Forms of Frustration: Unrest and Unfulfillment in American Literature after 1934

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Abstract

This dissertation offers an account of what the condition we call *frustration* has meant and might mean for modern and contemporary literary study. Building on theories of affect as they relate to race, class, and gender in American literature, I focus in particular upon the articulation of feeling in the face of systemic injustice within recent US literary history. Building on recent scholarship suggesting that feeling gives structure to cultural formations, I argue that a history of unrest in America reveals a pattern of artistic response, a *sensibility*, precipitated by specific historical moments but translated into aesthetic practice through a stable constellation of affective structures. This constellation, I argue, is an *affective situation* governed not by anger, despair, or hope, but by frustration as a persistent structural condition. To this end, I examine continuities between politically-engaged aesthetic projects from three periods of discontent in American history: radical journals like *Partisan Review* in the 1930s; the revolutionary poetry of the Black Arts Movement in the 60s; and contemporary revenge-driven novels drawing from the Red Power movement.

In pursuing this inquiry, my work attempts to offer an account of frustration that bridges the gap between specific articulation and historical pattern. Where Sianne Ngai uses an "ugly feeling" (like irritation) to investigate how Nella Larsen's novel *Quicksand* articulates racial injustice, I attempt to trace a larger historical trajectory of a radical sensibility in America. Alternatively, where Lauren Berlant uses affective experience to perform a broad analysis of the false promises and "cruel optimism" of recent American and European culture, I narrow my focus to three periods of social unrest in American history and embeddedness in an affective situation shared between artistic movements from those periods. Building on other scholarship that has viewed affect as potentially pre-discursive (Massumi, Deleuze), bound up in psycho-

biological drives (Sedgwick, Tomkins), or as a discursive quality itself (Berlant, Ahmed), this project looks to periods of literary radicalism in the United States with an eye for those situations governed by discontent, unrest, and frustration as structural and structuring forces—*affective situations* in which individuals, groups, and institutions respond to the use of power to block, bewilder, disappoint, and prevent.

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Introduction: Why Frustration?

My interest in frustration emerges from its ability, as a term, to capture the conceptually messy intersections of subjectivity, agency, ethical response, and artistic expression, all over a variable temporal scale. We can feel frustrated when faced with minor vexations, but also when faced with widespread structural conditions; we can be frustrated as individuals, but also as collectives; such a feeling can surge up all at once, or wear away at us day by day over the course of many years. Unlike many other feelings we recognize as politically charged, frustration bridges a gap between feeling and status: we can *feel* frustrated, as individuals responding to an event or set of circumstances, but also *be* frustrated, as social agents whose agency has, for whatever reason, been obstructed. Moreover, as we shall see, both can act as a spur to combat perceived injustice in the world through aesthetic production.

In this sense, while some may view frustration as a "minor," perhaps even trivial feeling ill-suited to investigate experiences of political injustice—rather than, say, anger—it is precisely this overlap of mundane, day-to-day experience and broader structural conditions that makes this affective structure worth examining. Investigating this feeling/status allows us to pursue important questions: what happens when feelings associated with injustice persist for years? Or decades? What happens when certain affective responses become so consistent with a given structural condition that the two are difficult to disentangle? To give an example combining both: what happens when various frustrations emerging from personal, day-to-day encounters with systemic inequality (i.e., microaggressions) accrue over time, building, informing, even transforming one another? And how do these affective conditions that emerge from persistent injustice relate to aesthetic production?

Not all forms of frustration, of course, connect back to political injustice. But many do, and often in diverse ways that reveal unique patterns, both in terms of aesthetic practice and the linkages between affect and specific historical situations. Because of its conceptual complexity, a feeling/status like frustration intertwines readily with other, more recognizably "political" feelings and categories—anger and despair, but also hope and even resolve—while allowing us to see how encounters with injustice can inspire complex responses that push at the boundaries of what might seem to count as a "feeling." By focusing our lens through various forms of frustration—the way these forms emerge out of specific structural conditions as well as aesthetic practices—we are better able to track this complexity and explore the conceptual terrain between affective response, agency, and unjust historical situations.

One example: in her keynote to the 1981 National Women's Studies Association Conference, Audre Lorde begins by discussing the feelings that racism brings into her life. "My response to racism," she writes,

> is anger. I have lived with that anger, on that anger, beneath that anger, on top of that anger, ignoring that anger, feeding upon that anger, learning to use that anger before it laid my visions to waste, for most of my life. Once I did it in silence, afraid of the weight of that anger. My fear of that anger taught me nothing. Your fear of that anger will teach you nothing, also. (Lorde 1997, 278)

Lorde's relationship with anger in this passage is complicated. A response to systemic racism, this feeling has spatial dimensions that shift over time ("with," "on," "beneath," "on top of"), as though it were a concrete—and persistent—presence in the world around which she must constantly maneuver. In these maneuverings, this feeling can be so destructive (laying "visions to waste") that the very fact of it ("the weight of that anger") sparks chain-reactions into other feelings, like fear. Yet this feeling can also provide nourishment ("feeding upon that anger"); though dangerous, it can be wielded tactically ("learning to use that anger"). And while isolating

(lived with "in silence"), it can become an object of knowledge in its own right—one capable of creating community (shared experiences between "my fear" and "your fear"), providing, for example, the occasion for a keynote address to an interested audience.

Though Lorde soon after shifts her focus to discuss "the uses of anger" more generally, these initial lines provide the beginnings of a phenomenology for a certain kind of affective response. Her descriptions, in effect, push at the boundaries of what a feeling like "anger" can be as it relates to individual experience: this is an anger that seems to exist outside the self—embedded in and emerging from external, concrete realities. This condition also takes on a number of different relational configurations over long periods of time—something Lorde has "lived with," as she describes, "for most of [her] life." Her account hearkens back to the word's root, which it shares with "anguish," or the list of feelings that the OED provides in its first definition: "trouble, affliction, vexation, sorrow." ("anger, n.", OED Online). In the spread of this definition alone, we can see the conceptual complexity that emerges when one rigorously examines, as Lorde does here, the intersections between subjectivity, affective experience, and structural injustice.

