scientists, the eldest of the group responds that they know how the typical "story" goes when reporting "these things" to the cops, so "we told ourselves a different story, with a different ending." The women are adamant that they did not kill the men, but that "she," meaning the land, "took them," and they did not know how to protect themselves. At once proclaiming the land's agency and the researchers' incompetence, the men's death illustrates that, despite all their inspecting of it, they do not *know* the land or how to navigate it. It is the Inuit women's map of Ennis—which is passed through stories, rituals, and caretaking—that proves most authoritative. And it is the land, in the end, who has the power to "take," not the settlers.

This penultimate scene, in which the Inuit women share their story with the detectives, is staged much like the birthing sequence: this time, instead of orbiting around the pregnant woman, the community envelopes an elder who acts as their spokesperson. The same acts of care are there: the hand on the shoulder, the passing of warm tea. In reading reviews of the show, I found that many viewers, including myself, still wondered how Annie's tongue appeared at the research station. When asked about it, the women say to the detectives: "That's not part of our story. I don't know what you're talking about." It is possible that the women really did not know anything about the tongue, but I read this more of a moment of opacity—a way of safeguarding a piece of Annie's story and the women's stewardship of it from outsiders. López elaborates:

> So what happened to that tongue? The version that will work for the people that will read the series as a completely rational story is that the tongue was found by the people of the village. And then the women who know everything knew that they couldn't take care of Annie's body in the way that they would like. So one of them keeps a tongue as an act of

> reverence and kindness to the body that is still going to go through a lot of indignities. They preserve the tongue… And then when the women come into the station, they leave the tongue as a sign that now is the time of the truth of storytelling—of our storytelling. The stories that Annie couldn't tell and was silenced for are going to come to the light. The other version of events is: Annie is left there, and the tongue is cut and the tongue disappears into thin air. And it is *Annie* who comes with the women into the station, like she's awake… Annie does visit the station with the women, and leaves her own tongue, because she knows this is how it starts—that she can finally tell her story.[162]

Whichever ending audiences choose, Annie's story remains: it persists in the land that remembers her, the women who care for one another, and the stories they choose to tell or not.

Tagaq's songs and performance in the show invoke the same multi-sensorial listening practice I have discussed throughout this chapter. They fold listeners into a rich sonic realm to reveal a landscape not defined by violence, but of deeply attuned navigation. That listening is work, just as survival is—but only in paying attention can one understand the depths of agency and connection that move between oneself, the land, and others. That practice stands against settler colonialism in that it decides to hold rather than take, to listen rather than master. Or, as Tagaq writes *Split Tooth:* "Sound is a conduit to a realm we cannot totally comprehend."[163] In that realm there is always more to learn if one surrenders to truly hearing.

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[162] Issa López quoted in "'True Detective: Night Country' Ending: Creator Issa López on Those Killers, Season 1 Ties and What Happened to Annie's Tongue?" interview by Kate Arthur, *Variety,* February 18, 2024, https://variety.com/2024/tv/news/true-detective-season-4-ending-who-killed-annie-scientists-1235908415/.
[163] Tagaq, *Split Tooth,* 55-6.

CHAPTER THREE

Stealing the Shadow: Nona Faustine's Critical Geographies of New York[1]

"The land still holds the memory of us," Nona Faustine meditates at the *Brooklyn Talks* panel for her photography series, *White Shoes*.[2] It "is all we have after everything has been so erased. The history of African Americans has been so tampered with… So [this is] my way of putting us back there. Saying: 'we were here.'"[3]

Faustine sits on stage alongside *White Shoes* book contributors Jessica Lanay, Pamela Sneed, and Seph Rodney at the Brooklyn Museum's celebration of the catalogue's publication. Though other museums had shown excerpts of *White Shoes*, the Brooklyn Museum's 2024 exhibition marked the series' complete installation and Faustine's first solo show.[4] Throughout *White Shoes,* Faustine poses nude—except for her pair of white satin heels—across and against former sites of African enslavement in New York City: she rests in front of the Lefferts House, the former home of one the city's largest slave-holding families; she pushes against the cold, immovable granite of Tweed Courthouse, constructed atop the city's late 17th and 18th-century

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[1] Note: Less than a week before my dissertation was due to my committee, Faustine passed away. The cause of her death has not yet been confirmed to the public. Her death was a complete shock to me and, it seems, was to many other members of the art community who loved her and her work so dearly. I am still very much processing her death and its relationship to this project; I am also honoring the family's privacy at this time and focusing instead on the incredible, necessary, and thought-provoking work Faustine leaves behind. This chapter is dedicated to Faustine and to her daughter, Queen. You can read more about the art she was working on up until her death at Alex Greenberger, "Nona Faustine, Photographer Who Pictured Enslavement's Histories and Black Women's Perseverance, Dies at 48," *ARTNews*, March 21, 2025, https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/nona-faustine-photographer-dead-white-shoes-1234736316/ and Maya Pontone, "Nona Faustine, Whose Defiant Self-Portraits Confronted Centuries of Violence, Dies at 48," *Hyperallergic*, March 23, 2025, https://hyperallergic.com/998094/nona-faustine-whose-defiant-self-portraits-confronted-centuries-of-violence-dies-at-48/.

[2] Nona Faustine, "Brooklyn Talks: White Shoes with Nona Faustine," interview by Jessica Lanay, Pamela Sneed, and Seph Rodney, panel discussion, streamed live on February 11, 2022, by Brooklyn Museum, YouTube, 1:08:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ws34aP7uBGA&ab_channel=BrooklynMuseum.

[3] Faustine, "Brooklyn Talks."

[4] Brooklyn Museum first exhibited *White Shoes* as a complete collection, but other museums had shown Faustine's work prior to Brooklyn's exhibition including the Studio Museum of Harlem and Smack Mellon.

African Burial Ground; she stands on an auction block, encircled by Wall Street traffic, at an intersection that used to be the address of an enslaved auction site.[5] "What does a Black person look like today in those places where Africans were once sold, a century and a half ago?" Faustine asks. "What is it like to be that naked, that vulnerable, on display to the world?"[6]

Though Faustine's images expound New York's repressed involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, the sites she selects are not solely ones of violation: she also photographs in spaces of ancestral community, places made sacred by Black gathering, such as Seneca Village, now Central Park, where New York's largest community of free African American property-owners once lived.[7] In these portraits, she is often clothed and at leisure—reading a book or drinking hot tea beneath the shade of her sunhat as she reclines under the shadows of the park's oak trees.

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[5] Note: slavery in New York did not formally end until Governor John Jay had signed a law to gradually end slavery in New York in 1799, which did not take full effect until 1827. For more background on the African Burial Ground in Manhattan and city development, erasure, and memory, see: "African Burial Ground," The New York Preservation Archive Project, accessed March 4, 2025, https://www.nypap.org/preservation-history/african-burial-ground/; Anne-Marie Cantwell and Diana diZerega Wall, "'We Were Here': The African Presence in Colonial New York," in *Unearthing Gotham: The Archaeology of New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 277-297; Andrea E. Frohne, *The African Burial Ground in New York City: Memory, Spirituality, and Space* (Syracuse University Press, 2015); and Ned Kaufman, "Heritage and the Cultural Politics of Preservation: The African Burial Ground and the Audubon Ballroom," in *Place, Race, and Story: Essays in the Past and Future of Historic Preservation* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 296-308. Faustine's historical note in her *White Shoes* book in regards to her Wall St. photograph ("From Her Body Came Their Greatest Wealth" is also instructive here: "Slavery was introduced by the Dutch and later the British, then maintained by Americans, from 1626 until 1827. From 1711 to 1762, at 74 Wall St., on the corner between Water St. and Pearl St., was the address of an Enslaved auction site. Established by a Common Council Law on November 30, 1712, slave-owners used it to hire out enslaved people of African and First Nation heritage. In 1726, it was renamed the Meal Market for the grain, corn, and meal that were sold there. Enslaved people came off the ships docked at nearby slips and were sold at this location. They could be bought and sold throughout New York City, in hotel lobbies, coffee houses, and everywhere in between. Enslaved people cleared the forests, built the roads and buildings, built forts and the wall that gave Wall St. its name. Human beings were the first commodity of the greatest finance capital in the world." Faustine, *White Shoes* (London: Mack Books, 2021), 109.

[6] Nona Faustine, "From Her Body Came Their Greatest Wealth (essay)," *White Shoes* (London: Mack Books, 2021), 1.

[7] For an extended meditation on Black gathering see Sarah Jane Cervenak, *Black Gathering: Art, Ecology, Ungiven Life* (Duke University Press, 2021).

Although they are not the Seneca Village images' central subject, the series' titular white shoes are consistently present in these photographs, and they peek out from hem of Faustine's long white skirt. These shoes are sensible pumps with low heels. They are the kind one might where to church or to work in an office: shoes selected not for glamour, but respectability, or as art critic Joanna Lehan notes, fit for "anywhere a woman's appearance is expected to not draw attention or offense," where she is expected to "literally toe the line."[8] The wearer could comfortably endure the shoes at work all day, but could not easily run in them. The shoes' whiteness, as Faustine has discussed across several interviews, represents white patriarchy and Western beauty standards' allegiance to white womanhood and propriety. "I was reading Fanon and when I first saw the shoes, [and] they reminded me of Queen Elizabeth," Faustine remarks in an interview with Lanay.[9] "I also thought of the properness of our lives as Black women, how we were taught as little girls what is proper or what is against Western ideals of beauty."[10] Through her citation of Frantz Fanon, Faustine tacitly links colonial control over place and bodies to the aesthetic promotion of "proper" femininity as it is rooted in white supremacy. The shoes signify how women are *supposed* to show up in public under such regimes. Faustine pairs "ladylike" shoes with her critique of white patriarchal society's management of who gets to claim "lady," and therefore sexual purity and virtue, through standing in material sites of Black women's violation and practicing her own embodied, if incomplete, "freedom."

Faustine's self-portraits at Seneca Village offer viewers a glimpse into a conversation between the artist, her ancestors, and the land about the textures of that incomplete liberation.

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[8] Joanna Lehan, "Nona Faustine: Time Travelling Goddess," *Photograph Magazine,* March 1, 2024, https://photographmag.com/feature/nona-faustine-time-travelling-goddess/

[9] Nona Faustine, "Feel Without Seeing (I Was Here)," interview by Jessica Lanay, *White Shoes* (London: Mack Books, 2021), 104.

[10] Faustine, *White Shoes,* 104.

Putting her body in a "state to remember," Faustine's postures recall the multi-faceted livelihoods of Central Park's former Black community: Seneca Village's residents once sipped tea, as Faustine does now, and enjoyed moments of repose, perhaps even underneath the same oak branches.[11] Through the Seneca Village Project, archeologists located fragments of a Florentine-style teapot in the house-yard shared by the Webster and Phillips families.[12] Did Eliza Webster, her daughter Malvina, and Matilda Phillips share tea at their houses, and what stories may they have told over its steam? Seneca Village was home to one of the few schools available to Black students, hosted by the African Union Church: as Faustine reads in the park, she claims Central Park as a space for her reflection and education, echoing the pursuits of those before her, while also indicting the state powers which would have deemed such acts criminal.[13] Her reading choices—*Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage* and a volume by Plato—point towards Black and Indigenous solidarities around their shared, yet incommensurable, experiences of dispossession at Central Park land. These books also imply Faustine's broader critique of European philosophical thought and the white liberal subject. Paired together, her texts imagine a "Central Park" defined not through property or possession.

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[11] Faustine attributes the quoted text to Harriet Tubman, however, I cannot find the original source. The full quote is: "There are few markers left but your black body is the marker. The land does hold the memory of your existence. You only have to put it there in its natural state to remember." See: Faustine, "Brooklyn Talks" and *White Shoes,* page 66.

[12] For more information about the Seneca Village Project and the artifacts archeologists located, especially the Webster and Phillips's families', see: The Central Park Conservancy, "Before Central Park: The Story of Seneca Village," *Central Park Conservancy Magazine,* January 18, 2018, https://www.centralparknyc.org/articles/seneca-village; Vaidehi Gupta, "A Story Map of Seneca Village," December 13, 2022, https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/26ec9f98000849a3b8887f7ede542df9; Laura Mogulescu, "Eliza Webster's Seneca Village and 19th Century Black Life in NYC," *The New-York Historical,* February 17, 2021, https://www.nyhistory.org/blogs/eliza-websters-seneca-village-and-19th-century-black-life-in-nyc; Jordane Brickett, "The Teapot as Mediator" and "Women of Seneca Village," Seneca Village Teapot, Bard College, 2020, https://senecavillageteapot.commons.bgc.bard.edu/women-and-tea-in-seneca-village/.

[13] In discussing Central Park and racialized criminality, especially as it relates to sexual violence, I would be remiss not to reference the 1989 Central Park "jogger" case, in which New York police officers arrested and detained five Black and Latinx men for the rape of a young white woman, Tricia Meili; the court ultimately (falsely) found the men guilty and imprisoned them. The accused men were exonerated ten years later. For an in-depth look at the trial, see: *When They See Us,* directed by Ava DuVernay (Netflix, 2019), digital.



Figure 3.1: Nona Faustine, *I Like Tea With My Plato, Seneca Village, Central Park, NYC*, 2021, pigment print, 40 × 60 inches. Image accessed via "Nona Faustine by Carla Williams," *BOMB Magazine,* March 15 2024.

Seneca Village formed in 1825 when free Black New Yorkers Andrew Williams and Epiphany Davis, along with the AME Zion Church, purchased twenty-one lots of present-day Central Park land from the Whitehead family for $953 total—the modern-day equivalent of about $30,000.[14] The New York government claimed eminent domain over Seneca Village's land and, following a city-wide media campaign which disparaged the town as nothing more than a "shanty," evicted Seneca Village's residents in 1857.[15] The city provided them with meager compensation before commencing construction on what is now known as Central Park.[16]

[14] See: Central Park Conservancy, "Before Central Park."
[15] See: Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Cornell University Press, 1992), 64-73.
[16] While newspapers' and the New York Parks department's framing of Seneca Village as nothing more than a decrepit shantytown certainly epitomizes a racist and racializing of place, I am conscious not to recreate Seneca Village as flawless Black utopia for the primary reason that residents need not justify their neighborhoods' moral value to save it from obliteration, just as rape survivors should not have to prove their virtue to qualify their right not to be assaulted. What does it mean to think about the body and land as deserving to *be*, to not be exploited as property or thing, outside of a white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy's system of value? Robin D.G. Kelley's remarks on Ruggles home are also apt here: "What would New York City look like had there been more militant opposition, fighting to hold on to these spaces? How do you defend these spaces? Think about how many historic

Artist and filmmaker Tourmaline offers that Seneca Village's past "is really a story of our expansive desires, the history of them, and our now, using that [desire] as a launching pad to expand even more."[17] I see this expansive desire—and a holding, too, for what has been taken—in Faustine's photographs. As with Simone and Tagaq, I have found through Faustine that, in endeavoring to write about these artists, they beseech me to listen in particular ways: this listening is messy, as Post-It notes teem from the corners of my copy of the *White Shoes* catalogue and the perimeters of my notebook; it sometimes feels repetitive, as I rewind Faustine's interviews and heft the thick glossy pages of the *White Shoes* book back and forth. Contained within my listening are images, sentences, and songs that take my breath away, that give me pause, or force me to step away from my desk. And within those moments, there are the artists' and writers' cues which necessarily foreclose or complicate my entry into their work. "The land still holds the memory of *us*," Faustine says, as in her Black ancestors who New York's most influential white settlers enslaved. Faustine, as a native New Yorker, creates with the knowledge that it was her kin who slaveowners forcibly made undress on the Wall Street auction block; who were made to build the city's most famed avenues and structures; who the city ordered to carry lanterns past dark, so that their movements could always be monitored; and who, still, imagined and enacted their own freedom, in practices both ordinary and insurgent. Faustine's navigation and memory of the land is layered in these legacies, ones that I argue are not so much hidden, but unresolved: the city's official histories may suppress these stories to New York's shadows, but their traces subsist in plain sight.

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spaces were destroyed in New York, not yet by dramatic acts of violence, but by state policies of eminent domain, freeway construction, urban renewal—this sort of soft power that's been way more destructive." See: Robin D.G. Kelley quoted in Tourmaline, Arlette Hernandez, and T. Jean Lax, "Pleasure Gardening with Tourmaline," *Museum of Modern Art,* June 16, 2021, https://www.moma.org/magazine/articles/576.

[17] Tourmaline quoted in "Pleasure Gardening With Tourmaline."

This chapter expands what I have termed *listening as incommensurable practice* into the terrain of the visual. Though sound is not explicit in Faustine's photographs, I foreground how the artist draws from a practice of listening to her ancestors' and the land's histories to model a critical geographic method of redress. In particular, Faustine uses *posture* to question and demand more from the medium of photography itself. By appropriating the postures and poses that photographers, sociologists, and slave auctioners have historically used to mark the Black female body as sexual commodity, Faustine clarifies how forced performance and image-making are integral to geographies of domination, while also quite literally "stand[ing] in the flesh" as she enacts another way for Black women to navigate public space.[18] Her reinvention of posture alongside her interpreting of the land opens up new methods of not just seeing, but listening to place with one's full body through a rigorous attention to how incommensurability configures across her audiences' multiple senses on spatial and affective registers.

Faustine's artistic practice is less one of "bringing to light" New York's dark past of slavery, but more akin to what I name *stealing the shadow.* I develop this phrase from Sojourner Truth, a key figure later in this chapter, who printed and copyrighted the phrase "I sell the Shadow to Support the Substance" on her carte-de-visite portraits as a means to own her image.[19] As the Metropolitan Museum ascertains, Truth was both "the actor in the picture's drama and its author;" the "shadow" she sells refers to the photograph itself, referencing a popular photography slogan from the time: "Secure the shadow [the photograph] ere the substance [body] fade."[20] Truth's "substance" was both her body and, more directly, her activism—she used the sale of her

[18] See Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 80.
[19] Sojourner Truth, *Untitled ("I Sell the Shadow to Support the Substance")*, 1864-1865, albumen print, 8.8 × 5.6 cm (3 1/2 × 2 1/4 in.), Art Institute of Chicago, ref. no. 2016.468, https://www.artic.edu/artworks/238249/untitled-i-sell-the-shadow-to-support-the-substance.
[20] B. A. Henisch and H. K. Henisch, "Secure the Shadow Ere the Substance Fade," *History of Photography* 28, no. 3 (2004): 211–12, https://doi.org/10.1080/03087298.2004.10441317.

carte-de-visites, which functioned as portable calling cards, to financially support her political causes. Faustine, following Truth's Black feminist performance lineage, *steals* the shadow by seizing back predatory postures of photography in order to exercise her own spatial imagination in a practice aligned with Simone's "stealing away" through fugitive sound. *Stealing the shadow* might also be read as a refusal to illuminate, or Faustine's querying of that impulse: how might stealing and staying in the shadow reject settler-colonial notions of enlightenment? Faustine's stealing of the shadow becomes even more poignant when one considers the history of lantern laws in New York City, through which the government required all enslaved Africans and Native persons to carry lit candles at night, so that their movements might always be legible.[21] Faustine, using both the camera and the light and shadows of her natural environment, takes back the tactics that would criminalize and apprehend her mobility and instead uses them to promote the "substance" of both an honest accounting of New York's geography and her right to liberatory movement.