In another example, we see an account of a similar condition in Sherman Alexie's 1996 novel *Indian Killer,* a thriller that follows the investigation of a murderer in Seattle and the explosion of lingering racial tensions that follow in their wake. Alexie's character, like Lorde, discusses anger in such a way that pushes at the conceptual limits of what the term might normally accommodate:

> All the anger in the world has come to my house. It's there in my closet. In my refrigerator. In the water. In the sheets. It's in my clothes. Can you smell it? I can never run away from it. It's in my hair. I can feel it between my teeth. Can you taste it? I hear it all the time. All the time the anger is talking to me. (Alexie 1996, 200)

For this character, anger is not in the air. It *is* the air. As with Lorde's description, this account renders the feeling spatially—it invades his most private spaces (home, closet, fridge, bedsheets), permeates his body (clothes, hair, teeth), and obtrudes into his sensory faculties (an odor lodged in his person that also speaks). And like Lorde, the speaker appeals to the idea that this condition might be shared, shareable ("Can you smell it?")—perhaps even that the act of sharing might provide some form of relief. Its temporality, also, is ambiguous: though this anger has come from somewhere, it seems to have no beginning or end, existing "all the time" in simple present indicatives, and with an intensity the speaker can only identify as "[a]ll the anger in the world." It is a condition, in short, that has restructured the speaker's relationship to the world and to other people while also being a concrete, external reality that exists somewhere out there *in* "the world."

From philosophers,[1] to literary scholars,[2] to cultural/social critics,[3] when writers discuss anger, they emphasize its powerful and historic links with concepts of justice and injustice.

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[1] When philosophers like Martha Nussbaum and Phillip Fisher discuss anger, they also make connections between anger and injustice. Grounding his arguments in classical understandings of feeling, emotion, and passion, Fisher describes anger after Aristotle as "the most primitive and spontaneous evidence of an innate feeling for justice and injustice within human nature" (Fisher 121). In her book *Anger and Forgiveness* Nussbaum describes anger's "twofold reputation"—that of being both "a valuable part of the moral life, essential to human relations both ethical and political" as well as "a central threat to decent human interactions"— then claims that "one of these contentions [the latter] is far better grounded than the other" (Nussbaum 2016, 14-15). Her ultimate recommendation, however—"a transition from anger to constructive thinking about future good" (16)—seems to echo what Lorde, hooks, and others have already claimed: that anger must be carefully wielded, transformed into something productive rather than destructive.

[2] Literary scholars have likewise tracked how writers have wielded anger as a political force in various historical traditions: one recent example is the work of Linda M. Grasso on the tradition of anger in American feminist literature stretching back to the mid-nineteenth century, in which she argues that "[t]he fundamental premise of this book is that anger can be an organizing principle of American women's literary history when it is employed as a mode of inquiry … a paradigm for understanding the ways in which women, at different historical moments, have responded to myriad forms of oppression through the literary imagination" (Grasso 4). Another recent example is Cari M. Carpenter's work on female Native American novelists of sentiment from the 19th century, and the political implications of their strategically-ambivalent performance of what she calls "playing angry"—see her first chapter, "Playing Angry: S. Alice Callahan's *Wynema*"(Carpenter 2008, 29-53). Outside the American context, Andrew Stauffer's work on anger in Romantic literature in England similarly explores the role anger plays in questions of justice: "the fight in England over the French Revolution became simultaneously a fight over the place of angry words and deeds in the modern liberal state" (Stauffer 1).

[3] In an argument similar to the one Lorde makes in keynote above, bell hooks writes that "[c]onfronting my rage, witnessing the way it moved me to grow and change, I understood that it had the potential not only to destroy but

Anger is, in many basic ways, a response to perceived injustice: as Lorde writes, "My response to racism is anger." But, for example, when bell hooks describes the intensity behind a sudden flash of rage—her book *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* opens with the sentence "I am writing this essay sitting beside an anonymous white male that I long to murder"—she seeks to channel this in-the-moment energy instead into a longer-term "passion for freedom and justice that illuminates, heals, and makes redemptive struggle possible" (hooks 8, 20). Similarly, when philosopher Phillip Fisher, drawing from the classical philosophical tradition, claims that the "impersonal" nature of judicial systems emerges "precisely in the negation of the specific attributes of anger," he argues that this system "allow[s] time to pass before holding a trial" because "[a]nger acts instantaneously and cools with time. Our one-year delay outlasts anger, purifying the system of the initial disgust and rage we feel towards" criminal acts (Fisher 123). Anger is not only a response to injustice—it is often an immediate, heat-of-the-moment response.

In light of this, I ask again: what happens, then, when anger lasts for years? Or decades? What transformations does this feeling undergo when it becomes, as Audre Lorde describes it, something to be lived with/on/beneath? Or when, as for Alexie's character, it becomes as much a fact of life as one's bedsheets, as intimately known as the contents of one's mouth, or as constant as a voice that speaks "all the time"? Anguish, affliction, vexation, trouble, sorrow—the OED's list of terms indicates some of the ways in which one term might open the door to the affective and phenomenological complexity of the conditions described above. Building on the insights offered by these accounts, I am interested in how persistent experiences of injustice produce

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also to construct"—it is, in short, not a pathological response but rather "an appropriate response to injustice" that can be used productively (hooks 16, 26).

complexes of feeling that may involve, but also may extend beyond, what might be called an immediate affective response of anger, rage, or wrath.

This dissertation project seeks to examine this complex of feelings—including but not limited to anger—and uses the temporally, conceptually, and experientially flexible lens of *frustration* to do so. Moreover, as indicated above, I will argue that when a persistent set of affective responses emerging from systemic injustice takes on the structure of a *condition*, our vocabulary for describing these feelings must shift accordingly. To this end, I adopt the framework of the *affective situation*. In brief, as I will return to it momentarily, I argue that viewing affective experience situationally—building on the work of others who have viewed it as something potentially pre-discursive (Massumi, Deleuze), bound up in psycho-biological drives (Sedgwick, Tomkins), or as a discursive quality itself (Berlant, Ahmed)—helps us to account for a different texture and more variable scale of affective experience, with both institutions and individuals as actors, as well as a temporal frame that accounts both for single moments and intergenerational historical legacies.

Frustration as a lens allows us to see and examine this combination of structural process, individual experience, and variable temporal scale. Like anger, frustration requires a belief or investment being balked, stymied, denied, postponed, or disappointed. Unlike anger, however, frustration is not what Fisher might call a "vehement passion," one of those "strong emotions" that "often surprise[s]" us with new knowledge that stems from "impassioned or vehement states within ourselves" (Fisher 2). Unlike the sudden rush of "killing rage" described by hooks, Lorde's feelings do not come as a surprise: they are, in fact, horribly familiar, even if they might sometimes obtrude in intense or unexpected ways. Frustration is, moreover, more "technical" than anger—a condition or status while also a feeling, and as a feeling almost always knotted

with a number of other affective responses. In this sense, it is closer to one of Sianne Ngai's "ugly feelings," one of the "negative affects" that responds to "a general state of obstructed agency with respect to other human actors or to the social as such" (Ngai 3).

Frustration grows within, emerges from, attaches to, revolves around, and snowballs out of this sense of obstruction. Because of this, understanding how frustration is structured—and how this structure *differs* from that of anger—results in a more robust understanding of the manifold affective dimensions in which active, acting subjectivities exist. Frustration, including the feelings with which it is entangled, is bound up with quests for justice, recognition, and full social agency, as well as the personal pain and political injustices that occur when these claims are denied. The periods of American history, and cultural formations therein, on which I choose to focus—a radical journal from the 1930s, revolutionary poetry from the 1960s, and violent revenge novels from the turn of the millennium that take aim at American institutions—offer three distinct vantages on the forms frustration can take, as well as the aesthetic-critical responses it can inspire.

In what follows, I will offer a more complete account of frustration as an explanatory concept and aesthetic category, including its prominence in Freudian psychoanalysis and subsequent absence in discussions of feeling, affect, and emotion. I will then discuss how a better understanding of frustration encourages us to examine affect *situationally*, and how this new methodological lens relates to the somewhat unusual range of methodological frameworks I adopt in the chapters of this dissertation.

What is frustration?

In terms of denotation, the OED gives only one definition for *frustration*: "The action of frustrating; disappointment; defeat; an instance of this" ("frustration, n.", OED Online). The

word *frustrate* has three definitions: (1) "To balk, disappoint (a person)," (2) "To deprive of effect, render ineffectual; to neutralize, counteract (an effort or effect)," and (3) "To render vain; to balk, disappoint (a hope, expectation, etc.); to baffle, defeat, foil (a design, purpose, etc.)" ("frustrate, v.", OED Online). According to these, the classes of frustrate-able things seem generally to include people, efforts/effects, and expectations/ purposes. Each, however, invites frustration of a slightly different nature. Moreover, each taps into a separate, but equally rich, web of connotations. A rough schema of these senses and their resonances might look like this:

First, as it pertains to people, frustration involves a peaking of affect that crests into a conscious, recognizable emotion. This is the experience of being—and knowing—that you are frustrated by something. Rei Terada, in navigating the interpretive usefulness of distinctions between terms like affect, emotion, and feeling, would describe this as an *emotion*—"a psychological, at least minimally interpretive experience whose physiological aspect is *affect*"—rather than a *feeling*, which she describes as "a capacious term that connotes both physiological sensations (affects) and psychological states (emotions)" (Terada 4).

As an emotion experienced by individuals, frustration is generally unpleasant. But it has the capacity to inspire or challenge us, presenting an opportunity for grit, determination, resolve, and ultimately growth. The challenges involved in learning a new skill, for example, might cause frustration at the same time that they offer the promise of a reward—in this case, competency in the new skill—for those who "stick with it" or "see it through." In a 2003 essay, Judith Butler goes so far as to claim that "to pass through what is difficult and unfamiliar is an essential part of critical thinking within the academy," citing Adorno and Benjamin as she discusses the "common predicament" of translation in social and intellectual life (Butler 199, 203).

In this first sense, frustration as an emotion can catalyze a number of other feelings: anger (towards that which frustrates) or hopelessness (at the prospect of insurmountable obstacles), as well as pride (having overcome a challenge) or even shame (having failed to do so). It is a prime example of what Sara Ahmed means when she claims that affect can be "sticky"—that is to say, messily entwined with the 'stuff' with which we live and to which we are attached, as well as the invisible histories that, through repetition, build "sticky" links that metonymically transfer meaning and significance from one thing to another (Ahmed 2004, 10-11, 44-45).

With all this in mind, present scholarly discussions of affect, emotion, and feeling as they pertain to subjectivity and cultural objects offer a great deal in understanding the subtleties of this first sense of frustration. The second sense of frustration, however, fits less easily into extant scholarly formulations. As it pertains to efforts and effects, frustration involves some form of neutralizing, counteracting, or rendering ineffectual. No longer an emotion, per se, this form of frustration is more of a status: it is technical, almost mechanical, and does not require the presence of a thinking, feeling subject to take place, only that an effort or effect has been prevented. Computer programs, bacteria cultures, crystal formations—along with any other process, conscious or not, upon which someone or something could intervene—can all be frustrated in this sense of the word.[4]

The third and final sense of the word returns to those actions taken by subjects, but adds a different wrinkle. As it pertains to hopes, expectations, designs, or purposes, frustration opens itself to more intangible things or groupings in which individuals may find themselves involved, or to which they may find themselves attached. A hope, purpose, or desire can be expressed by

[4] For more on post-human subjectivity and agency, see, for example, the work of N. Katherine Hayles—in particular her 1999 *How We Became Posthuman*, as well as her more recent *Unthought: The Power of Cognitive Nonconscious* (2017).

an individual or shared by a community or movement; political parties can have collective designs frustrated by canny opponents, poor logistical organization, or historical accident. As with the second sense of the word, the question of what, exactly, is being frustrated in these examples becomes hazy.

But these three senses of this word are themselves entangled. Moreover, the conceptual tidiness of this three-pronged schema highlights the fraught terms and concepts on which these definitions depend. What counts as something capable of desire, design, or feeling? What makes a feeling count as feel-able, and for whom? Put most broadly: what counts as a subject?

In her 2001 work *Feeling in Theory*, Rei Terada connects what Fredric Jameson called the "waning of affect" with a longer history of emotion disrupting philosophical categories of subjectivity:

> Feared as a hazard or prized as a mysterious gift, emotion indexes strains in philosophy—the same strains that poststructuralist theory argues fracture the classical model of subjectivity. Thus 'post-structuralist' dissatisfaction with the subject appears in *classical* thought about emotion: theories of emotion are always poststructuralist theories. … The discourse of emotion from Descartes to the present day describes emotion as nonsubjective experience in the form of self-difference within cognition. (Terada 3)

Looking carefully at any emotion, then, applies pressure to some of our most basic concepts, selfhood and subjectivity included. Examining frustration in particular, however, shows us what happens when an understanding of what Terada calls "nonsubjective emotion" collides with concrete, institutionalized structures of oppression. While frustration is, for many, an everyday occurrence for which individuals have an intuitive understanding, the gritty details of its affective structure (actors, objects, action, temporality, motivation, accountability) and their conceptual fuzziness leave it somewhere between individual feeling and systemic structure.