Figure 3.2: Sojourner Truth, *Untitled ("I Sell the Shadow to Support the Substance")*, 1864-1865, albumen print, 8.8 × 5.6 cm (3 1/2 × 2 1/4 in.), Art Institute of Chicago, ref. no. 2016.468, https://www.artic.edu/artworks/238249/untitled-i-sell-the-shadow-to-support-the-substance.

[21] For an in-depth discussion of New York's lantern laws see Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Duke University Press, 2015), 76-83.

To track these interventions, I begin by offering some more background into Faustine's photographic process and reading her methods through a framework of Black women's geographical thought as outlined by Katherine McKittrick. Central among these methods is Faustine's interruption of "transparent space," or as McKittrick writes, "the illusion that the external world is readily knowable and not in need of evaluation"—a fallacy sustained by repetitive "practices of domination," which seek to "hierarchically position" where individuals and communities "'naturally' belong."[22] Performances of opacity and doubling, like Faustine's, destabilize the authority of transparent space; I connect Faustine's disruption of space's supposed transparency with my suggestion that stories of sexual violation should be framed less as tragic incidents with tidy ends or, in the case of New York's participation in the slave trade, buried histories to be uncovered and codified, but more so as unresolved hauntings, which are not abstract, but rather indicate places' lived complexities. I then guide us through a brief history of slavery in New York after explicitly defining and discussing how redress and self-regard figure in *White Shoes.* Then, moving into the core of this chapter, I chart Faustine's photographic practice of "stealing the shadow" through three postures: the baring of her breasts, working from Truth's performances; the ethnographic gaze; and, finally, the reclining or odalisque pose. Finally, I return to Faustine's evocation of the land's memory to consider one more image alongside the musical call-and-response of Nina Simone's "Sinnerman" and Beyoncé Knowles-Carter's "RIIVERDANCE."

[22] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xv.

***Stealing Shadows and Saying Place*[23]**

Nona Faustine's Photographic Method

Faustine's photographs hum with quiet sounds: the rustle of a tree branch; the stillness of smoke in snow; a moment inward, for Faustine alone, amidst the screeching streets of Manhattan. In some of her images, Faustine dons a floor-length, white peasant skirt, belted by baby shoes, and in some she blankets herself in a shimmering gold cape, summoning Grace Jones robed in Afropunk splendor. Throughout her photographs, she wields a range of objects: a pistol aimed skyward, recalling Harriet Tubman; a posterboard that reads "ARN'T / I / A / WOMAN;" a frying pan; and a set of manacles, cuffed to her wrists. Her backgrounds bathe in natural light and range from the wooded clearings of Prospect Park to the crowded thoroughfares of Manhattan's metropolis. Intentionally wedding landscape painting to portraiture, Faustine embeds the earth into her images, even the ones shot squarely within New York's commercial center. One gets a sense of what Faustine calls light's "spiritual presence" when viewing her images.[24] The glow of branches refracted in windowpanes, the early-morning fog cast between Wall Street's skyscrapers, and the sunrays spread over Faustine's frame on the city's rocky shores all contribute to a soft-spotlighting of the artist's nude body.

Faustine has repeatedly noted in interviews that she is "not playing a slave" in *White Shoes*' images: "I am myself—a free woman in the twenty-first century. And I am exercising that freedom. That's what you see in these images."[25] Her choice to use her own body in her artwork is both practical and personal; reflecting on her body as subject, Faustine shares that she "had never seen what this body—this brown, fat body—signifies historically in museums or galleries

[23] Referencing Truth and McKittrick's phrasing respectively in this title.
[24] See Faustine, "Brooklyn Talks."
[25] Faustine, *White Shoes,* 107.

in our history…. I wanted to see people like me in art."[26] Crucially, Faustine did not want to "exploit the Black female body again," even if someone was willing to be photographed. Through choosing to pose herself in her photographs, Faustine intervenes in photography's history of said exploitation, while authoring and acting a radically different scenario.[27] The white supremacist scenario or "embodied script" of Black women's display is one characterized by lack of agency and forced nudity.[28] Faustine rewrites this script not by "playing a slave" or asking another Black woman to pose nude, but through taking up performative space *on her own terms* and in her own "shoes." In *White Shoes*, Faustine apprehends the projections mapped onto Black women's flesh and intervenes at the moment of marking—the images' sites and props, as well as Faustine's stillness, invoke legacies of Black women's violation, particularly in New York, as I explore later; and *yet*, Faustine harnesses this tension between the beckoned past and the embodied present to hold a reparative kind of ancestral space, one fortified by her own self-possession. Faustine navigates a challenging task—she directly addresses history, while not letting herself, as subject, be defined by its violence nor its supposed "past-ness." That her nude Black female flesh activates and reorients space through its mere presence may be proof that the histories Faustine summons are not so distant at all.

Standing in time, in which the past is always present, Faustine offers another way of seeing history and place. At the *Brooklyn Talks* panel cited at beginning of this chapter, an audience member compares Faustine's presence in the series, particularly in photos where she is masked, to Ẹlẹ́gbá, the Yoruban orisha of transitional crossroads whom is responsible for calling ancestors in ceremony.[29] In her images, Faustine seems to guard the portal between the earthly

[26] Faustine, *White Shoes,* 105.
[27] "Radically authoring a different text" references Spillers's words. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 80.
[28] Working from Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire,* 13.
[29] "Brooklyn Talks."

and spectral realms, past and present—she stares into the great "hole" of history, her presence a visual marker of the stories and peoples that white supremacy has sought to destroy.[30] She is an interpreter of land's memory: her listening practice is directed towards the stories held in the soil, witnessed by the trees, sedimented in the Atlantic Ocean and Hudson River, and alive beneath the concrete.

White Shoes functions as a critical map of New York, one that instructs audiences to better attune to places' histories and question the supposed transparency of public space. Through her embodied method and performances in *White Shoes'* images, Faustine details the cruciality of *navigation* in mapping cityspace. Her emphasis on navigation interrupts the transparency of maps to assert that fixed narratives of place are always incomplete because no two people move through space the same.

This emphasis on the incommensurability of navigation continues my dissertation's argument that musical artists Nina Simone and Tanya Tagaq instruct audiences to listen with disciplined attention to context and relation in lieu of easy comparison and empathy. Faustine translates "listening as incommensurable practice" as a performance and critical geographic method into images. Following Tina Campt's call to "listen to," rather than passively "look at" images, I ask how Faustine's embodied practices of posture and listening to the land "challenge the equation of vision with knowledge by engaging photography through a sensory register."[31]

Photography, as a medium central to the circulation of stereotypes, exploitative images, and falsely neutral representations of place warrants more nuanced methods of investigation—ones that rely less on the primacy of the image as a faithfully-produced text, but rather open up

[30] My invocation of the "hole" of history is a reference to Suzan-Lori Parks's *The America Play* (Dramatists Play Service Inc., 1995).
[31] Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Duke University Press, 2017), 6.

multi-layered "registers" that contest its authenticity. A turn towards listening to images is one manner of doing this, but woven in Campt's critique of passivity is also an engagement with more than just what one "hears" in studying a picture. What do images activate and how do they register differently—or incommensurably—across audiences? In the case of Faustine's work, the artist engages embodied methods, taking back postures used to justify sexual violence often at the site of the "crime," and foregrounds the land as an active agent: what the transparent image or map seeks to erase, in other words, the *land* remembers. That remembering, which rejects linear time or fixed notions of place, draws strength from its refusal to resolve. As I offered in my introduction, quoting Avery Gordon, "haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life… especially when they are supposedly over and done with (slavery, for instance) or their oppressive nature is denied."[32] Faustine's work might be read as haunting—critics have certainly described it that way—but, as with Tagaq's artwork, the "seething presence" of Faustine's haunting is not abstract: she materializes it through her own flesh, thus opening up a space for re-membering as an incomplete, or unresolved, process.[33] On "re-membering" and "redress," Saidiya Hartman writes:

> Redress is a re-membering of the social body that occurs precisely in the recognition and articulation of devastation, captivity, and enslavement. The re-membering of the violated body must be considered in relation to the dis-membered body of the slave—that is its segmentation and organization for purposes of work, reproduction, enjoyment, and punishment. This re-membering takes the form of attending to the body as a site of pleasure, eros, sociality, and articulating its violated condition… Yet, the very conditions that have produced the broken and depleted body and the body as object, instrument, and commodity ensure that the work of restoration or recompense is *necessarily incomplete.*[34]

Faustine places her body at the threshold between past and present where she can re-member the "dis-membered body of the slave;" in doing so, she also suggests that the land itself is part of

[32] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters,* 8.
[33] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters,* 8.
[34] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 129-130. Emphasis mine.

that redressive process.[35] Sourcing the earth as shelter, leaning against the crevices of the trees and the shade of rocks in Central and Prospect Parks, Faustine invokes how the land may have held those before her, too. Through her interpreting of the land's memory, Faustine touches her ancestors and might offer, retroactively, that "re-membering" through recognition and articulation. Faustine does not play or become her enslaved ancestors, but instead enacts another way for her flesh to *be* (and be read) in sites of historic violation. Even if redress will "inevitably fail," as Hartman ascertains, to name it as an ongoing and unresolved process, one that involves the land is to, citing Toni Morrison, move "forward finally toward a very thin, but no so frail, possibility of hope for the *present*."[36]

In an interview with Carla Williams, Faustine reflects that *White Shoes* is "not just about slavery and sorrow," but celebration of the self: "I'm confronting you with this big fleshy body, and it is something to be celebrated," she shares. "A body that carried a child, a body that gave birth, a body that is feminine, and a body that is joy."[37] Posing her body which "is joy" at former sites of violation, Faustine engages in practices of redress for her ancestors and of "self-regard," which Morrison defines as, in part, an "individual reclamation of the self" and "reconstruction of identity."[38] It is important that Faustine cites her motherhood and femininity as sources of her body's joy and beauty, as these are precisely the things that the system of slavery sought to destroy in Black women. Morrison similarly frames "the desire for choice in partners, the desire for romantic love" as integral to Black women's formation of self-regard and declaration of agency.[39] She explores the artform of jazz as a creative space where that "third thing grows,

[35] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 129.
[36] Toni Morrison, "The Source of Self-Regard," *The Source of Self-Regard,* 325.
[37] Nona Faustine, "Nona Faustine by Carla J. Williams," interview by Carla J. Williams, *BOMB Magazine,* March 15, 2024, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/2024/03/15/nona-faustine-carla-j-williams/.
[38] Morrison, "The Source of Self-Regard," 319.
[39] Morrison, "The Source of Self-Regard," 319.

where despair may have been, or even where the past lay whole and wouldn't let go." While Faustine is a photographer and artist, not a jazz musician, her work is grounded in the same terms Morrison cites to describe jazz's redressive potential: "defiance," "violence," "sensuality," "freedom," "intricacy," "invention," and "improvisation."[40] Faustine invents and improvises—switching through props, angles, and poses, as she moves from in front of the camera as its subject to behind it, checking images as photographer and author of her own image. Responding to some audiences' tendency to read her images as sexualized, Faustine elaborates that "Black women and Black dark-skinned women have been consumed and used, and that history has followed us… So for many of our people, when they see a body like mine, they cannot appreciate its artistic beauty and sensuality. They can only see it from a violent perspective."[41] Faustine interposes that perception to accentuate *her* appreciation for her body, its "artistic beauty and sensuality —boldly and lovingly, she cultivates that "third thing" for herself in the public spaces which would historically house her exploitation, instead transforming them into sites of defiant self-regard and lush creativity.

Faustine's celebration of her flesh is both a practice of self-regard and redress. As Hartman is careful to note, redress "does not or cannot restore or remedy loss, redeem the unceremoniously buried, or bridge the transatlantic divide," thus importantly foreclosing the projection of romanticized restoration onto redressive action. "The incompleteness of redress is

[40] Morrison, "The Source of Self-Regard," 320 and 316. Faustine wrote an essay that beautifully speaks to jazz in New York: "If there is still a city of New York in the future, will New Yorkers know that I existed? Will they know that me and mine were here? We were an integral cultural economic force of New York City, who breathed new life into the city after White Flight. We created new art forms on every level: fashion, dance, literature, music, film, performance, and the visual arts. We turned the trains into kinetic pieces of art, organized block parties, hooking up turntables with juice from the street light. 'Let the music play' sang Shannon, into all night sessions of improvisation creating a new form of jazz. We helped to build this city again just as our black and white ancestors did before us." Nona Faustine, "Intersectionality In the Studio," Leslie Lohman Museum of Art, n.d., https://www.leslielohman.org/archive/intersectionality-in-the-studio-nona-faustine.

[41] Faustine, "Nona Faustine by Carla J. Williams."

related to the magnitude of the breach," Hartman clarifies, "—the millions lost in the Middle Passage and the fifteen million and more captured and enslaved in the Americas—and to the inadequacy of remedy."[42] That historians will never know the full "magnitude of the breach" is important for all that it reveals about the gravity of the project of racial domination, the failures of the historical record, and the inadequacy of the Western dramatic structure that organizes around the resolution of crisis. Interestingly, Hartman adapted her discussion of "redress" from anthropologist Victor Turner's theory that "social dramas" in "regular, norm-governed social life" are initiated by a "breach of a rule controlling one of its salient relationships;" for Turner, "redressive action is about limiting or containing the breach" and is shepherded by recognized authorities in their respective social communities.[43] Hartman's revision of Turner's "redress" corroborates a version of performance studies with Black women's agency and autonomy at its center; in a similar move to Joshua Chambers-Letson's claim that Spillers "invents a certain strand of performance studies (which is to invent Joseph Roach and Diana Taylor" (see Chapter 1), Hartman retools a strand of cultural anthropology to consider "redress" under "the constancy of breach and crisis" as "primary determinants of the force of repetition in black performance." Put simply, attention to Black women's (forced) performance reorients catastrophe not as signaling a turn in the dramatic plot, but rather as the fabric which necessitates the need for continual, if always incomplete, redressive action. An investment in "incompleteness," rather than resolution, opens up possibilities in the present that rely less on using narrative as a tool to designate the end of a crisis, but rather to imagine what altering the conditions of repetition may actually entail.

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[42] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 131.
[43] See Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*: *The Seriousness of Human Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 92 and Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 131.

Unresolved Stories, Incommensurable Navigations

What shifts in understanding narrative and place as unresolved? Faustine's presence—her nude, fleshy, Black, and femme body against New York cityspace—works against dominant attempts to censor American histories, to tidy and resolve the stories told about its places and people. Faustine wields her body—the histories attached to it, its potential to interrupt transparent space, and her own self-possession—in order to not so much *reveal* the truth about New York, and America more broadly, but rather to interrogate how the "weather" of anti-Blackness and misogynoir, working from Christina Sharpe, structures the very operation of cityspace and public history. But perhaps more crucially, the story Faustine crafts is not just one of ongoing violence, but, again, is one of ongoing redress and contestation. McKittrick offers:

> […] What philosophical work can geography actually do for us, as readers and occupiers of space and place, if it is recognizably alterable? What is at stake in the legacy of exploration, conquest, and stable vantage points if we insist that past and present geographies are connective sites of struggle, which have *always* called into question the very *appearance* of safely secure and unwavering locations? And what do black women's geographies make possible *if they are not conceptualized as simply subordinate, or buried, or lost, but rather are indicative of an unresolved story?*[44]

I read McKittrick's directive to conceptualize Black women's geographies as "not simply subordinate, or buried, or lost," but rather as "indicative of an unresolved story" against many critics' impulse to frame Faustine's series as making New York's "invisible" histories "visible." Nearly every article title reviewing *White Shoes* rehearses a rhetoric of Faustine's "revealing" of New York: Faustine "unearths New York's buried history;" "unpacks the dark and hidden history of Wall Street;" and "forces us to see what's really there."[45] Most of these articles are

[44] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds,* xvii. Second emphasis mine.
[45] See: Alexander M. Thomas, "Nona Faustine Unearths New York's Buried History of Slavery," *Hyperallergic*, June 18, 2024, https://hyperallergic.com/926917/nona-faustine-unearths-new-york-buried-history-of-slavery-white-shoes-brooklyn-museum/ and Kady Ruth Ashcraft, "Nona Faustine's New York," *The Cut,* March 7, 2024, https://www.thecut.com/article/artist-nona-faustine-white-shoes-brooklyn-museum.html.

thoughtfully written and have been invaluable in my research—moreover, as those who have worked in journalism can attest, writers typically have little control over their own headlines, which editors instead design to maximize consumer engagement. Still, these headlines' narratives of "discovery" mark a larger cycle in the maintenance of white settler control of space: policy-makers, city tourism bureaus, and various stake-holders collaborate to craft a sanitized and consistent story of the city, one conscious to manage troubled histories firmly in the past, thus presenting space as "knowable"—then, when often white and settler, residents of the city learn of its legacies of injustice, they frame them as novel reminders of what once *was*, what must be "uncovered" and "made visible," but is no longer.

As I posited in my Introduction, a move away from structuring stories around climax and catastrophe is also a rejection of their containment: it is the deliberation to not package narratives, especially those depicting violation, into digestible and marketable arcs, but to honor and exist inside of their complexities. It is an oft-cited, even clichéd, maxim in trauma recovery work that "healing is not linear," but that statement is worth taking seriously.[46] As a survivor of rape, this has meant having patience with my own hills and valleys, in my senses of safety and security coming and going in often frightening and unpredictable waves.[47] It has also meant equipping myself with the deeper and wider knowledge that stories of sexual violence, including my own, exceed the narrow and tidy scripts they are often forced into. "Healing is not linear" means questioning the systems that allow harm to happen in the first place, that frequently privilege me, and that make transformative justice difficult, though not impossible, to achieve. It is an understanding that that reckoning is open-ended: there is forever more work to do. "Healing

[46] This quote has been attributed to many people, including self-help author Jaclyn Johnston and perinatal therapist Dr. Katayune Kaeni.
[47] "Hills and valleys" is a reference to Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959).

is not linear" also means celebrating the networks and resources that make healing happen and recognizing that those places, too, are in constant flux and change: that they have their limitations just as they have their life-saving capacities. Healing, like any other story, is unresolved. As Faustine forges her portals into the past, she moves across time not to heal history's wounds, but rather to mark the process of redress as one that is occurring and unresolved in the present. Through reorienting her audiences to the "now," while also rigorously attending to the past, Faustine models a practice of "nonlinear healing" that is independent of a final "product."