Previous discussions of frustration have, intentionally or not, often brought these issues to the fore; as Terada argues, "[a]ny theory of emotion today, including nonsubjective theories, owes a debt to psychoanalysis" (9). Though now almost a century old, Freud's work represents perhaps the most significant example of any one inquiry into the structure of frustration, the pressure it applies to our understandings of agency and desire, as well as the relationships it reveals between individual experience and larger social systems.[5] The psychological neurosis as an idea hinges on how Freud conceptualizes the frustration and satisfaction of various drives and desires. While one may suspect that Freud views frustration primarily as an "emotion"—what Terada calls "a psychological, at least minimally interpretive experience whose physiological aspect is *affect*" (4)—even a cursory look reveals a system of ideas troubled and complicated by the ways in which this feeling might disrupt notions of subjectivity.

To summarize, in Freud's schema the relation between frustration and psychoanalytical work is relatively straightforward: libidinal drives give us desires. Many of these desires, echoes from what he calls humankind's "primordial animal condition," are deemed impermissible by external forces (society, culture, the law, etc.) and thus denied (Freud 1953g, 10) These frustrated libidinal desires are then rerouted, repressed, and sublimated into other desires which imperfectly satisfy the libidinal desire. These substituted satisfactions can cause neuroses:

[5] Terada goes on to argue that "Any theory of emotion today, including nonsubjective theories, owes a debt to psychoanalysis. Freud's investigations of emotion are among a number of earlier approaches – Nietzsche's and Benjamin's work on pathos and allegory, Heidegger's theory of moods – that support the later texts I study here. Emotion in Freud operates very much as a differential force within experience. My goal in these pages cannot be to construct a model of poststructuralist Freudianism, but I [10] write informed by its possibility. The poststructuralist response to Freud matters to emotion in part because of the way it negotiates the tension between negation and repression. Freud recognizes that as a mode of representation, negation includes a positive dimension. Damping feelings produces compensatory displacements that may seem inferior in kind; but negation raises questions for compensation, for it hints that negated feelings may not be less represented than other feelings, and that there may be no undisplaced feelings" (Terada 9-10).

symptoms of libidinal frustration that, according to Freud, can wreak havoc on the lives of those who suffer them.[6]

Frustration also, however, plays an important role in Freud's methodology, his actual practice with patients. He claims that analysis must be performed "in a state of frustration": in "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (1937), he writes that the purpose of this is "to bring this [the patient's] conflict to a head, to develop it to its highest pitch, in order to increase the instinctual force available for its solution" (Freud 1953i, 231). The solution in question is the talking cure, through which the analyst helps bring unconscious repressions, frustrations, and neurosis-inducing conflicts into the patient's conscious mind, "for which it [then] must be possible somehow to find a solution" (Freud 1953f, 435).

In sum, then, frustration for Freud's psychoanalysis is (1) a principle cause of the problems (if not the problem itself) that psychoanalysis is meant to help resolve, and (2) a methodology to be used by the analyst to best bring out the patient's unresolved frustrations. But it is also (3) a metaphor in a larger system of metaphors used to conceptualize how desire,

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[6] For example, in his fifth lecture in 1909: "…human beings fall ill when, as a result of external obstacles or of an internal lack of adaptation, the satisfaction of their erotic needs *in reality* is frustrated." (Freud 1953a, 49)

Consider also sentences from the opening of his 1912 "Types of Onset of Neurosis": "The most obvious, the most easily discoverable and the most intelligible precipitating cause of an onset of neurosis is to be seen in the external factor which may be described in general terms as *frustration*. … Frustration has a pathogenic effect because it dams up libido" (Freud 1953b, 231-232)

Or lines from his 1916 "Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-Analytic Work": "Psycho-analytic work has furnished us with the thesis that people fall ill of a neurosis as a result of *frustration*. What is meant is the frustration of the satisfaction of their libidinal wishes" (Freud 1953c, 316).

See also lines from "Resistance and Repression," one of his "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis" given in 1917: "…the determining causes of falling ill leads to a result which can be expressed in a formula: these people fall ill in one way or another of *frustration*, when reality prevents them from satisfying their sexual wishes … symptoms can be properly viewed as substitutive satisfactions for what is missed in life" (Freud 1953d, 300)

Or, later, in "Civilization and Its Discontents" from 1930: "…a person becomes neurotic because he cannot tolerate the amount of frustration which society imposes on him in the service of its cultural ideals" (Freud 1953h, 87).

attachment, and agency work at various levels in the human mind and body. Freud's set of metaphors for libidinal forces and their frustration and/or satisfaction is one of fluid flows: valves, occlusions, pressures, releases, reroutings. Freud, for example, very frequently glosses frustration as a "damming up" of the libido.[7] In "Some Thoughts on Development and Regression—Aetiology," one of his "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis" in 1917, he explicitly describes desires, frustrations, and satisfactions as being "related to one another like a network of intercommunicating channels filled with a liquid" (Freud 1953e, 345). Later in the same text, he adds that "[t]he conflict is conjured up by frustration, as a result of which the libido, deprived of satisfaction, is driven to look for other objects and paths" (349). To paraphrase: desire flows through us, unbidden, like water surging through a system of pipes. Societal law denies this desire, closing valves in its path, frustrating this flow. But the pressure of the flow remains, and this pressure finds alternative means of escape through unknown, elaborate, and sometimes destructive paths—paths difficult to trace back to their source.

In this sense, then, Freud's understanding of "frustration" as a feeling and concept highlights its status also as a technical condition: the mechanical closing and opening of valves, stoppages damming up flows; an occlusion of "desire" as a tangible, observable fact to be identified, documented, and untangled by an analyst as though they were a plumber resolving a stoppage or blockage in a pipe.

In an attempt to reframe discussions of "frustration" in Freud's work, Jacques Lacan claimed in the third year of his seminar, 1955-56, that the idea has less to do with real, external objects of desire being denied, but rather symbolic frustrations associated with those denials (Lacan 235). In other words, even long after a denied object has been given to a person, the

[7] See, for a few examples, his essays "Transference" (Freud 1953f, 434); "Types of Onset of Neurosis" (Freud 1953b, 233, 234, 236, 237); and "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (Freud 1953i, 231).

symbolic mark of the original denial and frustration may remain and persist at the level of the symbolic order. For example: a child is denied a bottle; it is frustrating not to receive the bottle; but, more importantly for Lacan, it is frustrating not to receive what the bottle might represent: a parent's love, safety, and so on.