In surrendering to the "unresolved"—in listening deeply to the ways in which that which is supposedly "done" remains—one refuses the logics of capital and punishment which flatten, polarize, and sensationalize. These logics, which Sylvia Wynter might group within the "tyranny of mastery and knowability" imbedded within America's founding colonization, require resolution to function: they necessitate fixing the story, the place, or the person into a category and working hard to maintain that coherence.[48] Naming places and the stories told about them as fundamentally unfixed, even *unfixable,* then demands a more comprehensive reckoning with harm's contexts. Here, I find resonance in Gordon's meditation on Patricia Williams's expression—"That life is complicated is a matter of great analytic importance"—as both an argument against transparency, which I link to McKittrick's indictment of transparent space, and one that revels in "complex personhood."[49] Gordon and Williams's reminder that "life is complicated," which is "itself is a theoretical statement that guides efforts to treat race, class, and gender dynamics and consciousness as more dense and delicate than those categorical terms often imply," provides an indispensable guide for thinking through unresolved stories and how

[48] See Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality."
[49] See Gordon's exploration of complex personhood in *Ghostly Matters,* 4-5.

the impossibility of resolution translates into material geographies. Such complexity warrants suspicion of fixed narratives, of aesthetics and practices of (en)closure, and a rigorous entanglement with the unresolved, or an appreciation of the errant and the ongoing—the blurring of past, future, and present.[50]

One of the primary ways in which narratives of sexual violence are fixed into linear arcs is through widespread, often unexamined, language. When survivors disclose acts of sexual violence, for example, news articles often frame the assailants' abuse through the following phrase: "in light of recent allegations." A quick Google search of this cliché returns the following familiar article titles: "Harvey Weinstein Officially Fired in Light of New Allegations;" "N.F.L Increases Penalties for Sexual Misconduct in Light of Deshaun Watson Case;" "Re-reading Alice Munro in light of the secrets she kept and pain she caused," … the list goes on.[51] Albeit in a different context, these headlines rehearse the same scenario of the dramatic "reveal" that I critiqued in articles about Faustine's work. The phrase "in light of" subtly indicates something vital about how American media configures sexual violence: "in light of" implies the moment of enlightened revelation, in which the perpetrators' crimes are at last unveiled. While survivors may certainly have needed, wanted, or been forced to keep their story obscured from the public, the "light" of their truths rarely shines brightest on their stories: rather, "in light of" stages a reveal, an unmasking, of the offender. In doing so, it points to the fact that most sexual offenders,

[50] Gordon writes that: "Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, present, and the future." Gordon, *Ghostly Matters,* xvi.

[51] Examples as follows: Joanna Robinson, "Harvey Weinstein Officially Fired in Light of New Allegations," *Vanity Fair*, October 8, 2017, https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/10/harvey-weinstein-fired-weinstein-company-sexual-harassment-official-statement?srsltid=AfmBOopvKj35kkw-NDRRkWJPRXWP5JIKUQl3CM7OdACZnn50e3cqCmpL; Jenny Vrentas, "N.F.L Increases Penalties for Sexual Misconduct in Light of Deshaun Watson Case," *New York Times,* July 31, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/31/sports/football/nfl-conduct-policy-deshaun-watson.html; and Carrie Dawson, "Re-reading Alice Munro in light of the secrets she kept and pain she caused," *The Conversation,* July 12, 2024, https://theconversation.com/re-reading-alice-munro-in-the-light-of-the-secrets-she-kept-and-pain-she-caused-234465#:~:text=As%20scholars%20re%2Dread%20Munro,that%20so%20often%20surrounds%20it..

particularly those who garner substantial media attention, are powerful, typically white, men who are not predetermined as guilty and, through surveillance of the state, are not marked as always already criminal.[52]

The drama signified by "in the light of" is not afforded to state surveillance measures which frame Black people as guilty *without ever having committed a crime.* In Simone Browne's *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness,* she traces light as an anti-Black surveillance tool back to New York's 18th-century "lantern laws," as mentioned earlier, which mandated that all enslaved Africans, Natives, and mixed-race persons carry "a lanthorn with a lighted candle in it" after sunset, so they "may be plainly seen."[53] As Browne notes, this New York City law introduced light as a "supervisory technology," that supported the "legal framework [which] marked black, mixed-race and indigenous people as security risks in need of supervision after dark."[54] R. Joshua Scannell extends Browne's work to illustrate more contemporary practices of "racializing surveillance," including the New York Police Department's 2022 "Omnipresence" floodlight program, in which NYPD installed high-intensity artificial-light towers in fifteen public housing projects across the city.[55] Faustine's "stealing the shadow," then, operates on multiple levels: she interrogates how not just the medium of photography, but the state of New York has rendered Black bodies hypervisible and, following Browne, "made it possible for the

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[52] See Introduction.

[53] Browne, *Dark Matters,* 79 and Alexander Hamilton, *Gentleman's Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton 1744,* published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Virginia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1948), 88. The 1713 law was the city's direct response to a rebellion a year prior, in which a group of about twenty Africans set fire to a building at New York's center one night, and also aimed to suppress "secret night classes" attended by the enslaved. See: Jill Lepore*, New York Burning,* 58.

[54] Browne, *Dark Matters,* 78.

[55] R. Joshua Scannell, *Electric Light: Automating the Carceral State during the Quantification of Everything* (2018), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.
Mark Loeffler, Lya Shaffer Osborn, and Edward Bartholomew, "'Omnipresence' Weaponizes Light," *Light Justice,* June 2022, https://lightjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/FINAL-Light-Justice-Omnipresence-Article.pdf.

black body to be constantly illuminated from dusk to dawn, made knowable, locatable, and contained within the city."[56]

In her fabulatory text *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval,* Hartman tracks other New York City laws that functioned as forms as racialized (and gendered) surveillance at the turn of the 20th-century, particularly vagrancy statues which helped developed "status criminality" as "tethered ineradicably to blackness."[57] The central project of Hartman's *Wayward Lives* is not to rehearse this "status criminality," but rather to "convey the sensory experience of the city and capture the rich landscape of black social life" through recreating the inner worlds of the young Black women who "live[d] as if they were free."[58] Faustine's project is similar, in that it articulates, but is not defined by violation, but rather a practice of what she terms "radical absolute freedom."[59]

The freedom Faustine desires and Hartman evokes is perhaps best defined by a right to mobility, interiority, and sensuality: to *love one's flesh in public.* I argue that Faustine, like Nina Simone, places the particularities of the viewer's lived identities at the forefront of their experiences of her art in order to demonstrate how that right to freedom is not understood uniformly. In *White Shoes*, this is best summarized in the title of the series and its primary visual throughline: Faustine's "talismanic" white shoes. Attached to her feet, the white shoes are inseparable from Faustine's navigation of New York. They press into the city's pavement and sink into its parks' soil as she traverses blocks and boroughs. The "[in]escap[able]" and traveling quality of the shoes serves as a reminder for the ways in which white patriarchy shapes and sediments reality.

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[56] Browne, *Dark Matters,* 79.
[57] See Hartman, *Wayward Lives,* 242-243.
[58] Hartman, *Wayward Lives,* xi.
[59] Faustine, *White Shoes,* 107.

Though not explicitly referenced, the white shoes also remind me of the platitude, "you can't understand another person's experience until you've walked a mile in their shoes."[60] The saying, which promotes empathy instead of judgement, is a common refrain in sexual violence activism—a popular event, "Walk A Mile in Her Shoes," enlists men and boys to don high-heels and march a mile in them to "raise awareness" for "sexualized violence."[61] As I posited in my first chapter, however, working from Hartman's troubling of empathetic projection in *Scenes of Subjection*, I express concern over this well-intentioned notion. As a white woman, I can never walk a mile in Faustine's shoes; moreover, her relationship to and memories of the New York streets she travels are uniquely felt by her—the private textures and sensations of those moments are perhaps not for anyone else to know. Faustine's posing of her body, especially while nude, reminds viewers that "white patriarchy" impacts her embodied experience in particularized and routine ways, which cannot be abstracted from how power and force have been historically mapped onto her Black female flesh. Faustine's "white shoes" then function as a monument to the everyday-ness of white patriarchy and how it orders navigational practices, but also work to interrupt viewers' projections onto her.[62] Faustine's white shoes challenge respectability politics and the supposed purity of white femininity: the shoes are literally dirtied and worn down by the sites they move across—this works on two levels: 1.) white patriarchy, which disguises itself as pure, is stained by its own sites of enslavement, rape, and displacement and 2.) the concept of

[60] The popularization of "walk a mile in their shoes" as an axiom can be traced back to a 1895 poem that was y titled "Judge Softly" by Mary Torrans Lathrap, a late-19th-century Methodist Episcopal preacher, temperance reformer, and suffragist. In the poem, Lathrap implores her readers to "remember to walk a mile in [a man's] moccasins / Before you abuse, criticize and accuse." Elsewhere in "Judge Softly," Lathrap remarks that "There are people on reservations and in the ghettos / Who have so little hope, and too much worry on their minds." Lathrap was not Indigenous; the paternalism woven into her Lathrap's remarks reiterates my troubling of empathy.

[61] "Men Ending Men's Sexualized Violence: Walk A Mile In Her Shoes," Venture Humanity Inc., accessed March 4, 2025, https://www.walkamileinhershoes.org/.

[62] While those who look like Faustine may resonate with her image and navigate the city similarly, they still will never quite walk a mile in her shoes, but perhaps walk besides them.

"dirtied" itself is subverted because even as the shoes come to hold painful memories of sexual violation, the earth that sticks to them also remembers Black ancestors' livelihood and resistance, as well as, particularly in later images where Faustine reads and rests, instances of pleasure and redress. Faustine explains this best:

> [The shoes] are really scuffed up now. They show their wear and age […] There were multiple ways of looking at those white shoes. In the beginning, the shoes were pristine and white. Now they're dingy and missing color and have patched of dirt. They chart all the places that I've been, and if the shoes could tell the story, they would tell, right?[63]

Rather than prescribe what it would be like to "walk a mile in her shoes," Faustine's theorization here—that the shoes "chart all the places [she's] been" and to consider the story "they would tell"—posits dirt, transit, and time as generative ways of knowing.[64] It invites *White Shoes'* audiences to listen and pay attention to what they hear. It foregrounds Faustine's embodied map of New York, one that reframes, both in content and method, dominant understandings of the most famous city on earth.

Errant Paths, Arresting Traffic

Nona Faustine's New York

There is perhaps no city more written about, photographed, or mythologized than New York: it is the stock market's stage, the backdrop of most romantic comedies, and the inspiration for so many songs, slogans, and styles. "New York or Nowhere," as the t-shirt proclaims. But what *is* New York? To me, as a girl growing up in rural Ohio, it represented an aspiration, a mirage, and a warning—to go to New York was to, potentially, betray your Midwestern roots, but it also signaled at something almost scarily stylish, so seductively beyond the reach of my

[63] Faustine, *White Shoes,* 104.
[64] My thinking of dirt and soil as a way of knowing, particularly in relationship to Blackness, is informed by the work of Kimberly Bain. See: Bain, "Black Soil," *Social Text* , no 41 (March 1, 2023): 1–19.

small town. My surrounding landscape moved at a different rhythm than New York's: it was structured by the winding county roads and endless interstates that carried me past salt yards, shooting ranges, shopping malls, and bible-thumping billboards. "New York City" was only an idea dangling on the pages of my library books and sparkling inside our family's boxy television screen.[65]

For a young Faustine, who was born-and-raised in Brooklyn, New York is something else entirely. It was, and still is, most simply, her home. Faustine intimates that *White Shoes* is "for everyone," but is in particular a "love letter to Black women [and] to New York."[66] As Faustine was conceiving the series, she was also witnessing the aggressive gentrification of the Brooklyn neighborhood she was raised in.[67] In an essay for the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, Faustine shares that:

> Brown faces had begun to disappear and passengers exiting the familiar stops along the Q train were changing rapidly. My little family and neighbors were holding on, but for how long? I began to think of all those Black New Yorkers before us, the first ones with faces right out of Africa. Faces which I'd never seen, but for which looking in the mirror is the closest I could get to them.[68]

Faustine's impulse to mark her family's New York is intimately tied to her desire to remember the Black New Yorkers "before" her: that she first found those ancestors most closely through "looking in the mirror" demonstrates the importance of documenting herself as she remembers her ancestors and their lives in the city's Black past. In her instructive essay "In Our Glory," bell hooks locates the camera as an essential tool for the project of documentation in Black families:

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[65] There is, of course, another key memory of New York in our family television set: New York maybe only became a real place to me the day I came home from school to find the Twin Towers smoking and ablaze on that same screen. I remember being unable to square that what I saw then was supposedly the same city as my parents' favorite show, *Friends,* and I think the gap remained until I first visited New York more than a decade later.
[66] Faustine quoted in "Ar'n't I A Woman: Interview with Nona Faustine," interviewed by Sarah Sunday, *Musée Magazine,* April 8, 2019, https://museemagazine.com/features/2019/4/8/arnt-i-a-woman-interview-with-nona-faustine.
[67] Faustine, "Intersectionality in the Studio."
[68] Faustine, "Intersectionality in the Studio."

"The camera became in black life a political instrument, a way to resist misrepresentation as well as a means by which alternative images could be produced," hooks writes.[69] She continues: "The camera allowed black folks to combine image making, resistance struggle, and pleasure. Taking pictures was fun!"[70]

Faustine's father was a "camera and picture enthusiast" and growing up in Faustine's household, "the most precious thing was the family photo album, filled with ancestors and aunts and uncles in the South and North," the artist shares.[71] It was her dad's family photo album that inspired Faustine to learn the artform and kin remains at the heart of Faustine's work—her sister, Channon, accompanied Faustine during her photo shoots for *White Shoes,* and Faustine describes them as a "two-woman team," explaining that "[Channon] had my back while I stood in the streets of New York naked, vulnerable, and a little crazy."[72] hooks situates "the walls of photographs in black homes as a critical intervention, a disruption of white control over black images;" Faustine's family photo album functions similarly and although her dad was the primary photographer—and, like Faustine, loved to document landscapes—it was her mother "who did the albums," who scrapbooked and arranged the photographs and their stories.[73] Faustine's family cameras and photo album, following hooks, "provided a means to document

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[69] bell hooks, "In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life," *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 60.
[70] hooks, "In Our Glory," 60.
[71] Faustine, "Nona Faustine by Carla J. Williams."
[72] Nona Faustine, "Intersectionality in the Studio."
[73] hooks, "In Our Glory," 59 and Faustine, "Nona Faustine by Carla J. Williams." In her interview with Williams, Faustine continues: "My dad was the amateur photographer, so I always associated family photos with him. He had the equipment. He loved a secondhand store—my first and second cameras came from one. My mom, on the other hand, was the one who did the albums. But it was only in the last two to three years when I went through my mom's scrapbooks and albums after her death that I realized it was my mom documenting us. My dad loved landscapes. So when we went on vacations, that's what he took pictures of. The only one who had full documentation of us was my mother, and she never said anything. It was really a moment for me when I realized, Why did I assume it wasn't her? Why did I not think of her as a photographer too? All that time I made her sit for me, why didn't she say, Well, you know, I've done this before. It was one of those moments where I wished we'd had that conversation. I wish I could have that conversation with her now as a peer."

reality that could, if necessary, be packed, stored, [and] moved from place to place." In this manner, photography as a "political instrument" in Black families mirrors music or oral histories, told through story and song, which might transgress the State's borders, while still mapping rich and complex relationships to place. Faustine's family album both chronicled kinship ties to the South and attested to her relatives' navigations of recent and contemporary New York—the latter project becoming all the more pressing when considering Brooklyn's gentrification.

New York is the site of Faustine's ancestors and much of her aim in creating *White Shoes* was to honor and hold physical space for those "names lost to history," the enslaved Africans and Black domestic workers who constructed and sustained the New York she moves through today.[74] These are ancestors who could not be photographed in Faustine's family album. As hooks writers: "had the camera been there when slavery ended, it could have provided images that would have helped folks searching for lost kin and loved ones. It would have been a powerful tool of cultural recovery."[75] Faustine follows her mother's lead through *White Shoes* in her arranging of images for another family photo album, one that re-members missing or lost kin. Further, many of the sites Faustine chose to photograph are also interwoven in her quotidian life—the Lefferts House, for instance, she grew up passing "on [her] way home" nearly every day—deepening her connection with the generations of Black women who lived there before and, as she describes, heightening her sense of responsibility for sharing the histories of these now-mundane sites that she did not learn in school.[76]

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[74] Faustine discusses her own and the series' connection to domestic workers in this interview: "Reclaimed | Nona Faustine: White Shoes," uploaded May 9, 2024, by Brooklyn Museum, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkBAB_IIE2c&ab_channel=BrooklynMuseum.
[75] hooks, "In Our Glory," 60.
[76] Faustine, "Reclaimed."

Faustine has explained that, though she grew up knowing of New York's history of African enslavement, her teachers and curriculum portrayed it as ending "very early" and that the city was like "the utopia free North."[77] In reality, New York City was second-only to Charleston, South Carolina "in the extent to which slavery penetrated everyday life," according to the New York Public Library and the New-York Historical Society's "Slavery in New York" project. Both sources testify that during New York's colonial period "42 percent of the population owned slaves," compared to the 6 percent in Philadelphia and 2 percent in Boston.[78] New York's wealth derived almost entirely from the transatlantic slave trade: first Dutch, New York's original colonists, and then English merchants "built the city's local economy largely around supplying ships for the trade and in what slaves produced—sugar, tobacco, indigo, coffee, chocolate, and, eventually, cotton."[79] Furthermore, enslaved Africans, as well as enslaved Lenape Indians, crafted the most significant buildings and infrastructure of the city's early history from its docks and roads to the city hospital, prison, colonial churches, and, of course, the "defense wall," engineered by the Dutch to keep out their British competitors, for which Wall Street is named. As the New York Public Library summarizes: "The enslaved population […] literally built the city and was the engine that made its economy run."[80] Faustine's nude figure and photograph title ("From Her Body Came Their Greatest Source of Wealth") elucidates and complicates this

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[77] Faustine, "Reclaimed."
[78] Sylviane A. Diouf, "New York City's Slave Market," Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, *New York Public Library*, June 29, 2015, https://www.nypl.org/blog/2015/06/29/slave-market.
[79] For a comprehensive history of slavery in New York see: Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America,* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998); Thelma Willis Foote, *Black and White Manhattan: The History of Racial Formation in Colonial New York City,* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004); Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Lepore, *New York Burning;* Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991); *Slavery in New York,* eds. Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris (The New Press, 2005);
[80] Diouf, "New York City's Slave Market."

fact, by emphasizing that it was Black *women's* bodies, under *partus sequitur ventrum* and racialized logics of multiplication, that, indeed, generated New York's enslaved labor force.

Although the city of New York formally abolished slavery on July 4th 1827, its systems of anti-Black racial domination have reinvented themselves in new forms that persist to this day. Black women across generations and contexts, from Linda Brent (Harriet Jacobs) to Nina Simone, have drawn on art, language, and performance to create critical maps of New York that clarify that it is not the "utopia free North" it may imagine itself to be. Faustine works within this lineage and suggest that she evidences this incompleteness of the project of Black liberation through her multi-layered imagery.

In her Wall Street photograph, aptly titled "From Her Body Came Their Greatest Source of Wealth," for example, Faustine stands against the contemporary backdrop, a yellow taxi speeding behind her, in shackles and on an auction block. As I noted earlier, Faustine is careful to clarify that she is not "playing a slave," but poses "to make you understand what that could have looked like."[81] In this picture, a naked Faustine stands atop a wooden crate in the middle of an intersection at 74 Wall Street, which was a public auction site from 1711 to 1762, where "human beings were sold and traded."[82] Faustine explains that "on Google Maps, the spot looks like a boxed intersection with white traffic lines running along the sides. It's hard to make the connection between the past and present due to the erasure."[83] In the image, Faustine's stance is upright and her gaze is fixed towards the lens ahead; her feet, outfitted in the series' eponymous

[81] Nona Faustine, "'Once you know the history, you see it everywhere:' Nona Faustine on uncovering New York's uncomfortable past," interviewed by Annabel Keenan, *The Art Newspaper,* May 1, 2024, https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2024/05/01/once-you-know-the-history-you-see-it-everywhere-nona-faustine-on-uncovering-new-yorks-uncomfortable-past.
[82] Citing the language used at Brooklyn Museum's contextual plaques that accompanied Faustine's exhibit. Brooklyn Museum, *White Shoes* (March 2024).
[83] Faustine, "From Her Body," 1.

white shoes, are shoulder-width apart and her hands are folded in front of her, linked by a set of chained iron handcuffs.

It could be tempting to read Faustine's posture and performance as a taking back of slaveowners' spectacularization of Black women's bodies through forced display, however, I argue, following *White Shoes* book contributor Seph Rodney, that Faustine is not so much "reclaiming the spectacle" here, but rather "rescripting" sites where her body has been historically spectacularized and profited off of.[84] Faustine, through placing her Black female body at historic sites of its violation, brings both her flesh and her city's inheritances to the foreground, thus altering the frequency of her surrounding environment. Note how other people never directly appear in Faustine's photographs: she asks the viewer to concentrate on her and then to analyze the image's setting from that lens—she does so *not* so that audiences might project themselves into her vantage point, but rather to present an argument that her presence might reorient their spatial understandings. Faustine points to a way of being in place for Black women that hinges not on spectacularization or absence: rather, she asks, what does it mean to claim one's history alongside one's right to both mobility and interiority? And what does it mean to use photography as the medium to do so?

"Racial regimes became stable through a transformation of vision," Sarah Lewis asserts in her groundbreaking study on the invention and maintenance of race in 19th-century America.[85] Similar to how I have argued that Nina Simone and Tanya Tagaq restructure what listening *is* for their audiences, I suggest that Faustine reorients vision by attending to images' means of production; her images are multi-sensorial, too, as they open up alternate frequencies of America, to echo Brooks's reading of Simone (see Chapter 1). Faustine has shared that images of

[84] Seph Rodney quoted in "Brooklyn Talks."
[85] Sarah Lewis, *The Unseen Truth: When Race Changed Sight in America* (Harvard University Press, 2024), 2.

Sarah Baartman and an enslaved woman named Delia inspired *White Shoes*, as well as Faustine's goal to "reclaim a power taken away [from Black women]" by "the Jezebel stereotypes" that were "historically […] set up to excuse Black women being raped in slavery and out of slavery."[86] "Controlling images," returning to my citation of Patrica Hill Collins in Chapter 1, and suppressed spatial histories do not just "happen;" and while Faustine's work takes to task the creation of both, interrupting their ubiquity and transparency, she goes a step further through infusing her photographs with her own artistic and critical geographic processes—ones that do not simply critique the dominant system, but offer something different. In other words, she stresses process and performance in her artwork, thus placing it in evocative conversation with other Black women who have harnessed the same tools to question and transform the spaces they navigate.

Faustine destabilizes the racial regimes that would place her, as a Black woman, on the bottom "rung" of society, following Wynter, through her own multi-sensorial transformation of vision—one that relies on a method of *stealing the shadow* that I trace through postures of rebellion and redress through the remainder of this chapter.[87]

Shadows and Substance: "Compelled Photographs" and Postures of Rebellion and Redress

> The residue of sexual exploitation on slave women's bodies is the afterimage of the black diaspora, the puncture of the past materializing in the present… It presupposes a temporal aberration, an incessant invasion of the present moment by the past.
>
> – Kimberly Juanita Brown, *The Repeating Body,* 18-19

[86] Faustine discusses Delia and Baartman's influence on her work at "Brooklyn Talks" and in the *White Shoes* catalogue on page 105.
[87] Wynter, "Unsettling Coloniality," 7.

Time collapses in Faustine's photographs, or as Jessica Lanay, offers it "becomes suspended confetti."[88] Just as Faustine's multiplicity creates room for unfixability and ungovernability—or, in her own words, acts out a "freedom" from "limits" and "constraints"—it speaks back to the afterimages of slavery that haunt the series' frames.[89] Photography, as Faustine's medium, is defined by its stasis: the finality and circulation of the captured image. Through processes of repetition and redress, Faustine ushers many versions of herself into the space of the photograph in order to challenge and complicate that stasis.

Faustine employs *posture* to interrogate the medium of photography itself. She stages an intervention against how racial scientists and sociologists have leveraged photography as a tool of and justification for racial, spatial, and sexual classification through re-appropriating the poses that have been used to rationalize her supposed racial inferiority and sexual availability. Faustine summons and critiques these histories and their indelible connection to sexual violence, while asserting a "family portrait" not bent on possession and the tyranny of "whiteness as property," to cite Cheryl Harris's formulation, and but on an expansive understanding of kin that includes "ghosts" and the non-human.[90]

Faustine joins a Black feminist lineage of disruptive and imaginative performance, wielded powerfully across the terrains of image and gesture; her work is in conversation with visual artists such as Carrie Mae Weems and Lorraine O'Grady. Because my focus is on performance and its ability to illuminate, "say," and speak back to the particularities and histories of place, I have arranged this section largely through the performative postures Faustine embodies and refashions. Although performance and dance scholars such as Anusha Kedhar and

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[88] Lanay, *White Shoes,* 106-107.
[89] "Exploitative" references Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), ix and "compelled" builds from Campt, *Listening to Images,* 49, 75.
[90] See: Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993): 1710-1791.

Susan Leigh Foster's theorizations on "gesture" and "choreography" inform my work here, I consciously use the words "posture" and "pose" instead because the former terms are defined by movement and Faustine's photographic work is characterized by stillness.[91] Moreover, I argue that it is precisely photography's qualities of capture, circulation, and "suspension," following Harvey Young's indispensable *Embodying Black Experience*, that *White Shoes* contends with and reappropriates.[92]

This section charts three of Faustine's "postures" through their performance histories to illuminate how Faustine visually links force, the body, and geographical containment, while also modeling more liberatory ways for her to be in public space. I begin with Faustine's baring of her breasts and citation of Truth; situating Faustine in a performance genealogy with Truth, I argue that both women exposed their breasts and harnessed photography in order to complicate the category of womanhood.[93] I then move into an exploration of Faustine's appropriation of the "ethnographic" image, which is codified through a series of frontal, rear, and profile portraits of the photographer's subject. Finally, I conclude with an investigation of the "odalisque," or the tradition of the reclining female nude in Western European art and how Faustine repurposes its posture to command her own form of repose.

Throughout this section, I suggest that Faustine is intervening in both site and photography, encouraging her audiences to read spatial and visual practices alongside one another as she tends to the legacies of sexual violence and African enslavement in both.

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[91] Anusha Kedhar, *Flexible Bodies: British South Asian Dancers in the Age of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2020) and "Hands Up! Don't Shoot!: Gesture, Choreography, and Protest in Ferguson," Colorado College, December 2014, https://sites.coloradocollege.edu/bulletin/2014/11/hands-up-dont-shoot-gesture-choreography-and-protest-in-ferguson-a-point-of-view-piece-by-anusha-kedhar/ and Susan Leigh Foster, "Choreographies of Protest," *Theatre Journal* 55, no. 3 (2003): 395-412.

[92] Harvey Young, *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (University of Michigan Press, 2010).

[93] "Category of womanhood" phrasing builds from Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 174-175.

Faustine's nudity transforms the space around her, making apparent what was already there, but is concealed through the myth of place's "transparent." Her move reminds me of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Lilian Mengesha's critiques of the "false neutrality of [the] empty stage," an idea propagated by white theatre-makers, namely Peter Brook.[94] Thiong'o posits that "the real politics of the performance space may well lie in the field of its external relations; in its actual or potential conflictual engagement with all the other shrines of power… and the forces that hold the keys to those shrines."[95] Mengesha places Thiong'o's critique in conversation with Aileen Moreton-Robinson's "white possessive," in which, for Indigenous people, "white possession is not unmarked, unnamed or invisible; it is hypervisible… with every building and every street that this land is now possessed by others."[96] In New York, "signs of white possession are embedded everywhere in the landscape," too, through reminders and afterlives of African and Indigenous enslavement. Some of these "signs" include the stealing and renaming of "Seneca Village" as "Central Park" that I began this chapter with as well as the eighty-two Brooklyn streets named after New York's slaveowners and colonizers; urban planner Robert Moses's bulldozing of Black and Latinx neighborhoods for the sake of expanding the city's highway system; and the continued commodification of Black culture as "authentic" slice of New York, even as gentrification and environmental racism makes it harder and harder for many Black communities to remain in the city.[97] And perhaps the largest marker of all: that New York still exists on stolen land to begin with.

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[94] Lilian Mengesha, "Being and Whiteness: Settler Possession and Performative Wokeness in *The Thanksgiving Play*," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 35, no. 2 (2021): 39-52.
[95] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "Enactments of Power: The Politics of Performance Space," *Drama Review* 41, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 13.
[96] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xiii.
[97] For more background on Robert Moses and his racist urban development of New York see: Anish Valentine, "'The Wrong Complexion For Protection' How Race Shaped America's Roadways And Cities," *NPR*, July 5, 2020,

Faustine tactically exposes her nude body in order to disrupt logics of stasis and possession on visual and geographical planes. Deborah Willis and Carla Williams write in their preface to *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History*—a scholarly text so integral to *White Shoes* that it is available to read on-site next to the exhibit—that "when [they] began looking at the photographic history of black women, [they] soon discovered that the history of [their] image is deeply rooted in representations of mostly unclothed bodies."[98] They continue to group these images into three categories: "the naked black female (alternatively the 'National Geographic' or 'Jezebel' aesthetic); the neutered black female, or 'mammy' aesthetic; and the noble black female, a descendent of the 'noble savage.'"[99] Willis and Williams argue that "even imagery that resists these stereotypes alludes to these figures."[100]

Faustine interrogates all three "stereotypes" throughout *White Shoes*, while also depicting herself, in hooks's words, "in [her] glory." Most central to my dissertation's argument, Faustine activates photography as a densely layered performative space in order to evidence how racial and sexual exploitation and classification are also tied to a white settler-colonial geographical order that justifies rape and conquest through its fetishization of white womanhood and whiteness as property.[101] As Lorraine O'Grady has eloquently written:

> The female body in the West is not a unitary sign. Rather, like a coin, it has an obverse and a reverse: on the one side, it is white; on the other, not-white or, prototypically black. The two bodies cannot be separated, not can one body be understood in isolation form the other in the West's metaphoric construction of 'woman.' White is what woman is; not-white (and the stereotypes not-white gathers in) is what she had better not be.[102]

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https://www.npr.org/2020/07/05/887386869/how-transportation-racism-shaped-america and Robert Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (Knopf, 1974).

[98] Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body,* xi.

[99] Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body,* xi.

[100] Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body,* xi.

[101] See Harris, "Whiteness as Property."

[102] Lorraine O'Grady, "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity," in *New Feminist Criticism,* ed. Joanna Freuh et al. (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 152. Notably the figures of the Asian and Indigenous women are absent from O'Grady's "coin," however we might still see them as part of the same racialized system she describes.

I contend that this "order" is policed spatially as well: the oft-recited refrain that rape is something that happens exclusively to white women in "bad neighborhoods" and "dark alleys" represents a misplaced anxiety over the white woman's virtue (and, therefore, property value to her husband and father) as she crosses the threshold into "racialized" space.[103] Following that reasoning, the "not-white," "prototypically black," woman inhabits such racialized spaces "naturally," therefore, according to white supremacist logic, her assaults are the status quo and less legitimate.[104] The fact that most sexual violence happens in preexisting communities, including the white family home, represents a profound threat to white supremacist spatial and narrative order, which depend on an aggressive, racialized "outsider" to neutralize its own actual violence.

The misplaced anxiety over white women's virtue has horrifying consequences: one of the most famous examples being Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam's 1955 murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till after Till supposedly whistled at Bryant's wife. Till's story illustrates a policing of Black sound as well, as it was his apparent whistle that Milam and Bryant used to justify their crime.[105] Following his murder, Mamie Till-Mobley decided to hold an open-casket funeral for her son—clearly displaying his brutalized body—that around 50,000 people attended.[106] She

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[103] See Introduction.
[104] See Introduction.
[105] Policing of Black sound continues in a contemporary context with laws that disproportionately regulate public nuisance and "loudness" in historically Black neighborhoods. See: Brown, *Dark Matters* and Campt, *Listening to Images* on surveillance; "Not Peaceable and Quiet" with Counterpublic Artists Matt Joynt, Anthony Romero, and Josh Rios," Monument Lab Podcast, episode 16, hosted by Paul Farber, recorded at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation, https://monumentlab.com/podcast/not-peaceable-and-quiet-with-counterpublic-artists-matt-joynt-anthony-romero-and-josh-rios on artists' responses to policing of sound; Cheraine Donalea Scott, "Policing Black sound: performing UK Grime and Rap music under routinised surveillance," *Soundings*, no. 75 (2020): 55-57, on policing Black sound and sound as method at Black Lives Matter protests; Nick Lally, "Policing sounds," *Progress in Human Geography* 47, no. 4 (2023): 575-590 on sound as anti-Black policing method.
[106] For more on Till-Mobley's activism and the murder and trial of Emmett Till see: *The Murder of Emmett Till,* directed by Stanley Nelson (PBS: American Experience, 2023), digital and Mamie Till-Mobley and Christopher Benson, *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime that Changed America* (One World/Ballantine, 2004).

published images of his corpse in the *Chicago Defender* and *Jet* magazine and, after the acquittal of his killers, she travelled across with the NAACP advocating for civil rights. Till-Mobley's publication of her son's mutilation might be read in a similar genealogy to Truth and Faustine, in which she seized back the terms of photographic and fleshy circulation, in order to redirect the violence falsely projected onto her son back onto Milam and Bryant. It also countered what Harvey Young has called "the black body as souvenir in American lynching," or the practice of lynching participant-observers taking dismemberment pieces of the victim's flesh as "keepsakes" of the event.[107] While redress for Till's murder feels incomplete and impossible, Till-Mobley's re-memberings of him, through her activism, especially her publication of his corpse, intervened in the stereotypical scenario of the white woman victim/Black male predator and placed the truth on the national stage.

The stereotypical figure of the sexually virtuous white maiden in need of protection from the Black male "rapist" is a scenario that certainly derives part of its power from the fact that it enables (mostly) white men to act out heroic fantasies of saving the white woman, while simultaneously excusing, or even rewarding, their violent behavior.[108] In her 1892

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[107] Harvey Young, "The Black Body as Souvenir in American Lynching," *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 4 (2005): 639-657.

[108] There are so many examples of this in popular culture, but one I think about a lot is Taylor Lautner's opening 2013 monologue on *Saturday Night Live,* in which he retroactively "defends" then-girlfriend Taylor Swift from a cardboard cutout version of Kanye West shortly after the VMAs incident. Lautner rehearses policing language against the West figure ("What seems to be the problem here?") and practices fighting moves against him. A month prior, Swift herself hosted *SNL* and at the conclusion of her "monologue song," she sings that she is not worried about West anymore, because she's "got security lining the stage." This is not a defense of West (his antisemitic politics, amongst other harmful behavior, are abhorrent) – however, as scholars of popular culture and performance, we can glean a lot from how the scenario of the stereotypes of the endangered white woman, threatening Black man, and protective/heroic white (or aspiring-towards-whiteness) man is rehearsed in the 21st-century. Furthermore, in this specific situation, Beyoncé Knowles-Carter is either rendered absent or forced to play the role of the eternally tolerant Black woman, who repairs West's mistakes and facilitates Swift's comfort, while not being permitted to express her own feelings about the situation. Many thanks to my colleague Imani Davis who introduced me to Lautner's *SNL* performance and provoked much of my reflections above in their guest lecture for the "Taylor Swift and Her World" course we both assisted in 2024 at Harvard University. See: "Taylor Lautner on Failing to Stand Up for Taylor Swift at the VMAs," *Saturday Night Live*, season 35, December 12, 2009, uploaded by Saturday Night Live September 18, 2013, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibmouXVqwFc&list=PLS_gQd8UB-hJRYbWF16W0bMHquE3cfLM3&index=2&ab_channel=SaturdayNightLive and "Taylor Swift Monologue Song,"

pamphlet "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases" (and its 1892 follow-up, "The Red Record"), Ida B. Wells investigated Southern whites' use of lynching as a means of terror and social control after the formal abolition of slavery. Crystal Feimster, author of *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching*, summarizes Wells's argument that "the portrayal of black men as rapists […] concealed [Southern white men's] rape of black women," and also provided a "cover to whites' violent efforts to rob African-Americans of their rights."[109] In other words, Wells's investigative work indicts the criminalization of Black men as well as the white supremacist order which makes Black women's rape unremarkable.

In the realm of visual representation, such a racial-sexual order has been structured and maintained through "compelled" images of Black women produced by racial "scientists" and researchers Herman Moens, Louis Aggasiz, Thomas Eakins, Alexander Dunlop, and countless others.[110] Campt, who locates "compelled photos" in ethnographic portraits and criminal identification photography, summarizes them thusly: "These photos were intended to classify types rather than identify individuals… they are at best coerced, and at worst compelled."[111] The link between so-called scientists and sociologists' forcing, or compelling, Black women to disrobe for the cameras and the greater project of racial and sexual classification may seem obvious, but it is absolutely critical to emphasize as I consider the politics of sexual violence—particularly whose stories are deemed to "matter," and which are seemingly swept under the debris of history. Faustine's "interpolation" of "multiple selves," and her tender invocation of the

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Saturday Night Live, season 35, November 7, 2009, uploaded by Saturday Night Live on October 29, 2013, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2twcSFYlt0&ab_channel=SaturdayNightLive.

[109] Crystal Feimster, "Ida B. Wells and the Lynching of Black Women," *New York Times,* April 28, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/28/opinion/sunday/ida-b-wells-lynching-black-women.html. See also: Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Harvard University Press, 2009) and Wells, *Southern Horrors.*

[110] See: Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body*, 7-79.

[111] Campt, *Listening to Images,* 49.