For both Lacan and Freud, then, objects, desires, and symbols are entangled with one another. Frustration occurs in a symbolic order that is enmeshed with social elements: mechanical as well as affective, individual as well as bound up with signifiers and thus larger social meaning. In this sense, for much psychoanalytic thought, frustration is simultaneously a scientific fact to be identified and recorded (an instance of botched plumbing and the rerouting of primordial flows) as well as an intangible, even imaginary symbolic event deeply enmeshed with its social surroundings.

Affective situations

But my interest is not in the history or legacy of psychoanalytical thought. Rather, as indicated above, I am interested in how a term like frustration captures the intersections of subjectivity, agency, ethical response, and artistic expression. Moreover, that these intersections can occur over a variable temporal scale and be intertwined deeply with certain social and political structures. To this end, frustration invites us to view affect *situationally*—a methodological framework alluded to above and to which I will now turn.

In some of the most significant recent works of criticism on feeling and affect, scholars often hang the larger relevance of this research on the ways in which individual affect intersects with societal structure. For example, in *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant argues that "the present is perceived, first, affectively," describing a number of emergent "temporal genres"—such as "the episode, the interruption, the aside," and so on—that affect, as a lens, allows us to examine

within histories of the present (Berlant 2011, 4-5). Among these genres is "the situation," which Berlant, borrowing from Alain Badiou's work on the "event," describes as

> a state of things in which *something* that will perhaps matter is unfolding amid the usual activity of life […] a state of animated and animating suspension that forces itself on consciousness, that produces a sense of the emergence of something in the present that may become an event. (Berlant 2011, 5).

Berlant's examination of this and other "genre[s] of unforeclosed experience," or what she also calls "genre[s] of social time," is at the core of *Cruel Optimism* (Berlant 2011, 6).[8] Such a lens allows her to connect individual affect with a material history of how the present unfolds in a given social context.

Likewise, Fredric Jameson in his recent *Antinomies of Realism* uses affect as a means of discussing the temporality of realism as a mode of literary writing. For Jameson, affect offers a framework for his investigation into what he calls the "two chronological end points of realism: its genealogy in storytelling and the tale, its future dissolution in the literary representation of affect" (Jameson *Antinomies*, 10). While Jameson's interest lies primarily in traditional literary narrative—specifically "the combinations [affect] forms with the longer-range temporalities of storytelling, of récit and of destiny" (Jameson 2013, 46)—he, in discussing affect, seeks to discuss time and temporality. Echoing Berlant, he identifies the "present" as "the realm of affect" (10).

But if the two textual examples I included in this introduction are any indication, affective experience has a great deal to say about temporalities beyond that of the individual to the present. Affective responses to injustice may very well unfold chronologically in one "genre

[8] In Berlant's own words: "The situation is therefore a genre of social time and practice in which a relation of persons and worlds is sensed to be changing but the rules for habitation and the genres of storytelling about it are unstable, in chaos. […] This kind of attention to the becoming-event of something involves questions about ideology, normativity, affective adjustment, improvisation, and the conversion of singular to general or exemplary experience. This set of processes—the becoming historical of the affective event and the improvisation of genre amid pervasive uncertainty—organizes *Cruel Optimism*." (Berlant 2011, 6)

of unforeclosed experience" or another—but they also add up over days, weeks, and years, each new experience informing and being informed by the last. While Jameson seeks to investigate "combinations" between affect and "longer-range temporalities of storytelling," I would argue that affective response as it unfolds in the present is itself imbricated deeply with past experience and future expectation. bell hooks's sudden flash of "killing rage" doesn't occur in a vacuum—as much as they can be immediate and "emergent," so affective responses can emerge from hardened, predictable, structural relations.

We see gestures towards this in Sianne Ngai's excellent *Ugly Feelings*, in she focuses "on the negative affects" relating to "the predicaments posed by a general state of obstructed agency with respect to other human actors or to the social as such—a dilemma I take as charged with political meaning regardless of whether the obstruction is actual or fantasized, or whether the agency obstructed is individual or collective" (Ngai 3). She then goes on to relate "[t]hese situations of passivity, as uniquely disclosed and interpreted by ignoble feelings" as indicative of "bourgeois art's increasingly resigned and pessimistic understanding of its *own* relationship to political action," such that "the very effort of thinking the aesthetic and political together … is a prime occasion for ugly feelings" (Ngai 3). For our purposes, what's most interesting about Ngai's discussion here of negative affects emerging from thwarted agency is how such blockages of feeling act—they "pose," "disclose," and "interpret"—and what they act on—"predicaments," "dilemmas," and "situations." This language, I would argue, reaches for but does not fully arrive at the ways in which affect can be *situational*—that is, emerging from the "[p]lace or position of things in relation to surroundings or to each other"; a structural as well as structur*ing* force; both a response to concrete reality and a structural reality in its own right (OED "situation" 3a).

In this sense, repurposing Berlant's language, rather than view "the situation" as "a genre of social time" that allows us to analyze emergent experience, I want to view the situation as *a genre of affective experience* that allows us analyze the ways in which affect exists structurally. What, for example, are we to make of "a state of things" that has already "unfold[ed] amid the usual activity of life" but continues to produce "a state of animated and animating suspension that forces itself on consciousness"—that, in fact, has become a part of the institutions, systems, and social forms that organize experience while also generating intense, complex, affective response? This kind of "situation," then, is not so much a temporal genre as a conceptual term for the set of "predicaments," "dilemmas," and "situations" one might explore with Ngai's framework from *Ugly Feelings*. While feeling giving structure to cultural formations has a long history,[9] the *situation* as a genre of affective experience shows us how affect can both structure cultural formations while also *being structured by* larger institutions, systems, and networks.

Taking this one step further, my goal in this project is to examine affective situations governed by frustration as a structural and structuring force: *frustrative situations* in which actors are not so much "made to do" (to borrow a phrase from Bruno Latour) as they are "made *not* to do," or "made to do *otherwise*" by frustrating actors that use power to block, stymie, bewilder, disappoint, and prevent (Latour 1999, 25). I use the word "frustrative"—an archaic form the OED defines as "tending to frustrate, balk, or defeat" ("frustrative, adj.," OED Online)—to key in on the ongoing, situational, status-like aspects of felt experience when tangled up with institutional structures, the "–ive" suffix implying "a permanent or habitual quality or tendency" (similar to the difference between 'performing' and 'performative') ("-ive, suffix," OED online).

Methods and chapters

[9] For more on this, see Philip Fisher's discussion of grief within the elegy and fear within the gothic (Fisher 9), or Martha Nussbaum's claim that pity and fear in Aristotelian tragedy shape the genre itself (Nussbaum 1995, 53).

My interest in this theoretical framework, however, emerges from the historical texts and contexts I examine. In the process of examining how writers articulate and represent responses to injustice over the course of the century, a pattern of artistic and critical response emerges that seems to stem from structural—not spontaneous, emergent, unpredictable—affective experience. So where Ngai uses an "ugly feeling" (like irritation) to investigate how a single novel like Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* articulates racial injustice, and where Berlant uses affective experience to perform a broad analysis of the false promises and "cruel optimism" of American and European culture, my investigation required that I operate at a scale somewhere between single text and larger historical trajectory—to read widely enough within openly politicized literary writing to identify when a group of texts is operating within or responding to a frustrative situation, but also to delve deeply enough into those texts to account for the full variety and vivid complexities of their relationship to this situation.

To this end, I narrow my focus to social unrest in three specific periods of American history, but within each period my framework adopts a somewhat unusual scale: an entire decade of a magazine, a corpus of over two-dozen books of poetry, and a constellation of novels involved in a shared genre experiment. This perspective—not quite traditional close reading and not quite "distant reading"—allows the larger patterns that make up frustrative situations to emerge without forfeiting the granularity of closer reading where appropriate. Moreover, this perspective also allows us to examine how frustration with systemic injustice in America, emerging from this feeling of being stuck in frustrative situations, takes shape in specific literary forms: namely, in a text's *mood* (broadly, how the writer relates to the object being written about), its *tone* (also broadly, how the writer relates to their intended audience), and its *genre* (those conventions of plot, character, themes, formal elements—virtual or otherwise—that

position literary texts with regards to one another). These more formal literary features are deeply interconnected with one another and certainly do not encompass all the ways in which a feeling might influence a given work. However, for the purposes of gaining purchase on an under-examined feeling from the standpoint of literary study, I believe these three "forms" of frustration make useful starting-points for investigating how such literary forms relate to the frustrative situations out of which they emerge.

These chapters, and their unique methodologies, are as follows: in my first chapter, I argue that this form of frustration as a systemic condition in American cultural production first coalesced in the heated literary-critical debates of the 1930s. Where many consider the literary criticism of the "cultural front" to be shallow, instrumentalist, and brazenly propagandistic (see: Soviet realism), I argue that looking carefully at this often neglected period gives us a richer, more complex genealogy of the affective dimensions of literary criticism in the US. Specifically, I examine the relationship between aesthetics and politics on which much of this criticism is predicated—a relationship defined by resistance, subversion, misdirection, complication, and against-ness. Looking at a large corpus from the archives of the radical journal *Partisan Review*, we find a coherent critical *mood*, rich with affective attachments, based upon the idea of difficulty.

Shifting away from a discussion of how radical critics of the 1930s adopted frustration as a lens for relating to texts, my second chapter investigates how the poet/critics of the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s and 1970s transformed frustration into a means of sharpening their poetry to have a targeted impact on a particular readership. Building on the work of scholars like James Smethurst, I argue that this process of honing and brandishing the affective dimensions of a poem so as to provoke a particular response occurs largely in the realm of *tone*—a formal

feature of literary texts that, despite its importance for understanding the political dimensions of such texts, has received little serious examination in the last half of the century. In this inquiry I combine the granularity of close reading with a natural language processing technique called sentiment analysis to "evaluate" a small corpus of BAM poetry collections for sentiment (26 works from 14 authors). These texts range from the experimental, explosive poetry of Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, and Jayne Cortez to works by more established poets like Gwendolyn Brooks. By employing an interpretive method in part suspect from a revolutionary perspective—a distanced, potentially de-contextualized computational analysis, fraught with echoes of contemporaneous reading practices employed by the FBI's COINTELPRO—I explore the limits of these methods in thinking through BAM poetry, as well as how such digital techniques might be used to pursue questions, problems, and lines of inquiry centered around black thought and experience

Shifting closer to the present, my final chapter argues that contemporary novels from two Native American authors—Louise Erdrich and Sherman Alexie—represent the latest articulation of a literary genre experiment that has its origins in the Red Power movement of the 60s and 70s. Specifically, this corpus of novels grapples with institutional injustice through a modified revenge plot that I call the reparation plot. Though the chapter offers extended readings of only two texts (Erdrich's *The Round House* and Alexie's *Indian Killer*), the depictions of anger, injustice, failed bureaucracy, and frustration associated with this generic frame is informed by the work of many others—Leslie Marmon Silko, James Welch, Linda Hogan, LeAnne Howe, Louis Owens, and potentially many more. In many of these novels, there is no familiar revenge plot with its cyclical, generational blood-feuding or violent communal payback, nor a straightforward legal thriller or detective story in which justice for spectacular crimes is carried

off in the climactic space of the court room. These familiar generic worlds are replaced by a slow reckoning of accounts, intertwined deeply with bureaucratic institutions founded on patriarchal racial codes.

As these novels—and other contemporary works—show, cultures of discontent and the sensibility of unrest through which they are articulated have regained fresh, even urgent significance in American political and cultural spheres. In sum, this dissertation argues that an historical account of frustration as a political and aesthetic condition in America might better equip the field of literary study to disentangle and reassess its varied connections to aesthetic and political concerns. It raises the types of questions that art in particular helps us to explore: what does injustice look and feel like? What responses to it are possible, or even imaginable? When is political justice satisfying, and for whom?