Black women whose bodies have been historically reduced to commodities before her, is a direct intervention in such an "order"—a reckoning akin to Wynter's "demonic," or that which operates "outside the space-time orientation of the humunucular observer," which takes to task "the absented presence of black womanhood" within "Man's" "bounds of reason."[112] McKittrick extends Wynter's "demonic" to the geographic:

> … black women's geographic options [are], often crudely, aligned with historically present racial-sexual categorizations. More specifically, transatlantic slavery incited meaningful geographic processes that were interconnected the category of 'black woman': this category not only visually and socially represented a particular kind of gendered servitude, it was embedded in the landscape. Geographically, the category of 'black woman' evidenced human/inhuman and masculine/feminine racial organization. The classification of black femininity was therefore also a process of *placing* her within the broader system of servitude—as an inhuman racial-sexual worker, as an objectified body, as a site through which sex, violence, and reproduction can be imagined and enacted as a captive human. Her classificatory racial-sexual body, then, determined her whereabouts in relation to her humanity.[113]

Faustine's project is to both elucidate classifications' role in the *"placing"* of black femininity within a "broader system of servitude" *through photography* and to re-spatialize the confines of such classifications. Faustine, in her map of African enslavement and Black life in New York, tethers this artistic and performative lineage to concrete locations across the city. Faustine thusly elucidates what is implicit in the work of her foremothers—that Black women's matters *are* spatial matters and that the quest for mobility, sensuality, and beauty, in the afterlife of sexual domination, is to dare the textures of the everyday terrain to shimmer and *move*, to contain within them the possibility of "making and remaking oneself," as Morrison might say, of imagining, of "saying place," of choosing to love one's flesh, (w)ho(l)ly.[114]

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[112] Wynter, "Beyond Miranda's Meanings," 364-365.
[113] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds,* xxvi-xxv.
[114] Morrison, "The Source of Self-Regard," 321. "Black matters are spatial matters" is a reference to McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds,* xiv "w(h)ol(l)y" cites *Beloved,* in which the character of Baby Suggs's name is frequently written as "Baby Suggs, holy." In *Beloved*, Baby Suggs, holy, leads ceremony and gathering in the Clearing (Morrison, *Beloved,* 100-104).

"It was not to her shame that she uncovered her breast before them, but to their[s]"[115]

Many Truths, Disrupting Circulation(s)

Posed on 74 Canal Street, where Sojourner Truth's wooden home once stood, Faustine holds a large white posterboard, which reads in plain bold type: "AR'N'T I A WOMAN."[116] The phrase's question mark is absent; instead, each word is set on its own line, the sentence stretched into a stanza: "AR'N'T / I / A / WOMAN." Faustine balances the bottom edge of the poster on her bare left hip and breast, the other side gripped by her hand; her top half is nude, her lower half in a lengthy white-linen skirt, which nearly covers her signature white shoes entirely. Truth's former residence is on Faustine's other side; now a laundromat, the brick building is framed by a bike and pawn shop, the latter declared by two red-and-mustard "We Buy Gold" signs. The sheer number of cars, storefronts, and billboards indicate Canal is a busy street, but there are no figures surrounding Faustine. This sidewalk is hers. Her stance—feet shoulder-width apart—is firm. Assured. Her gaze is direct: Faustine looks straight ahead—into the camera, daring a witness.

Faustine's citation of Sojourner Truth provides a generative place to begin my analysis of the artist's use of posture. As Daphne Brooks writes in *Bodies in Dissent,* Truth harnessed "theatrical and performative models as methods of antebellum social and political disruption," including baring her breasts, in order to "articulate a means to rescuing that very body from nineteenth-century proscriptions of racial and gender abjection by locating agency precisely

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[115] Citing William Hayward's recounting of Truth at an 1858 meeting in Indiana; this exchange quoted in full later in this section. William Hayward, "Pro-Slavery in Indiana," *The Liberator*, October 15, 1858. Accessed via Fair Use at https://fair-use.org/the-liberator/1858/10/15/the-liberator-28-42.pdf.

[116] For more information on Truth's Lower East Side residence, see Lib Tietjen, "Sojourner Truth: Abolitionist, Suffragist, Lower East Sider," Tenement Museum (blog), n.d., https://www.tenement.org/blog/sojourner-truth-abolitionist-suffragist-lower-east-sider/.

within her flesh."[117] As one of the most photographed people of her generation, Truth was also an astute minister of her own image, "rescuing" not only her corporeal self from abjection, but re-appropriating her likeness from circulation—a pattern of dissemination that persists, as Brooks points out, in critical debates that "reduce" Truth and her body to "authentic" symbol.[118] My exploration into Truth's theatrical and performative strategies helps ground Faustine's important work and demonstrate photography as a striking space for claiming self-possession and sexual freedom. Following Truth, Faustine engages nudity and photography as a means to disrupt the fungibility projected onto her flesh and locate her own agency. As Tiffany Lethabo King writes, fungibility "represents the unfettered use of Black bodies for the self-actualization of the human and for the attendant humanist project of the production and expansion of space."[119] Sexual exploitation is inseparable from this process, particularly for Black women, both because rape increased property during enslavement and to King's point, even after formal abolition, scientists, researchers, and developers justified such abuse as being necessary to humanist progress in the fields of medicine and accumulations of capital.[120]

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[117] Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent,* 157. See also: Carol McCusker, "Sojourner Truth's in Photographs," Harn Museum of Art, n.d., https://harn.ufl.edu/resources/sojourner-truths-truth-in-photographs/.
[118] Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent,* 158.
[119] Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Duke University Press, 2019), 24.
[120] King, *The Black Shoals,* 24. Eyo Ewara's "Attempting Redress: Fungibility, Ethics, and Redressive Practice in the Work of Saidiya Hartman" also really helpful traces Hartman's theorizing of fungibility and provides a genealogy of the term: Ewara, "Attempting Redress," *Theory & Event* 25, no. 2 (April 2022): 364-391. In regards, to medical progress and racial and gendered violence see: Deirdre Cooper Owens, *Medical Bondage; Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology* (University of Georgia Press, 2017) and Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (Penguin Random House, 2008).



Figure 3.3: Nona Faustine, *72 Canal, Sojourner Truth's Home,* 2016. Image from Sarah Sunday, "ar'n't I a woman: Interview with Nona Faustine**,"** *Musée Magazine*, April 8, 2019.

Sojourner Truth moved into the building Faustine stands in front of in 1829, two years after she escaped enslavement in upstate New York and as the state's gradual abolition laws took effect. In both of their work, Truth and Faustine testify to New York's active participation in African enslavement and complicate its position as a supposedly "free state" after emancipation. While Faustine's map hones in on New York City, Truth challenged the North more broadly as a traveling preacher through her regular public lectures. As Truth worked to illustrate the incompleteness of her freedom, she also advocated for temperance and women's rights. It was in this context that Truth delivered her iconic 1851 "Ain't/ ar'n't I a woman?" speech in Akron, Ohio, which Faustine references—it is, however, as historian Nell Painter has brilliantly detailed, very improbable that Truth ever said the phrase. "Ain't/ar'n't I a woman?" can be traced to

Frances Gage's account of Truth's speech.[121] Gage was a reformer and voting rights activist who worked closely with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. She provided her well-known report of Truth's speech twelve years after it was delivered, projecting onto Truth an imitation of a "Southern slave dialect."[122] In reality, Truth never lived in the South and spoke only Dutch until the age of nine. Any accent of Truth's would have been Dutch, not Southern. Gage's version may have been (consciously or inadvertently) referencing an 1838 anti-slavery medallion, which supplanted an enslaved woman onto a previous image of an enslaved man; chained and in a kneeling position, the words "Am I not woman and a sister?" are inscribed above her.[123] Although created to promote abolition, the coin's message is paternalistic and relies on the trope of a subservient slave appealing to a "white savior."[124] The engraving's question mark places the enslaved figure in a perpetual state of request, even as the double meaning of "sister" complicates her appeal by directing it towards Black men, as well. This is one reason why Faustine's removal of the question mark is powerful—she does not need the assurance of her spectators to validate her statement. It also means Faustine's poster is in some ways closer to Truth's more likely remarks, which were recorded by her friend Marius Robinson in *The Anti-*

[121] Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1996).
[122] Painter, *Sojourner Truth,* 121, 164-177. See also: Malea Walker, "Sojourner Truth's Most Famous Speech," Library of Congress (blog), April 7, 2021, https://blogs.loc.gov/headlinesandheroes/2021/04/sojourner-truths-most-famous-speech/ and "Her Words: Sojourner's Words and Music," The Sojourner Truth Memorial Committee, last accessed March 5, 2025, https://sojournertruthmemorial.org/sojourner-truth/her-words/.
[123] See George Bourne, *Slavery Illustrated in Its Effects Upon Woman and Domestic Society*, (Freeport, N.Y., Books for Libraries Press, 1972 [c1837]), digital, https://www.loc.gov/item/72006480/. The Wheaton College Permanent Collection houses one of these medallions, and an interview with the college's art history professor R. Tripp Evans helpfully contextualizes it: Evans, "Interview: Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?", interview by Emily Gray, *Wheaton ARHive Revue*, n.d., https://wheatonarthiverevue.com/interview/am-i-not-a-woman-and-a-sister/. Also see Jennifer Herron, "'Am I not a Woman and a Sister?' Activist Performance in Antebellum Black Women's Literary Societies," (M.A. thesis, Tufts University, 2016), ProQuest.
[124] Evans, "Interview."

Slavery Bugle as "I am a woman's rights," though, as Painter has suggested, historians may never know Truth's precise words.[125]

Though Truth never asked "Ain't I a woman," "the hold of [the question's] uncertainty," Hartman intimates, "was so inescapable" it "achiev[ed] mythic proportions," nonetheless.[126] In the centuries since its publication, "Ain't I a woman" has both been appropriated in service of the "fetishistic agendas" Brooks rightfully critiques *and* has functioned as a vital provocation across Black feminisms, functioning as a book title and thematic refrain for important works by bell hooks and Deborah Gray White.[127] Aligned with the latter, I suggest we read Faustine's adoption of the phase as an apprehension of its excessive circulation. By switching away from the inquisitive mode and placing "Ar'n't I A Woman" in conversation with her unclothed posture and Truth's residence, Faustine crafts a constellation between the text, her body, and her location rooted in self-assurance, a claiming of the tentative "me."[128] She dramaturges a scene in which she is neither reduced to a "body part" nor disembodied altogether, as Truth is in Judy Chicago's iconic *Dinner Party* art installation.[129] In Chicago's piece, a series of famous women are largely represented through their genitalia, yet Truth is represented by three "African mask-ed" faces that burst from a singular rounded chest. Ironically, at the Brooklyn Museum, Chicago's *Dinner Party* shares a gallery with *White Shoes*, so the exhibits are viewed consecutively.[130] In the order

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[125] Painter, *Sojourner Truth,* 121, 164-177. Nell Painter also discusses this in an article by Cynthia Greenlee, "The Remarkable Untold Story of Sojourner Truth," *Smithsonian Magazine,* March 2024, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/remarkable-untold-story-sojourner-truth-180983691/.

[126] Hartman, *Wayward Lives,* 39.

[127] Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent,* 157. See: bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (South End Press, 1981) and Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (W.W. Norton and Company, 1999 [1985]).

[128] Referencing Morrison, *Beloved*, 322. See Morrison's reflections on this moment in "The Source of Self-Regard," 318.

[129] Spillers brilliantly critiques Chicago's piece in her essay "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 156-157. I am building from her here.

[130] "Components of *The Dinner Party,*" The Brooklyn Museum, accessed March 5, 2025, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/place_settings/sojourner_truth.

that I walked through the gallery, Faustine's "Ar'n't I A Woman" reconfigures Chicago's representation of Truth by both acknowledging the history in which Black women are reduced only to the "breast," but also demanding Truth herself be read in a broader context—one that is capacious enough to include Truth's geographies and Faustine's full body, intentionally posed according to her vision.

By placing "Ar'n't I A Woman" directly next to her breasts, Faustine draws the viewers' focus to her chest, thus visually linking it to the category crisis of Black womanhood, while also demanding a deeper engagement with the core of the question. In doing so, she speaks back to the compelled and disrobed images of Black women that ghost her series.[131] Perhaps the most famous of these, which Faustine cites often as one of her catalysts for *White Series*, are the 1850 daguerreotypes of Delia, an enslaved woman photographed by Joseph T. Zealy for Louis Agassiz's "study of polygenesis," whom I mentioned briefly above.[132] Zealy photographed frontal and profile topless portraits of Delia along with five other enslaved men (Alfred, Fassena, Jack, Jem, and Renty). In these images, her "clothing [is] gathered at the waist, as if removed for the purpose of photograph."[133] The "gathered" fabric evidences Zealy (and Aggasiz's) power to compel their "subjects" and projects stereotypes of sexual availability and primitivity onto their bodies. It is Delia's "pulled-down shirt" that "reveals that she, as a captive, was compelled to

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[131] On "ghosting," see Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: Theatre as Memory Machine* (University of Michigan Press, 2001).

[132] See *To Make Their Own Way in the World: The Enduring Legacy of the Zealy Daguerreotypes,* eds. Ilisa Barbash, Molly Rogers, and Deborah Willis (Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, 2020), https://peabody.harvard.edu/make-their-own-way-world, an incredible interrogation of Aggasiz and his work's enduring harm, and Saima S. Iqbal, "Louis Aggasiz, Under a Microscope," *The Harvard Crimson,* March 18, 2021, https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2021/3/18/louis-agassiz-scrut/, for a more direct look at Aggasiz. Aggasiz and the Peabody are of a particular geographic interest to me: for many years I lived just down the street from the Peabody Museum (about a ten minute walk), and the surrounding area on Google Maps is labeled as "Aggasiz." I saw his name daily before learning about his legacy.

[133] Quoted text is from the Peabody's object description. "Daguerreotype, Delia profile," 1850, daguerreotype, leatherette, 11.9 x 9.7 x 2.1 cm, Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology, object no. 35-5-10/53039, https://collections.peabody.harvard.edu/objects/details/180457.

appear before Zealy's camera," Harvey Young writes.[134] Young argues that the interminable "hypervisibility" of Delia's daguerreotypes, even by critics who provide "cogent, corrective readings" of them, "promotes [Delia's] ongoing objectification," through rendering her "a sexual object, the embodiment of 'specimen,' and an idealized xenotype of the 'other.'"[135] Even the notes originally attached to the daguerreotypes—which identify the captives "by a single name, the plantations on which they labored, and the geographical regions of their birth"—seek to classify them solely as a "laboring" race, defined entirely by their enslavement. While Carrie Mae Weems has appropriated Zealy and Aggasiz's daguerreotypes to intervene in "white America['s]" representations of "the black subject" (*From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*, 1995-96), Faustine takes a different approach, instead using her own body to *stand in the flesh* of the "disrobed" posture and thereby instructing audiences to read it differently.[136]

Faustine's tactical and even redressive disrobing echoes one of Truth's performances from nearly two centuries prior. In 1858, while at an assembly in Indiana, a state whose laws forbade her very presence (causing Truth's 1861 arrest there), a man identified as Dr. Strain harassed Truth into stripping her chest to prove that she was indeed a woman and not "a mercenary hireling of the Republican party."[137] William Hayward reported the full exchange for William Lloyd Garrison's paper, *The Liberator,* as follows:

> … Dr. T. W. Strain, the mouthpiece of the slave Democracy, requested the large congregation to 'hold on,' and states that a doubt existed in the minds of many persons

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[134] Young, *Embodying Black Experience,* 37.
[135] Young, *Embodying Black Experience,* 37-38.
[136] Carrie Mae Weems, *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried,* 1995-1996, chromogenic prints with sand-blasted text on glass, 28 works: 26 3/4 × 22" (67.9 × 55.8 cm); 4 works: 22 × 26¾" (55.8 × 67.9 cm); 2 works: 43 1/2 × 33 1/2" (110.4 × 85 cm), Museum of Modern Art, object no. 70.1997.1-34, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/45579.
[137] Quote is Hayward's verbiage, "Pro-Slavery in Indiana." For more background, see also: Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent,* 156-160 and Patrick J. Furlong, "Sojourner Truth Visits Indiana in 1861," *Hoosier Voices NOW,* Indiana Historical Bureau, https://www.in.gov/history/about-indiana-history-and-trivia/annual-commemorations/civil-war-150th/hoosier-voices-now/sojourner-truth-visits-indiana-in-1861/#:~:text=Sojourner%20Truth%20first%20visited%20north,of%20her%20ideals%20and%20determination.

> present respecting the sex of the speaker [Truth], and that it was his impression a majority of them believed the speaker to be a man [...] he now demanded that Sojourner submit her breast to the inspection of some of the ladies present, that the doubt might be removed by their testimony… Confusion and uproar ensued, which was suppressed by Sojourner, who, immediately rising, asked them why they suspected her to be a man. The Democracy answered, 'Your voice is not the voice of a woman, it is the voice of a man, and we believe you are a man.' Dr. Strain called for a vote, and a boisterous 'Aye' was the result […] Sojourner told them that her breasts had suckled many a white babe, to the exclusion of her own offspring […] she quietly asked them, as she disrobed her bosom, if they, too, wished to suck! In vindication of her truthfulness, she told them that she would show her breast to the whole congregation; that it was not to her shame that she uncovered her breast before them, but to their shame… I heard a Democrat say, as we were returning home from meeting, that Dr. Strain had, previous to the examination, offered to bet forty dollars that Sojourner was a man! So much for the physiological acumen of the western physician.[138]

Truth's performance speaks wisely to Spillers's theory of "ungendering;" as I outlined in my Introduction, Spillers's argument that the dominant culture's "traditional symbolics" of gendered femaleness cannot apply to Black women—as the Atlantic Slave Trade initiated an "ungendering" of Black female flesh—predates Judith Butler's intervention that gender, rather than a fixed identity, is constituted through a "stylized repetition of acts."[139] Through uncovering her breast and shaming Strain, Truth makes explicit how the concept of female gender is mapped differently onto her body *because* of its association with what Spillers terms "the materialized scene of unprotected female flesh."[140] Truth uses her body to materialize that scene and trouble Strain and the likes' anxieties around her gender. She elucidates that the "shame" belongs to Strain and his colleagues and their unwillingness to name that the ungendering of her flesh is informed by *their* violence, not Truth's failure to perform as a "proper" woman subject. In fact, Truth clarifies that such a performance of hers was always doomed to fail precisely because gender's scripts are enforced and rehearsed through racialization.

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[138] Hayward, "Pro-Slavery in Indiana."
[139] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 68.
[140] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 68.

A key difference between Truth's scene and Faustine's is the former was coerced into disrobing whereas the latter elected to do so. Still, I read both as instances of agential disrobing and, as Brooks writes of Truth's display, "extraordinary public acts of black women's corporeal dissent and resistant performance."[141] As I explore in my next section linking photography and racial science, that Truth was decried by a "physician" is contextually important. Truth, through "enabl[ing] her breasts to articulate the history of a submerged slave past," citing Brooks, not only "shames" her congregation into "acknowledg[ing] their spectatorial and social complicity in her abjection," but speaks back to the conditions of *inspection.*[142] Disturbingly mirroring the typical operations of a slave market, where auctioneers would submit enslaved women's (and men's) flesh for scrutiny and evaluation, Strain attempts to force Truth to have her breasts quite literally "inspect[ed]."[143] Truth, then, not only refuses to offer up her body to a faux-medical spectacle, thus rewriting the scenario of her display, but infantilizes the white men who scrutinize her.[144] She reminds her audience that she has been both forced to nurse white children and separated from her own "offspring" under the system of slavery—further, one of Truth's daughters, as the congregation may have at least implicitly known, was the product her then-owner's rape.[145]

As Brooks argues, Truth "interpolat[ed] another Truth" into the "site of subjection," therefore "revalu[ing] her exploited flesh and instill[ing] it with an alternate textual meaning."[146]

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[141] Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent,* 159.
[142] Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent,* 159.
[143] See Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 55-66, particularly her reading of Sukie's insurgent performance, for discussion of scrutiny of Black flesh at auction.
[144] The (falsely) medical spectacle Strain attempts to coerce Truth into here, particularly as it involves her breasts, recalls P. T. Barnum's exhibition of Joice Heth. See: Uri McMillan, "Mammy Memory: The Curious Case of Joice Heth, the Ancient Negress," *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York University, 2015), 23-64.
[145] See: Painter, *Sojourner Truth,* 3-21.
[146] Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent,* 159.