Chapter 1: Revolutionary Difficulties: *Partisan Review* and the Critical Moods of the 1930s

> We have conceived the artist to be a man perpetually on the spot, who must always report to us his precise moral and political latitude and longitude. … But in doing so we have quite forgotten how complex and subtle art is and, if it is to be 'used', how very difficult it is to use it. (55)
>
> Lionel Trilling, "Hemingway and His Critics" (*PR* 6.2, 1939)

In this chapter, frustration is the model for a specific mode of reading that came into focus in the 1930s and has persisted to the present moment. Where many consider the literary criticism of the US movement known as the "cultural front" to be instrumentalist or propagandistic, I argue that the critical prose of this period redefined certain conventions of literary criticism—in particular, its *mood*—into the practice we know it as today. At the heart of this sea change was a fresh examination of the relationship between aesthetics and politics—how art objects (their contents and formal features) relate to larger political and cultural concerns. Earlier accounts argue that the newfound "links" between art and politics in this period functioned more like chains, cogs in the cultural apparatus of the Communist Party, where art objects mattered only as mobilizers and catalysts for political action, and where radical critics were little better than hawkers, promoters, and enforcers of Party protocols (i.e., panning a novel for having no political message, or praising a mediocre novel simply for including the right one). Recent, more nuanced accounts allow for the diverse complexity of thought that developed over the course of the decade in journals like *Partisan Review*, *The Modern Quarterly*, and even *New Masses*, as they—for the first time in an organized fashion—brought Marxist thought to bear on

art and culture in America, often going to great lengths to distinguish their thought from that of the official Communist apparatus.

Introduction

"Esthetics may be the under-sea level of ideology, but that's where you find the pearls"—so Philip Rahv concludes the opening paragraph of a 1935 essay in *Partisan Review*. For Rahv, one of the founding editors of *PR*, the work of the author in question "illustrates a literary trend or symptom of social importance" such that "it might prove worth while to examine his work in detail" (Rahv 1935, 84). This brief review advocates closely examining a text's "esthetics" to find kernels, contradictions, ambiguities, aporias, moments of upheaval or subversion—the "pearls" that reveal a symptomatic relationship with ideology writ large. The business of criticism is thus to extract precious—but heretofore submerged—perspectives that shed new and lustrous light on broader issues of "social importance." This model for literary scholarship has remained in force to the present day.

But the year was 1935. Terms like symptomatic reading, close reading, or explication had yet to acquire their currency in literary criticism; the New Critical brand of scholarship and pedagogy had yet to be institutionalized, and Marxist literary methods had yet to make headway in the academy.[10] Rahv, moreover, was not a professor producing scholarship, but a critic

[10] Even the idea of a literary criticism in the business of "producing critical interpretations" was relatively new, having gained purchase only recently in the years after WWI—this in contrast to the "historical and philological" brand of literary scholarship then institutionalized in universities, a scholarship interestedly mostly in "establishing facts about works—their sources, their authors and their historical circumstances," rather than exploring their meaning as autonomous art objects (as would the New Critics in the 40s) or their relationship to culture, society, and politics (as would the radical "journalists" of the 30s) (Culler 4-5). The seeds of New Critical thought are out there—the Fugitive poets have more or less begun their project of combining the thinking of T. S. Eliot and "the moderns" with a pedagogical approach as explored in I. A. Richard's *Practical Criticism* (1929). But what scholars refer to as the crucial "turning point" of 1937-1941 has yet to happen: John Crowe Ransom has yet to found the *Kenyon Review* (1937); his students Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren have yet to publish their landmark *Understanding Poetry* (1938); Allen Tate has yet to publish *Reactionary Essays* (1936) and take control of *The Sewanee Review* (1944); Yvor Winters yet to publish *Primitivism and Decadence* (1937); and Ransom himself is years away from writing *The New Criticism* (1941) (Graff 152; Baldick 65, 82; Leitch 39). Though I. A. Richards

publishing in a radical magazine. Thus the now-familiar terms of Rahv's criticism—depth, symptom, close examination, and the invocation of ideological pearls retrievable via aesthetic analysis—emerge from a relatively unfamiliar methodological orientation: a peculiar mix of Eliotic aestheticism and an emergent leftist cultural critique committed to the quest for socialism in America.

A number of scholars have elaborated on the successes and failures of the attempt by Rahv and his co-editor William Phillips to fuse these two seemingly irreconcilable literary traditions, noting as well the relevance of this methodological experiment to contemporary concerns.[11] Alan Wald writes that recovering the complexities of this period will help "to combat the political amnesia of a predecessor generation in the hope of reasserting the possibility and the potential of a tradition of radical political and cultural activity" (Wald 1987, 24). Likewise, Harvey M. Teres approaches the history of *PR* and its intellectual community so as to move beyond "the depressing story of the magazine's gradual 'embourgeoisement' and 'failure of nerve'" asserted in James Gilbert's *Writers and Partisans* (1968), instead arguing that "today's left is badly in need of the kind of self-critical renewal strongly encouraged by [these] writers and critics" (Teres 1996, 14). Recent reassessments of the period have begun to make clear the diverse complexity of thought and literary writing that developed over the course of the decade, as well as its relevance for the present state of criticism and scholarship.[12]

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and others have been at work on related ideas in Britain, a watershed text like Brooks' *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939) has yet to adapt them for New Critical thought in America.

[11] See, in particular, chapters 4 and 5 of Gilbert the first section of Teres's *Renewing the Left* and chapter 3 of Wald's *The New York Intellectuals*. For more on the shift away from seeing 1930s radical criticism as "a well-meaning but modest tradition," as argued by Walter B. Rideout (1956) and Daniel Aaron (1961), see Wald, "The 1930s Left," p. 19.

[12] My sources here focus mainly on literary criticism rather than literature: for *Partisan Review*'s fraught relationship with "leftism" and defining itself against other radical journals, see Murphy and Foley (particularly "Art or Propaganda?" 129-169). For *PR*'s relationship with the Popular Front, see Denning (particularly 109-110). For Philip Rahv and William Phillips, the journals founders, see Cooney (particularly "*Partisan Review* and the Appeal of Marxism" 38-66). For *PR*'s relationship with the New York Intellectuals, see Wald's *The New York Intellectuals*

This chapter draws on the interest in the relationship between current modes of scholarship and the criticism practiced by *Partisan Review* in the 1930s to ask the following question: what is the salience of mood in shaping the relation between literary criticism and radical political activity? That is to say, how has mood mattered—and how does it continue to matter—when it comes to connecting literary works to larger political and/or cultural concerns? In pursuing this question, I will show that *Partisan Review*'s literary and cultural criticism inaugurated a distinct way of evaluating the political nature of literary works by highlighting the significance of a certain critical mood: namely that of discontent.