Faustine does something similar in her "Ar'n't I a woman" photograph and across her entire series, as she sources her flesh to articulate New York's submerged slave past, but also "interpolates" not just other versions of herself, but cites/sites her Black foremothers: this includes Truth, but also women whose voices are harder to hear in the archives, including Isabel, who the Lefferts family enslaved at their property in present-day Prospect Park. Pieter Lefferts, the family patriarch, was one of late-18th and early-19th century New York's largest landowners and made much of his wealth through his trading, selling, and buying of the enslaved.[147]



Figure 3.4: Nona Faustine, *Not Gone With The Wind,* Lefferts House, Brooklyn, 2016. Photo via Brooklyn Museum, 2017.

[147] Faustine, *White Shoes,* 111 and "Lefferts Historic House Museum," Historic House Trust – New York City, https://historichousetrust.org/houses/lefferts-historic-house-museum/.

Faustine has two photographs in front of the Lefferts House, "Not Gone With the Wind" and "Isabel;" in both, she dons the same long linen skirt from her "Ar'n't I A Woman" photograph, but belts it with four children's lace-up shoes, also white. She is nude from the waist up in both images and in "Isabel" holds a cast-iron frying pan.[148] When asked about the children's shoes, Faustine has shared that they are meant to represent children sold from their enslaved mothers. Just as Faustine blockades spectators from "walking a mile in her shoes," she suspends them from projecting onto the absent-presence of enslaved mothers' stolen children, while still mourning their theft. That the shoes trace Faustine's stomach is also significant, as they visually encircle the site of her womb. Brooks's reading of Truth's "unveiling" is again instructive here: "By reminding her audience of her own absent offspring whom she is denied the right to nurse, Truth splinters the security of the viewer's intimacy with her body."[149] Interestingly, in "Not Gone With the Wind," Faustine stares just above the camera's eye, so while her forward-facing posture may superficially convey openness or readability, her expression remains difficult for audiences to decipher. "Not Gone With the Wind" as a title references and rejects "the dominant script of the mammy figure whose breasts are made available for 'suckl[ing]" by linguistically disavowing *Gone With the Wind* (1939), whose "Mammy" represents one of the most famous and formative examples of the stereotype in popular media. By evoking enslaved mothers, Faustine makes explicit that the history of her

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[148] Faustine's frying pan evokes Aunt Jemima, the stereotypical "mammy" figure Chris L. Rutt used to sell his famous pancake mix. Rutt developed the character of "Aunt Jemima" from Billy Kersands's minstrel song "Old Aunt Jemima," which was written in 1875. For more information on Rutt's conception and the brand-circulation of the "Aunt Jemima" character, see: Dorris Witt, "'Look Ma, the Real Aunt Jemima!' Consuming Identities under Capitalism," *Black Hunger: Soul Food and America* (University of Michigan Press, 1999), 21-53.
In *Scenes of Subjection,* Hartman elaborates an interesting historical note on iron cooking pots and pans, which is that enslaved women often placed them upside down against doorways during quilting parties and prayer gatherings to catch their voices and prevent them from being heard. When whites saw enslaved Black women carrying cooking and washpots, then, what they may have actually been witnessing was far from subservience, but actually coded insurgence and resistance. See Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,*123.
[149] Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent,* 160.

body as "rape-able" object depends on what Hartman describes as the slaveowner's "rights of property." Under those laws, an enslaved woman's "maternal function was […] indistinguishable from the condition of enslavement and its reproduction."[150] "Motherhood was critical to the reproduction of property and black subjection, but parental rights were unknown to the law," Hartman continues; " […] the concept of 'injury' did not encompass the loss of children, natal alienation, and enforced kinlessness."[151] As I detail at-length in my introduction, it also did not include rape. "Not Gone With the Wind" refutes a mapping of the "mammy" onto Faustine's body, while also indicating that the geographical system of the plantation is not quite "gone (with the wind)" either: the shoes remain empty, as Faustine makes a place for ancestors like Isabel's mourning and yearning for another type of motherhood. The title also claims place in its assertion of Black presence; by refusing the narrative that Black people are "gone with the wind," Faustine offers a praxis of remaining, one that persists in spite of the city's efforts to displace its Black residents.

Faustine's suggests that the women and versions of herself that she "interpolates" are ever-present within the space she occupies and, additionally, that the ability to govern how she moves through that public space—to be the cartographer, choreographer, and "costumer" of her own movement—is central to the freedom she seeks. That she can imagine claiming the sidewalk as her own at all, in a manner that hinges not upon property, but something closer to the self-regard I extended earlier, is radical. The coupling of "Ar'n't I A Woman" alongside her breasts critiques the racial and gendered order she must navigate, while simultaneously upending it: Faustine invokes the visual and spatial histories that would constrain her, while disturbing them by acting of her own accord. In doing so, she creates space for another script, one that, as I argue

[150] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 171.
[151] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 171.

in the section above, gathers around a "loving" of flesh. Both Faustine and Truth take control of the surplus of their image and its circulation, albeit in different contexts. The "many" Faustine's in the frame fracture a static reading of her "Ar'n't I A Woman" image, while also creating something multi-layered and entirely her own: the photograph is at once a tribute to Truth; a self- and family portrait assisted by Faustine's sister; a reclamation of the artist's historically disrobed and stripped flesh through her chosen nudity; and a moment inside a map of her design.

That Faustine uses photography, a medium that depends on literally capturing a singular instant, to disrupt a reductive narrative of her image, one that hinges upon a history of possession, is quite powerful indeed and, again, resounds Truth, who also exercised a performance strategy, in which "excess" may yield "subterfuge," through the image. As I described at the beginning of this chapter, Truth inscribed the phrase "I sell the Shadow to Support the Substance" on her carte-de-visite portrait.[152] Here, as with her instance of "corporeal dissent" recorded by the *Reformer,* Truth relied on reflexivity and doubling in order to take control of projections onto her body and image. Truth, in "selling the shadow," captured back the fungible order forced onto her, and other Black women's bodies, a racialized and gendered order that was, in part, reinforced through the medium of photography. Carte-de-visites were immensely popular card-size portraits, or "calling cards," which Truth used to promote and raise funds for her various causes. They bring to mind the contemporary album cover in their popularity, earning potential, and precise artistic vision.[153] Such cards cost twenty-five to fifty

[152] Read more about the image and its provenance here: "Sojourner Truth: 'I Sell the Shadow to Support the Substance,'" The New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/301989.

[153] Albums covers represent a rich space for female musicians, especially Black female artists, to take control of their image and its circulation, in a fashion similar to how Truth deployed the carte-de-visite. Some of my favorite album cover examples include Beyoncé's *Lemonade* (2016), *Renaissance* (2022), and *Cowboy Carter* (2024); Rihanna's *ANTI* (2016); and Solange's *A Seat at the Table* (2016).

cents each, and Truth sat for her carte-de-visite portraits at least eleven times.[154] In Truth's cards she is seated and knitting, a vase of flowers arranged beside her.[155] She stares directly ahead. Truth registered her cards as engravings in order to secure their copyright protection, and she is quoted as reflecting that she "used to be sold for other people's benefit, but now she sold herself for her own."[156] Truth's etched quote, "I sell the shadow…," is what allowed for her cards' copyrighted status; thus, her language here is akin to Nina Simone's "stealing away" practice I forwarded in my first chapter and can be read alongside Faustine's practice of self-possession.

A popular portrait of Truth features her holding a cased photograph of her grandson, suggesting an argument for Black kinship and futurity through repurposing routes of circulation. In this chapter's conclusion, I argue that Faustine takes this ethics of kinship a step further in *White Shoes* through crafting an intimacy with the land in her images—the earth becomes not just a bucolic backdrop or property to be claimed, as in much of white Western portraiture, but rather family, an active participant that refuses, protects, and remembers. First, however, I look at two other "postures" or white supremacist photographic traditions Faustine takes to task through self-portraiture: the "ethnographic" image and the "odalisque."

"The Ethnographic Image"

In "Of My Body I Will Make Monuments in Your Honor," Faustine takes the conventions of segmentation and fragmentation that have been projected onto her body to another level by removing her head across three "cut-out" profiles of her nude body. The three silhouettes are inserted into a grassy-green cemetery with old-stone gravestones; in them,

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[154] Holland Gormley, "Sojourner Truth and the Power of Copyright Registration," Library of Congress (blog), December 8, 2020, https://blogs.loc.gov/copyright/2020/12/sojourner-truth-and-the-power-of-copyright-registration/.
[155] Truth's flowers remind me of Kevin Quashie's work, which has been instrumental in my thinking for this chapter. Quashie, *Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (Rutgers University Press, 2012).
[156] Gormley, "Sojourner Truth."

Faustine wears her white pumps and stands atop a pinewood box. She faces a different direction in each image, following the "ethnographic aesthetic of frontal, rear, and side views of a subject."[157] In the first picture, the frontal one, the curve of Faustine's chin remains, as if the head has fallen off its statue; the second rear image removes her skull entirely; and in the third, the profile, Faustine is turned to the camera, but her face is punctured by a perfect hole-punch circle. Faustine clasps her hands in front of her for the frontal and profile images and rests them to her side for the rear; a lower half of the excerpted images features a black-and-white background past her legs, seemingly of an old, scuffed wall.



Figure 3.5: Nona Faustine, *Of My Body I Make Monuments In Your Honor,* Brooklyn, 2014.
Image: "ar'n't I a woman," *Musée Magazine*.

[157] Willis and Williams, *The Black Body*. 11

"Of My Body […] " appears towards the beginning of *White Shoes'* book, shortly after "From Her Body Came Their Greatest Wealth" (on Wall Street) and marks a departure from the rest of the series in that it is the only image which collages others; in other words, all other photographs represent pictures taken in "real-time," whereas "Of My Body […]" contains the first layer of the photograph (the shot of the graveyard) and then another (the three "cut-outs"). The effect of these multiple exposures is one of fracture, of the "seeing spots" aspect of an afterimage, where it's not entirely clear which elements of your vision are happening *now* and which are optical intrusions from a recent *then.*[158] Placed in an empty patch of grass beside a row of headstones, the spliced figures stand in for missing graves. The full photograph literally blends time by combining separately shot pictures into one shared frame, while also disrupting the viewers' ability to form a singular coherent story through its use of fragmentation.

The graveyard photographed is the Flatbush Dutch Reformed Church's, a pre-revolutionary, all-white cemetery which hosts 1,500 Dutch settlers and their descendants. As Faustine relays in her exhibition notes, "The names on the headstones reflect the names of the streets that surround the neighborhood and Brooklyn itself: Cortelyou, Ditmas, Lefferts, Duryea, Vanderbilt, Martense. These families were some of the largest slave-owning families in New York City, going back to the time when the land was farms."[159] Three enslaved Africans are buried at the cemetery, "deemed special enough to be buried among [the families that owned them]," ascertains Faustine: their names are Diana, Cato, and Flora, but their graves are unmarked.

[158] See Kimberly Juanita Brown, *The Repeating Body: Slavery's Visual Resonance in the Contemporary* (Duke University Press, 2015), 1-18.
[159] Faustine, *White Shoes,* 110.

During the time that Flatbush Dutch Reformed Church was an active burial site, Dutch settlers set aside a separate graveyard a block away, at what is now Church and Bedford Avenue, for the enslaved. Faustine photographs at that site later in her series; in those images she is wrapped in her floor-length gold robe. At the Church Avenue African Burial Ground, there are no headstones, just a fenced-in overgrown patch of grass, which the city has largely "desecrated" through its construction of a school building; still, community members have found ways of honoring the dead buried there through commemorative posters, protest fliers, and public history projects.[160]

Faustine's triptych-like posture stands in for Diana, Cato, and Flora, visually forming the headstones that their owners denied them. Faustine's triptych portrait also resuscitates, or models, the haunted poses of "the ethnographic image." Deborah Willis and Carla Williams trace the "ethnographic aesthetic of frontal, rear, and side views of a subject" to artist and scientists' anatomical studies, including Petrus Camper's "facial angle" sketches, which measured and teleologically arranged the skull dimensions of Greco-Roman statues, "Europeans," "Kalmouk," "Angolans," and orangutans[161] Camper, also Dutch like the majority of New York's settlers and slaveowners, published and distributed his theories in the late-1700s, during the height of African enslavement in the city. Willis and Williams go on to locate how frontal and profile shots, modeled by Camper's sketches, became the "backbone" of the criminal "classification system" in 1880s France and a method for photographing the mentally ill.[162] "The profile view

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[160] Faustine, *White Shoes,* 110 and "Flatbush African Burial Ground Remembrance and Redevelopment," *NYC Housing Preservation and Development,* accessed March 5, 2025, https://www.nyc.gov/site/hpd/services-and-information/fabg-site-history.page.

[161] See Geoffrey Galton Harpham, "Petrus Camper, 1722-1789," *Theories of Race* (Hutchins Center for African and African American Research, 2023), https://www.theoriesofrace.com/9/ and Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body*, 11. Harpham's *Theories of Race* is part of a larger project, *Who's Black and* Why, led by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Andrew S. Curran. As Harpham notes, even though Camper's illustrations became "the visual icon of scientific racism," he himself attempted to recount the idea that Africans and Europeans were "separate species."

[162] Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body,* 11.

became a standard tool of ethnographic photography in part because it reduced the specificity of identity, whereas the frontal pose does not differ iconographically from portraiture," they argue, noting that the profile "provid[es] a categorizable likeness without the reproach of the returned gaze."[163] Popular press caricature illustrators cited the profile ethnographic aesthetic in their sketches of Sarah Baartman, in which they exaggerated Baartman's buttocks size and surrounded her body with ogling tools of measurement.[164]

In Faustine's profile photograph, however, she *does* return to gaze, even if it is fractured by a bullet-point removal. Both her returned gaze and her removal of her head across all three figures signify an intentional rupture in the "ethnographic aesthetic," one that contends with its history of racial and sexual classification and that, through the Flatbush Dutch Reformed Church Cemetery setting, suggests that the segregation of space is interlinked with the classification of bodies. In the context of sexual violence, this amounts to an interrogation of how Black women's bodies are made continually public and denied privacy, even in the afterlife—as with the unmarked graves at the Flatbush and Church Avenue cemeteries and, of course, in the case of Baartman, whose body cast and skeleton remained on display until 2002, when France acceded South African President Nelson Mandela's request to repatriate her remains.

By removing her head across her three portraits, Faustine points her audiences towards the objectification of Black female flesh's central role in racial classification and its resultant spatial segregation. Citing Nicholas Monti's *Africa Then*, Williams and Willis write: "Baartman exemplified the claim that 'the black woman was imagined without a head: the body is all that

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[163] Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body,* 11. Also: bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze," *Black Looks: race and representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 115-132.

[164] Some examples from the British Museum collection: Louis François Charon, "Les Curieux en extase, ou les cordons de souliers," 1815, published by Aaron Martinet, print/satirical print, The British Museum, museum no. 1998,0426.7, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1998-0426-7 and Frederick Christian Lewis, "Sartjee, the Hottentot Venus," 1810, published by Hendrick Cezar, print, The British Museum, museum no. 1917,1208.3712, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1917-1208-3712.

counts."[165] Her figures' lost heads may also be read as a rejection of the fetishization of the mind in European enlightenment—following revolts organized by the enslaved, slaveowners and local police would often go after and even behead plots' so-called "leader," symbolically removing the "head" of the conspiracy, often missing that most rebellions operated through a complex and coordinated network of many people. That authorities granted utmost power to revolts' "head" was symptomatic of a larger framework that still persists today across arts and politics—one that aggrandizes the individual, brilliant "mind" over the collective body. By removing her head in "Of My Body […]" Faustine both critiques the history of her own corporeal objectification and segmentation, while *also* denouncing an Enlightenment-based descriptive statement that would glorify the singular white male genius. In this way, she makes a similar move to British-born Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare, whose "Age of Enlightenment" piece Sarah Cervenak uses to critique Enlightenment's faulty and "crooked" understandings of "reason."[166] In Shonibare's installation, headless mannequins of celebrated white philosophers reveal through assigned "disfigurement, deformity, and compromised mobility" that for their "hegemonic conceit" and "illusion of self-determination" to function, these thinkers had to rationalize "other bodies" as "unruly, disabled [...] [and] disavowed."[167] Faustine's excises her own head in order to reveal the flaws of Enlightenment philosopher's selective fetishization of the solitary great "mind."

Furthermore, the interruption of Faustine's returned gaze through the hole-like excision of her face might also imply a sort of veiling, or practice of opacity. Faustine clarifies that she is looking back, but does not grant viewers' unfettered access to her expression. Elsewhere in *White Shoes,* Faustine dons a literal veil to obstruct her visage; in "Of My Body […]," however,

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[165] Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body*, 60.
[166] Sarah Cervenak, *Wandering: Philosophical Performances of Racial and Sexual Freedom* (Duke University Press, 2014), 25.
[167] Cervenak, *Wandering,* 25.

her gaze is blocked by negative space, perhaps implying that it is both the formulation of the very "ethnographic aesthetic" she leverages and her own opaqueness that obstructs spectators from deciphering her expression. Though she does not entirely halt it, Faustine disrupts the cycle of hypervisibility. Ultimately, Faustine warps the "ethnographic aesthetic" by rightfully placing it alongside both a literal cite of haunting—the graveyard—and by implicating classification as a central tool in the domination and parceling of both land and bodies. As the title of this image states, Faustine inserts her body into once-segregated space in order to honor her Black ancestors in the present and future tenses; she takes back her own body as a "tool," this time allowing herself to stand in as a living monument. Thus, she projects the criminalization and categorization bound up in the stereotypical ethnographic image back onto itself as she enacts and imagines a new order.

"Of My Body […]" and the image that precedes it, the first shot at the graveyard, opens a space for this practice of imagination. Following Campt and Kevin Quashie, whose studies of listening and attentiveness tend to moments of errancy and quiet in spite of conditions of capture, Faustine's presence at the Flatbush Reformed Dutch Church graveyard prefigures a redressive relationship to history and memory. The titles of the two images at the Flatbush cemetery—"On This Spit of Land…" and "Of My Body I Will Make A Monument in Your Honor"—both invoke a self-conscious narration of place: who gets remembered in the public story of a land's history? In "On This Spit of Land…" Faustine walks amongst the graves of Dutch settlers, her back towards the camera, bands of sunlight and gravestones' shadow filtered across her frame. Knowing that the graves of the three enslaved Africans buried here are unmarked, Faustine's movement through the graveyard becomes one of witnessing, of listening for ancestors who may not be identified by official records, but who remain there, nonetheless. "Of My Body […]" with

its refashioning of the ethnographic image's triptych, teases out the tension between Faustine's marked body and her ancestors' unmarked graves. Faustine reroutes her viewers' attention to embodied histories in order to argue that they, too, belong and are woven into the land's stories—in ways that exceed the contained text and captured image, but demand to be listened to, nonetheless.

Recline and Repose

The *White Shoes* exhibit and catalogue is threaded with images of Faustine in recline and repose. Over the course of the series, she gradually weaves these images of recline with ones where her body is more clothed and her stature more upright. This section, the final one of my exploration of photography and posture, examines Faustine's embodiment of "laying down," beginning with *White Shoes'* primary images of Faustine in a state of complete recline and undress, except for her white heels, against the shores of the Atlantic Ocean and at the base of a wide wingnut tree.[168] I then move into later photographs in the series, in which Faustine adopts a more classic "reclining pose," resting her arm on her propped up knee and leaning backwards, faced away from the camera. These pictures are set at former plantation houses and residences of enslaved; I place them in conversation with the tradition of the odalisque to discuss how Faustine disrupts it, ultimately enabling another reading of "repose," for both the pained body and the land as a site of sanctuary.

The catalogue's first photograph, "Like A Pregnant Corpse The Ship Expelled Her Into The Patriarchy," displays Faustine laying down completely, one leg bent and angled inwards, the other outstretched, ankle askew. She rests against jagged rocks piled against the seacoast;

[168] For a thoughtful meditation on "laying down" and Black feminisms within the Black Lives Matter movement, see Theresa Incampo, "'But What If Instead We Imagine Black Life:' Femininity, Performance, and the Black Lives Matter Movement" (M.A. thesis, Tufts University, 2018), ProQuest.

Faustine lies on her back, her bare chest faced upwards, aglow under dawn's sun. As viewers of the image, we see only her chin: her gaze is upward for the sky alone. The subsequent image finds Faustine in a similar pose, except both knees are bent this time and her arms are outstretched like a cross, implying a state of surrender. We can see the bends of water's waves, can nearly hear them crashing and receding against the bank's boulders, whose sharp edges barb in each direction. The shadow of a ship hangs at the horizon.

Of *the White Shoes'* photographs, I find these the most challenging to look at. Faustine's body does look "expelled" and discarded; she appears "beached" on the shore, to quote Spillers evocative description.[169] Of all of Faustine's images, these are perhaps the only ones that, through their flat posture of nakedness, surrender, and vulnerability, heavily suggest the posture of someone who has just been raped. The titles of these images, "Like A Pregnant Corpse The Ship Expelled Her Into The Patriarchy" and "On Narrioch You Will Find Me," inform their meaning, though even without them the photograph's setting and Faustine's posture evokes the forced arrival of enslaved Africans on New York land. Through the former photograph's title, Faustine makes explicit the system of enslavement's dependence on Black women's reproduction: in doing so, she complicates "birth" as not necessarily positive, but even negative. The second title rightfully resituates "discovered" New York land to the Indigenous—"Narrioch" is the Lenape Tribe First Nation people's name for Coney Island's beaches—suggesting possibilities for Afro-Indigenous alliance, particularly under early colonial occupation and conquest. By pairing the geographic setting indicative of New York's "discovery" and founding—the Atlantic's shore—with her own cadaver-like figure, seemingly expelled and

[169] Spillers, "Interstices."

discarded, Faustine clarifies that New York's "birth" also initiated a kind of death for the violated and enslaved.

Yet, even as these are some of the most stark and brutal images in the *White Shoes* collection, they are not without a whisper of reprieve. Amidst these images, it is the earth that cradles Faustine's frame; the mossy boulders, shaded branches, root-strewn dirt, and lapping waves that offer a place of rest in the wake of implied and/or inherited violation. "There are few markers left but your black body is the marker," Faustine shares, citing Harriet Tubman.[170] "The land does hold the memory of your existence. You only have to put it there in its natural state to remember."[171] Lingering with "hold" for a moment, the word operates on several levels: it is an invitation to pause for, or "hold," the difficult histories Faustine summons and it is a recognition of the land's capacity to "hold" memory and the redressed body. "Hold" also invokes the hold of the slave ship, as an origin site for the U.S.'s continued anti-Black geography of incarceration and containment; however, in Faustine's citation, "hold" is a verb, not a noun, thus turning the "hold" of the ship on its head and activating it. The "hold" of the ship is not a passive structure: it is the active literal and psychic site where the figure of the captive Black female is first held hostage.[172] Yet, Faustine's evocation of "holding," as in re-membering, resonates with Hartman's reading of Octavia Butler's *Kindred,* in which protagonist Dana, after traveling back in time and encountering her enslaved ancestors, finds that "she is not able to rescue her kin or escape the entangled relations of violence and domination, but instead comes to accept that they have made her own existence possible."[173] Faustine puts her "body in the state to remember" her violated kin and the land's memory of them, while also affirming her own present-day existence.

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[170] Faustine, *White Shoes,* 66.
[171] Faustine, *White Shoes,* 66..
[172] Working from Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 72-3
[173] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26 (2008): 14.

Faustine's project of affirmation, of imagining and enacting her own freedom, can be read in the other times she reclines in *White Shoes.* These images strike a decidedly different tone than the ones on the Atlantic's shores: outfitted in a billowing open-back white linen dress and a wide-brimmed canvas sunhat, the Faustine who leans before the Manor, for example, appears at ease, relishing the dappled light that streams through the surrounding trees' reddish leaves and long-armed branches. The Sylvester Manor is just visible through the foliage, its daisy-yellow exterior peeking through the oaks. In her catalogue notes, Faustine summarizes the manor's history thusly:

> On Shelter Island there was a plantation where enslaved Africans and First Nation peoples worked, lived, died, and are buried. The land was taken from the Manhansett Indians, the original inhabitants, despite their protest. Enslaved and indentured people built the manor in 1737 for Brinkley Sylvester, whose grandfather—Nathaniel Sylvester, an English colonist—and great-uncle owned two plantations in Barbados and 8,000 acres of Shelter Island, with a total of 200 enslaved people. The last enslaved person was freed in 1820. The enslaved people that left their mark on the land include Hannah, Jacquero, Hope, Isabel, Obium, Semnie, Tammero, Oyou, Comus, Matilda, and many others.[174]

As with all of her work, Faustine points to a larger geographical system of enslavement and capitalism, in this case the Sylvester sugar plantations in Barbados, and holds space for her enslaved African ancestors, who lived and worked where she now poses, sharing their names whenever possible. What I am interested in here is how Faustine's reclining posture compliments and expands this work—at this point in the series, both in the catalogue and in the exhibit display, viewers have seen Faustine display her nude body in explicit reference to slavery and sexual violence. Thus, audiences are instructed to read the series through the contexts of those histories and their afterlives, even in images like the one at the Sylvester Manor, which imply them more subtly. Faustine's reclined posture calls to mind that of "the odalisque," which

[174] Faustine, *White Shoes,* 113.

traditionally described "a female concubine in a [typically Turkish] harem," as Willis and Williams offer, but now more generally refers to a reclining woman's nude portrait.[175] Faustine echoes their typified pose, in which the female subject angles her body so she rests on her side, her chest propped up by her elbow or, in some cases, a stack of pillows. White European painters, including Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres and Henri Matisse, invented and popularized the genre as a way to conjure "a geographically vague 'Orient,'" replete with sexually available women.[176]

As several art historians have pointed out, early odalisques often arranged subjects by skin color with the "white favorite prone at the center of the painting" and a "black eunuch" serving her in the background; in these paintings, as Willis and Williams argue, the "black female function[ed] as iconographic marker of a sexual theme," "her black body included as a signifier of the other woman's sexuality."[177] Visually marginalized into a subservient role, the illustrated or photographed Black women in classical odalisques served as accessories, like other "racial props" integrated into the images' scenery, to exoticize and eroticize the central white(r) figure.[178] Later, photographers reconfigured the odalisque style to reinforce the presumed always-already sexual availability of the Black woman. As Willis and Williams write:

> Even after the abolition of slavery, the black female was the perpetual 'working girl,' in that she could never possess a status in European culture that was unrelated to her labor, whether forced or paid. Her supposed availability as a sexual being coincided with her actual availability as a worker. Ultimately, the image of the Black woman was associated with prostitution, pornography, and deviant sexuality. Above all else, her image and

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[175] Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body,* 36-46. See also: Ellen C. Caldwell, "The Colonialist Gaze of Matisse's Odalisques," *JSTOR Daily*, November 22, 2018, https://daily.jstor.org/the-colonialist-gaze-of-matisses-odalisques/ and "Odalisque, Enslaved Woman, and Eunuch – Gallery Text," Harvard Art Museums, n.d., https://hvrd.art/o/299806.
[176] Caldwell, "The Colonialist Gaze."
[177] Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body,* 38. Also, it is important to note that odalisque's central figures, if more "Orientalized," were still light-skinned in contrast with their darker-skinned attendant, and that photographers commonly used "racial props" emphasize the central woman's "exoticism." Some attendants were also young Black men (Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body*, 36-40).
[178] Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body,* 39.

> particularly her body was understood to represent that which could be dominated and that which could be possessed, especially sexually.[179]

One disturbing photo, which Hartman meditates on at-length in *Wayward Lives,* describing it as a "durational image of intimate violence," illustrates this in particular.[180] Much like time collapses in Faustine's image, it does, too, in Thomas Eakins's nude photograph of a young Black girl, a "compelled image," in which the unnamed girl is posed in the odalisque style, her small frame rigid against the couch, where she "retreats as far away from the camera as possible," and her gaze into the camera direct and "steely," "assum[ing] nothing shared between the one compelled to appear and those looking."[181] "It is not the kind of photograph that she would have wanted," Hartman writes, "and it was not taken at her request." Eakins, who the Met Museum describes as "America's greatest, most uncompromising realist," is widely celebrated for his depictions of the human figure; he therefore justified the picture as an "anatomy lesson," much like the "ethnographic" portraitists I describe above. Although he took several nude photographs of adults (mostly white women) over the course of his career, the image described above is his only one of a child. As Hartman details there were "rumors" about "other girls" he had asked to pose, but "they were white […] daughters of the elite, so there was public outrage and the painter disgraced."[182] Furthermore, they had been spared "the odalisque, the pose of the whore and the slave; […] they had not been required to look directly at the camera and acknowledge his gaze and pretend to invite it."[183] Eakins' differential treatment between his white elite subjects photographed and the young Black girl emphasizes the iconographic system of projected and racialized sexual promiscuity that ironically first characterized the odalisque

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[179] Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body,* 3.
[180] Hartman, *Wayward Lives,* 27.
[181] Hartman, *Wayward Lives,* 25.
[182] Hartman, *Wayward Lives,* 26.
[183] Hartman, *Wayward Lives,* 26.

genre, albeit through the figure of the Black "attendant." That Eakins remains a celebrated artist—and the young Black girl's name and stories are lost to history, even as Hartman searches the archives for her— underscores author Najwa Ali's argument that the odalisque, which arrests the female subject as sexually available (and, in the case of the Black female, presumes her as perpetually "in service," in terms of sexual and domestic labor), also serves to underscore the male artist's "movement, his ability to enter a netherworld, his ability to move anywhere."[184]

Whether or not Faustine is consciously citing the odalisque and its history, she rewrites the routes of its performative substitutions when she adopts and controls its signature stature. In her photograph, she faces her body away from the camera, staring straight ahead at Sylvester Manor and Wyckoff House, as if reminding the audience that the same logics that would compel her to recline nude for the camera substantiated New York's plantations. Through reclining, Faustine takes a posture that has been used to her "body [as] already marked by a history of sexual defilement, already branded as a commodity" and rescripts it as one of privacy and repose. That she does so on land where the Sylvester family held her ancestors captive both critiques their forced labor—her pose declaring that she, and they, deserve liberation and rest—and allows for her to quietly commune with how those ancestors may still remain within the land's memory. Faustine quite literally "flips" the pose and the image, bringing into focus the land's memory and her own, while boldly authoring a map with her self-regard and interiority at its center.

[184] Najwa Ali, "Matisse / Odalisque / Modernity," *World Literature Today* 89, no. 5 (2015): 44–45. https://doi.org/10.7588/worllitetoda.89.5.0044.



Figure 3.6: Nona Faustine, "There are few markers left but your black body is the marker...." *White Shoes,* 2021.

Coda: "Runnin' through the river with you (dance)"[185]

Midway through the *Brooklyn Talks* panel I began this chapter with, book contributor and panelist Jessica Lanay cites Nina Simone's epic 10-minute-arrangement of "Sinnerman" (1965).[186] "Sinnerman" is a traditional African American spiritual, the kind Simone may have heard as a child at the revival meetings her Methodist mother hosted. Lanay references "Sinnerman" in conversation with Faustine's photograph, "Lobbying the Gods for A Miracle," in which Faustine leans against the cavity of a tree, smoking pistol clutched to her bare chest.[187] In the image, which was taken at Prospect Park near the Lefferts House, Faustine gazes sharply in one direction, as if in anticipation; she is on the lookout, caught in the split-second decision between which way to run. The image is quick, urgent, but the story it evokes sprawls across

[185] Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, "RIIVERDANCE," *Cowboy Carter* (Parkwood Entertainment, 2024).
[186] Lanay, "Brooklyn Talks."
[187] Although staged to look like smoke, the white material emerging from the gun barrel is actually snow.

time, or as Lanay says, "braids it," in its vivid fugitivity.[188] Even the snow suggests the other side of the white Christian calendar—as Faustine explains, Christmas and New Years, far from a joyous season, was often the most painful time of year for enslaved mothers because slaveowners would perversely sell and trade them and their children as gifts.[189] Around Faustine's waist is the aforementioned belt of baby shoes. "In places in the woods […] you could still hear women crying for their children that were stolen," Faustine reflects at the panel.[190] "That's how much the land absorbed their cries and sorrows […] and if you're quiet at a certain point and place in these woods, you can still hear their cries."[191]

Faustine's invocation of the land as container, or holder, for Black ancestral sound and memory once again foregrounds the land's agency and activeness in her photographs. Lanay calls upon Simone's "Sinnerman" as similarly sonically and poetically positioning the land: "I run to the rock / please hide me / I run to the rock / Please hide me, Lord / All on that day / But the rock cried / out, I can't hide you," Simone sings, imploring the earth through sound, not unlike "Mississippi Goddam."[192] Faustine's "Lobbying the Gods for a Miracle," too, calls on the heavens, as she takes on the posture of a woman who has chosen to flee. "When people fled they would use all of the land to hide in to, to rest in: a log, a rotten tree, or you know, a cave, just any place to rest for awhile," Faustine ruminates, "So, when I saw that tree, and we started working around it."[193]

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[188] Lanay continues in the same interview: "I thought about that song in particular because in the contemporary context when black women and femmes are running there are so many ways we cannot be held or hid or helped because it puts the people who would in danger as well. But even from that conundrum…. We still find power." Lanay, "Brooklyn Talks."
[189] Faustine, "Brooklyn Talks."
[190] Faustine is referencing a Henry Louis Gates Jr. documentary she watched here.
[191] Faustine, "Brooklyn Talks."
[192] Nina Simone, "Sinnerman," *Pastel Blues* (Verve Label Group, 1965).
[193] Faustine, "Brooklyn Talks."

Faustine, like Simone, sources the history of enslaved Africans' fugitivity and their reliance on the land to hold them. In a contemporary context, Lanay offers that "when black women and femmes are running there are so many ways we cannot be held or hid or helped because it puts the people who would in danger as well."[194] Still, in that "conundrum," Lanay remarks, "we find power." I hear that "power," woven within the challenges of fugitivity, in Simone's music, as discussed in my first chapter, including "Sinnerman." As Simone beseeches the Lord and the land to protect her, she composes a call-and-response in the song, looping and repeating "power." "Sinnerman" moves at a propulsive pace: it is errant and defiant. Simone is "on the run," but the power is hers.

Recently, another song reminded me of Simone's "Sinnerman" and with that Faustine's *White Shoes*: Beyoncé Knowles-Carter's "RIIVERDANCE," off of her 2024 country album *Cowboy Carter.*[195] Like "Sinnerman," "RIIVERDANCE" suggests an errancy in its speed and draws on the land ("Runnin' through the river with you (dance)," Queen Bey sings in a loop). The song employs the musical and African tradition of call-and-response; specifically, Knowles-Carter's "RIIVERDANCE" repeats "dance" as Simone's "Sinnerman" does "power."

Knowles-Carter's "river," like Faustine's tree and Simone's rock, centers land powerfully associated with enslaved Africans' fugitivity. Beyoncé renders a cascading river as the scene in which her speaker cedes to romantic and sensuous love: reappropriating the language of apprehension and citing the country genre's traditional outlaw aesthetic ("Starting at the barrel of the gun / Yes, he shot me down"), Knowles-Carter implores her lover to "arrest me and read me my rights"—no matter the fight, they'll make amends, and she'll "steal [his] heart again on

[194] Lanay, "Brooklyn Talks."
[195] "ii" allusion to the second of Knowles-Carter's trilogy, but might also be read how she plays with repetition, genre, and invention across the album. Writing about *Cowboy Carter* could be its own essay entirely, so I return my focus to "Riiverdance" and its resonance with Faustine's work.

Saturday and Sunday nights."[196] Following Morrison's reading of self-regard and jazz, I see Beyoncé's "desire for romantic love [as operating] as a place, a space, away, for individual reclamation of the self."[197] Of the blues, Morrison writes that "whether or not the loved one reciprocated the ardor, the lover, the singer, has achieved something, accomplished something in the act of being love."[198] Romantic desire provides the pathway to Knowles-Carter's creation of a space where she may dance—the outcome or logistics of that love is not so much the point, but rather that it allows her to access "the defiance, the grandeur, the agency," the embodied ecstasy that comes with such a choice to surrender.[199] Desire is what carves the space for her dialogic "dance" with the river and the land.

What would it mean to read Knowles-Carter's (and Simone's) call-and-response as a back and forth between performer and land? And how might that sort of "call-and-response" translate to Faustine's interventions in photography? In one of her photographs, "No More Slaves in the Attic," Faustine stretches her arms across an oak tree's branches as filtered light pours across her nude frame. Her gaze is turned away, but she leans back, as if resting in glow and shade—it is a sensual image, as Faustine describes it, where she is celebrating the beauty of her body. Listening to the image, one cannot disavow the haunted histories of Black bodies and trees woven within it; and yet, the title is "no more," and Faustine's posture—one that bathes in the sunlight and the shadow—is one not of pain or terror, but something approaching serenity and "no fear"—a public love of her flesh that is wholly hers, right now.

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[196] Perhaps a reference to practice of "stealing away" on Sundays. Also, I use he/him pronouns to refer to Knowles-Carter's speaker's love interest because she does elsewhere in the song.
[197] Morrison, "The Source of Self-Regard," 319.
[198] Morrison, "The Source of Self-Regard," 319.
[199] Morrison, "The Source of Self-Regard," 319.

CONCLUSION

Transformation, Or, Carrying the Weight of Catastrophe

"A guy did a horrible thing to me and I tried to make something beautiful out of it," artist Emma Sulkowicz once said.[1] In doing so, she evoked one of the core arguments of my dissertation: that art and performance contain an alchemic potential for transformation and education. Through that capacity for change, performance artists author a map that rewrites place while navigating it. That map is more profound than linear healing or resolution, and it is never quite complete because places (and people) are always shifting.

To enter a place of transformation through stories is to touch time; it is to listen deeply—incommensurably—to the histories that extend beyond your own and gain perspective without sacrificing specificity. I did not choose what happened to me, but I can decide to participate in the world around me, to understand more complexly its histories and find my place within its tides. Trying "to make something beautiful out of it" is what I've attempted to do across my dissertation. It's what I've attempted to do throughout my graduate career, even when beauty felt impossible. "To make something beautiful" is not to craft something that is aesthetically appealing by commercial standards, and it certainly is not demarcated by the creator's final product; instead, I view making something beautiful from one's pain as entering a conversation through a practice of creation that is guided, but not foreclosed by, one's personal truth.

Sulkowicz's "something beautiful" was their 2014 durational art piece, "Mattress Performance (Carry That Weight)," at Columbia University. For the performance, which lasted a full academic year, Sulkowicz carried a model of the twin-sized dorm mattress that she was

[1] Emma Sulkowicz quoted in "Survivor Emma Sulkowicz Reclaims Their Body and Steps into Their True Colors," August 23, 2018, by StyleLikeU, YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BvVpD9oHNIo&t=204s&ab_channel=StyleLikeU.

raped on across campus, receiving only help when someone explicitly offered it.[2] Sulkowicz vowed to carry the mattress until Columbia expelled her rapist; the university never took action against him, so Sulkowicz, clad in their powder-blue cap and gown, hoisted the mattress across Columbia's commencement stage, accompanied by friends who volunteered to assist her. "People think I was supposed to have this warlike relationship with [the mattress] and it was supposed to be this object that I was angry with," she reflects. "But for me, that related to how people chose to read my piece rather than the way I lived with it."[3]



Figure 5.1: Emma Sulkowicz, *Mattress Performance, Carry That Weight*, 2014–15. Courtesy of Andrew Burton/Getty.

Sulkowicz's relationship to her mattress reminds me of mine to the pages I have written about my experiences with rape, both within my dissertation and beyond it. Her story mirrors the way that turning traumatic memory into material, be that art or narrative, is heavy and unwieldy,

[2] Sulkowicz uses both she/her and they/them pronouns. For more on "Mattress Performance" see: Emma Sulkowicz, "Carry That Weight," *YouTube,* September 4, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l9hHZbuYVnU&ab_channel=ColumbiaDailySpectator.
[3] Sulkowicz, ""Survivor Emma Sulkowicz Reclaims Their Body."

like a washcloth drenched in water, and is never quite done-with. Sulkowicz formally ended their performance at Columbia's graduation, yet it remains, informing her latest art pieces and inspiring other survivors to carry mattresses at their own institutions. Sulkowicz's "Mattress Performance" speaks powerfully to the routine survival of sexual violence. Trauma is that which haunts and composes the day-to-day; it is cumbersome and inconvenient; it takes the most intimate parts of yourself away, so that trust is a constant lesson and privacy never a guarantee. I am reminded of Chanel Miller's words in *Know My Name,* which have been a solace for me: "This is a lot of what surviving is like: trying to carry on and get work done, while your past pounds into you, distracts you, makes it impossible."[4]

Begin as you want to end, and end as you want to begin. My dissertation began with both my own survival and dissatisfaction with the narratives of rape I grew up around and witnessed in the dominant media. I knew intimately that sexual violence did not solely exist in an *elsewhere*; that is my white, Midwestern community was not immune to rape culture, as much it pretended to be. In fact, the dynamics that permit and sustain sexual violence —domination, shame, silence, and white supremacy—structured my environment, even if I did not quite have the words to name and call out abuses of power in my childhood and adolescence.

Through the truly transformative mentorship and friendship I found at Miami University of Ohio, I started to understand that I could more powerfully and accurately critique the systems and contexts that have informed my experiences through studying and listening to the gendered, racialized, and classed particularities specific to the spaces I move through. During my undergraduate years at Miami, I witnessed a reinvigorated conversation around sexual assault as the media reported on the vital chorus of "Time's Up's and "Me Too"s and yet, I felt strongly

[4] Chanel Miller, *Know My Name* (Viking, Penguin Random House, 2019), 308-309.

that the coverage of these movements absented a deeper historical context: namely, how sexual violence could not be reduced to a contemporary phenomenon on college campuses, but rather is fundamentally ingrained in the U.S. culture of racial capitalism, land theft and extraction, and white supremacy.

I craved more rigorous historicization of the Me Too movement, while also grappling with my personal struggle to put my own experiences into adequate words. I remember reading the wall of social media posts after #metoo hashtag had gone viral, and feeling too paralyzed to share a status myself. It reminded me of how, when I was an undergraduate at Miami, I never participated in the Women's Center's yearly awareness campaign in which survivors wrote their stories with sharpies on neon-colored t-shirts and pinned them on clotheslines that zig-zagged across our main quad. I was always too ashamed and too unable to find the right words to describe what had happened. Moreover, I think on some level, I worried that placing my experiences on a t-shirt would simultaneously reduce them and make them material: if it was out there, I could not hide or run from how much it impacted me, but it also felt like a betrayal to condense all the pain I held in my body to a few sentences on a shirt.

Tarana Burke, whose activist work also includes racial and economic justice advocacy, founded Me Too ten years prior the movement's widespread popularity, a fact that reporters often add as an aside or an afterthought. In 2017, following the exposure of Harvey Weinstein's patterned sexual abuse, several famous actresses, starting with Alyssa Milano, tweeted "Me too" in order to, as Milano urged, "give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem."[5] Shortly afterwards the phrase went viral on social media. "Within a six-month span,

[5] Christie D'Zurilla, "In saying #MeToo, Alyssa Milano pushes awareness campaign about sexual assault and harassment," *Los Angeles Times,* October, 16, 2017, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-et-entertainment-news-updates-october-2017-htmlstory.html#in-saying-metoo-alyssa-milano-pushes-awareness-campaign-about-sexual-assault-and-harassment.

our message reached a global community of survivors," the "me too." website recounts. "Suddenly there were millions of people from all walks of life saying, 'me too.'" And they needed our help." While "me too" certainly led to indictments of sexual harassment in Hollywood, Black activists—including Burke—critiqued the movement's lack of intersectionality and overemphasis on the high-profile cases of wealthy white women. Leaders of the 2017 "me too" movement intended to fundamentally reveal that rape is not an isolated occurrence, and yet, in the popular discourse, various reporters and commentators often reduced their statements to a particular assailant, picking over the details of his wrongdoings or, at worst, pontificating about which man would be "next" in the women's "witch hunt."[6] Returning to the reasons Burke founded Me Too in 2006 reveals that the movement, at its core, was about *listening* as a challenging, yet instrumental practice, all along. Burke recounts the experience that caused her to start "me too" on the movement website, writing that:

> During an all-girl bonding session at our youth camp [where Burke worked], several of the girls in the room shared intimate stories about their lives. Some were the ordinary tales of teenage joys and anxieties, but others were quite painful. Just as I had done so many times before, I sat and listened to the stories, and comforted the girls as needed. When it was over, the adults advised the young women to reach out to us if they ever needed to talk, or if they needed anything else. Then we went our separate ways.
>
> The next day, Heaven—who had been in the previous night's session—asked to speak with me in private… As she attempted to talk to me that day, the look in her eyes told me this conversation would be anything but ordinary. She had a deep sadness and a yearning for confession that I read immediately. And I wanted no part of it.
>
> Finally, later in the day, she caught up with me and almost begged me to listen. I reluctantly conceded, and for the next several minutes this child, Heaven, in a halting voice, told me about her "stepdaddy"—rather, her mother's boyfriend—who was doing all sorts of monstrous things to her developing body. I was horrified by her words, and the emotions welling inside of me ran the gamut.

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[6] For examples of this rhetoric, see: Anna Livsey, "Liam Neeson says harassment allegations are now a 'witch hunt,'" *The Guardian,* January 17, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/jan/13/liam-neeson-says-harassment-allegations-have-become-a-witch-hunt and Janice Williams, "Will innocent men become 'casualties' of #MeToo movement?" *Newsweek,* January 4, 2018, https://www.newsweek.com/ronan-farrow-harvey-weinstein-metoo-755974.

> I listened until I literally could not take it anymore—which turned out to be less than five minutes. Then, right in the middle of Heaven sharing her pain with me, I cut off this little girl's story and directed her to another female counselor who I believed could 'help her better'.
>
> I will never forget the look on Heaven's face.
>
> I will never forget, because it haunts me, still. I think about her all the time. The shock of being rejected, the pain of opening a wound only to have it abruptly forced shut again – it was all on that precious little face. But I wasn't ready to help. As much as I love children, as much as I cared about that child, I did not yet possess her courage.
>
> As much as I loved her, I could not muster the energy to tell her that I understood, that I connected, that I could feel her pain. I couldn't help her release her shame, or impress upon her that none of it was her fault. But most of all, I could not find the strength to say out loud the words that were ringing in my head over and over again.
>
> I just watched her walk away from me, visibly struggling to recapture those secrets and tuck them back into their hiding place. I watched her put her "mask" back on her face and return to the world. And as I stood there, I couldn't even bring myself to whisper the words circling my mind and soul: 'me too'[7]

For Burke, the young girl—Heaven—raised a mirror, one that she was not ready to stare fearlessly into. While Burke shared Heaven's history with sexual violence, importantly it was Burke's own journey that she needed to reckon with: her own reflection that she needed to perceive clearly. Speaking with other survivors often feels like stepping through a portal of deep understanding, or at least it has been that for me; however, in those moments, while I have gained solace through shared experiences, I have also been transformed and expanded by the knowledge that other survivors are *not* my mirror image—only in the act of doing more than acknowledging, but *listening incommensurably* to specificities of their survivals am I able to begin seeing myself, other survivors' particularities, and the world around me more attentively. And only from clarity can change commence.

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[7] Tarana Burke, "History & Inception," *me too.,* https://metoomvmt.org/get-to-know-us/history-inception/.

Throughout my dissertation, I have shown how artists map places in order to theorize justice, agency, and transformation. I began my first chapter with Nina Simone's declaration that she wanted her audiences "to be to pieces." Simone emphasized her spectators' limitations, disrupting the spectacle of her Black female body on stage, while also requiring rigor from them and building a commons of incommensurability in the concert hall. In my second chapter, I discussed how Tanya Tagaq mapped the land as an active agent, thus sounding sovereignty and relationality. Nona Faustine created an ancestral map of New York, at once indicting its history of African enslavement and systems of racial capitalism, while also crafting a space for loving flesh and rewriting the conditions of vision.

At the end of my first chapter, I recounted the story of Philomela, who transforms into a nightingale after her rape: before her metamorphosis, however, she stitched her story to cloth. Her rapist cut out her tongue to silence her, just like the men of *True Detective: Night Country* attacked Annie*,* but Philomela's words persisted when she wove them onto that tapestry, as Annie's story remains in the land and amongst her circle of Indigenous women in the fictional town of Ennis, Alaska. I wonder if Philomela, when sewing her testimony, felt as conflicted as I did about writing my story on a Women's Center t-shirt: did the fabric fail to contain the depths of her tale of trespass and survival—was there something in her birdsong that exceeded language? Both things can be true: Philomela organized her story into words so that she could survive and seek justice, so that others could read the truth; and yet, through her flight of freedom, she discovered a new way to be in her body and in doing so, she sang and soared, sensing an embodied liberation that perhaps can never really be captured by narrative.

Philomela's story resonates with another tale in Ovid's *Metamorphoses:* that of Daphne, who transforms into a tree to escape Apollo's rape. "Cove me, O mother Earth," she called, and

"torpor seized on all her body […] a thick bark closed her gentle bosom, and her hair became as moving leaves; her arms were changed to waving branches, and her active feet as clinging roots were fastened to the ground—her face was hidden with encircling leaves."[8] Nature protects Daphne as she twines herself into its soil and branches, however, Apollo continued to kiss her tree bark, even as she "shrank from every kiss." He used her branches to fashion his laurel crown, her wood to construct a bow and lyre, and his powers to make her evergreen. Euro-Western artists from William Shakespeare to Gian Lorenzo Bernini have drawn from this myth in their work. The story is one where man's sexual forcefulness is wed clearly to his desire to conquer nature, yet Euro-Western artists' depictions of it serve to reinforce and Christianize Daphne's virtue and chastity or— as is the case in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*—use her maimed body as a plot device and object for the male characters to act upon. As Vanessa Watts writes, within Euro-Western thought and its epistemological-ontological framework, humans "reside over nature" and "societies were built-upon [that] domination."[9] Euro-Western artists' portrayals of Daphne's story served to map chastity onto nature and/or reassert Man's dominance over it, thus reinscribing an order of relations where the human, as defined through Euro-Western "Man," is on top.

Anishinaabekwe artist Rebecca Belmore (as well as many other Indigenous and non-Euro-Western artists) offers another genealogy of the tree and gendered sexual violence, one that critiques epistemological-ontological frameworks of dominance, while not being defined by them. In her forthcoming book *Critical Dreaming,* Lilian Mengesha traces how Belmore's use of

[8] Naso, P. Ovidius, *Metamorphoses*, Lines 1.525-649, original English trans. Arthur Golding (1567), accessed via *Perseus* (1922), https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0028%3Abook%3D1%3Acard%3D525.

[9] Watts, "Indigenous place-thought & agency," 24-25.

trees and birchbark in artworks such as *Speaking to their Mother* and *One Thousand One-Hundred Eighty-One* forward ethics of place-based relations and public accountability, respectively.[10] Furthermore, while I do not have space to thoroughly explore this in my conclusion, Black women artists have also traced an important lineage of trees, violence, and relationality particular to histories of rape and lynching in the US: this genealogy includes Faustine, as I discussed in the previous chapter, as well as Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit," which Simone famously covered, and Morrison's cartographies of the clearing and the tree-like scars on Sethe's back in *Beloved.* Each of these works could (and should) be entire dissertations; however, for the sake of space, I will focus briefly on Belmore's invocation of the tree in her performance of "Facing the Monumental" at Queen's Park, Toronto before returning to Sulkowicz's "Mattress Performance" for my final conclusion.

On a bright afternoon in Queen's Park, Rebecca Belmore coincided "Facing the Monumental" with Canada Day, a national holiday celebrating the 1867 British Northern America Act, which established Canada as a federation of provinces under British dominion. The 1867 act is part of the long and continual history of eroding the legal tribal status of Indigenous women that directly attacks Native nations' land sovereignty. The architects of Queen's Park praise colonization through many monuments, which include at least six statues of settlers and one of King Edward VII atop a horse.

Belmore orchestrated her performance around an alternate kind of monument, the living mitogomizh (oak tree). Writing about Belmore's performance, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson calls such oaks "our grandmothers, carrying water inside them, rooted to the land, their bodies magnificent archives of story."[11] Belmore consecrated the land surrounding the park's oldest tree

[10] See: Mengesha, *Critical Dreaming.*
[11] See Simpson, *As We Have Always Done,* 204-206.

with four pots of niibish, or nibi (water), prior to her performance. As Simpson notes, the water signified that the performance "was going to be about women" as in Nishnaabeg philosophy Nibi is synonymous with women's sovereignty."[12] Over the course of the hour-long piece, Belmore led her three shkaabewisag (helpers) around the tree, encircling it with water-moistened brown craft paper. Together, they wrapped one of her helpers to the tree, so eventually the shkaaabewis woman disappeared into the oak behind the paper and a long, black-haired wig Belmore placed over her face. Simpson reflects that "when mitigomizh was wrapped with the paper, it reminded me of a sexy, strapless party dress […] Mitigomizh for me had become sexualized through no choice of her own."[13] Suddenly, in the midst of this disappearance, the vibrational sounds of bullets "terroriz[ed] the pines" as they rang through the park. Officers had fired off a twenty-one-gun salute in honor of Canada Day. Soldiers' gunfire accompanied the informal sounds of the park, including passerby's chatter, which highlighted how normalized violence against Indigenous women and 2SQ is in settler states. Through disappearing both the woman and oak tree, and timing this "absent presence" with settlers' gun blasts, Belmore suggested that the State's rendering of Indigenous women as "rapeable" and "disposable" is a tactic to further land claims and ownership over the earth's resources.[14] Through binding the woman and the oak tree, however, Belmore argues that the true monuments of the land are based in reciprocity, survival, and remembrance, not the glorification of domination.

Sulkowicz's mattress is not the same as Belmore's tree, however, both map their surrounding terrain by explicitly critiquing institutional violence through performance and embodying a practice of relationality that honors the individual's agency while not being defined

[12] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done,* 203.
[13] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done,* 204-205.
[14] See Paula Gunn Allen, "Violence and the American Indian Woman," in *The Speaking Profits Us,* ed. Maryviolet Burns (Seattle: Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 1986).

by isolation. For Belmore, her performance mapped "Queen's Park," and more broadly the Indigenous lands of what is known as Canada, as scored by settler-colonial violence (as indicated by the gun blasts, in particular); she linked the State's violation towards Indigenous women to their conquest of the land, thus naming an interlocking pattern of abuse, while demanding more respect for both Native women and the earth. Sulkowicz harnessed her mattress to rupture Columbia's marketable and supposedly idyllic college campus setting through visually critiquing the institution's inaction and therefore endorsement of rape.

One of Sulkowicz's "rules for engagement" in her performance piece was that she could not ask for help from anyone, but if it was offered, she could accept.[15] At first, this rule was challenging for me to understand within the "commons of incommensurability:" isn't the point to lean on one another during chronic crisis, to break away from the individualist "bootstraps" mentality? But as I meditated on it more, I find this rule to be an apt metaphor for incommensurable survivals. Ultimately, only the victim of the crime senses what it feels like to move through their own memories; only they can carry their own mattress, even as others may offer a knowing nod, a generous hand, or walk in time beside them.

My survival of my own rapes has always been in relation to others, and not just because rape requires another party, a harm-doer who is also deserving of transformative justice.[16] Sitting through what feels like catastrophe and realizing that there is a longer, broader context beyond me, that has nothing to do with me, brings me closer to something deeper than empathy or a simple acknowledgement of pain. My beginnings precede me. When I hold my loved-one

[15] Sulkowicz, "Carry That Weight."
[16] For more on transformative justice, see: Patrisse Cullors, "Abolition and Reparations: Histories of Resistance, Transformative Justice, and Accountability," *Harvard Law Review* 132 (2019); Generation Five, *Toward Transformative Justice: A Liberatory Approach to Child Sexual Abuse and other forms of Intimate and Community Violence* (2007); and Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice* (Haymarket Books, 2021).

survivors and let myself be held by them, when I live in that commons of incommensurability, I am still learning that survival is the first form of resistance. I am still learning that there is more to life than survival. Just like catastrophe cannot be isolated to an individual moment—must exist within the collective and historical contexts—survival is not a singular instance or a place one arrives. Pain, like grief, warps space and time; it stains the world around you with the textures of memory. But in that deep sorrow, you may remember that you are never alone.

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