Discontent emerges from a broader sense of dissatisfaction, displeasure, and even indignation towards one's present circumstances. Of course it is not the only mood on display in *Partisan Review*: there is also wariness (of sectarian politics, strictly policed literary-critical programs, and the threats both represented to intellectual autonomy), outrage (against certain forms of economic exploitation, rooted in a Marxist critique), and hope (that acting on this outrage might lead towards a more just society). As a mood, however, discontent—unlike, say, suspicion—acknowledges, amidst the sting of failure, a sense of shared pain as well as shared purpose with a particular audience. A discontented literary criticism thus recognizes the broader frustrations out of which it emerges as well as the despair to which it can lead. It arises from feelings of having tried and failed, of passionate commitments—whether as an individual or at the scale of a political movement—being blocked, stymied, and disappointed, often repeatedly. By reconsidering *PR*'s open expressions of discontent, articulated most clearly in their reevaluation of the relationship between aesthetic difficulty and committed political practice, we

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and Wilford. For Marxist literary criticism's status in institutional histories, see Culler (7, 15), Baldick (89-91), and Leitch (1-23). For more on *PR* generally, see Brooker, Conn, Howe, and Tadié.

get a clearer sense of how collective feelings of political frustration can be channeled into literary criticism.

Looking at this writing in terms of critical mood, then, involves a close examination of the orientation of *PR* contributors—Rahv and Phillips in particular—towards their objects of study as well as their intended audience. Here, the work of Martin Heidegger offers an essential resource. For Heidegger, "moods are the fundamental ways in which we *find* ourselves *disposed* in such and such a way"—through them our situation in the world is disclosed to us, shaping our concerns, attunements, and estimations of value (Heidegger 67). Building on Heidegger's idea of *Stimmung* (mood) as a concept crucial to Marxist historical thinking, Jonathan Flatley argues that "[p]ublics, audiences, collectivities have moods" that can be altered through what he elsewhere calls a "revolutionary counter-mood"—one of "those world-altering moments where new alliances, new enemies, and new fields of action become visible and urgently compelling" (Flatley 2008, 23; Flatley 2012, 504). Just as mood opens the world to us in certain ways, it also forecloses other possible phenomenal experience. Identifying shifts in shared affective attunement, then, represents one way of thinking about the emergence of revolutionary possibilities. Moreover, sensitive as it is to more subtle differences in modes of argumentation, mood can also register the force of criticism as both individual argument and as a collaborative and institutional product. In this sense, where Heidegger finds in the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin a "fundamental mood" in which "our world is disclosed, above all, as a world permeated by *absence*" (Young 74-75), I find in the writing of *Partisan Review* a world that is permeated by *frustration* in the form of political, social, and critical discontent.

The lens of mood has played an important role in recent reconsiderations of criticism's affective aspects as they relate to its political and theoretical dimensions. A recent issue of *New*

Literary History explores mood as "a term well suited to capturing the low-key affective tone of critical and theoretical writing" (Felski and Fraiman vi); Rita Felski's investigations into the moods and methods of critique have inspired much discussion; in an American Studies context, Christopher Castiglia seeks alternative "dispositions" for criticism beyond what he calls *critiquiness*, a constraining mix of "mistrust, indignation, ungenerosity, and self-congratulation" he traces back to the Cold War (Castiglia 2017a, 214-15; Castiglia 2017b); likewise Nancy Bentley introduces a recent forum on critique in *J19* by identifying signs of "a collective mood-shift" in scholarly criticism, hoping to explore "alternative paths through which to discover historical meaning" (Bentley 147-8). In short: the affective dimensions of criticism—as well as the histories of these moods, dispositions, and attachments—are starting to pique scholarly interest as well as spark scholarly controversy.

Little attention, however, has been paid to the moods emerging from the tumultuous, contested, and intensely radicalized criticism of the 1930s, a period when debates on the political nature of culture, its efficacy and role in promoting economic and political change, and how to make use of a tradition compromised by bourgeois values, were vibrant, heated, and urgent. *Partisan Review*, *The Modern Quarterly*, and *New Masses* brought Marxist thought to bear on art and culture in America decades before scholars in the academy would, sometimes in keeping with official Communist protocols, and sometimes in direct opposition to them. After the onset of the Depression, the following surge of radical political thought and the seeming success of socialist revolution in the U.S.S.R., issues of how art might relate to political problems had never felt more close to home (Brooker 829-830). Leftist critics fiercely interrogated the relationships between aesthetics and politics as they attempted to articulate methods of literary interpretation.

In doing so, they also developed new, coherent, and heretofore unexamined critical moods rich with affective attachments.

While Rahv and Phillips most certainly participated in the tradition of oppositional detachment described in Michael Walzer's *The Company of Critics* (1988),[13] these continuities are marked by significant contextual differences. Arguments over the philosophical, political, and institutional future of literary criticism came to a boiling point just as the Second World War erupted, quashing radical sentiments, depoliticizing literature, and sending radical journals into decline while more conservative scholars like John Crowe Ransom moved to institutionalize New Critical approaches in English departments across the country (Graff 150; Duvall 929). While individual critics continued to pursue leftist approaches, this period of intense flux marked the final gasps of literary radicalism as an organized movement in the US. Reexamining the first ten years of *PR* under Rahv and Phillips, then, means reexamining oppositional writing at a turning point in the history of American literary criticism.

PR existed alongside other examples of radical criticism that were indeed shallow, instrumentalist, and brazenly propagandistic, where art objects mattered only as mobilizers and catalysts for political action, and where radical critics were little more than hawkers, promoters, and enforcers of Party protocols (i.e., panning a novel for having no political message, or praising a mediocre novel simply for including the right one). But not all "social missions" for literature in the 1930s were tied to the fate of the Communist Party, even if their reputations suffered from the bad smell that began to surround words like Marxism, socialism, and revolution after the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939 (Graff 150). In revitalizing the elite little magazine

[13] For more on early-20th-century American literary radicalism—socialism, radical journalism, the bohemian culture of Greenwich Village, disillusionment and expatriation following the First World War, and so on—see Gilbert's *Writers and Partisans*, particularly chapters 1-3.

"as a vehicle for radical and working-class communities," *Partisan Review* "became one of the most influential mid-twentieth-century magazines" (Rozendal 903): the editors published work from contributors as diverse as Leon Trotsky, Georg Lukács, T. S. Eliot, John Crowe Ransom, Tillie Lerner (Olson), and Langston Hughes. More than just an ancestor to critical communities like the New York Intellectuals, a canonizing force for a certain brand of literary modernism, or an example of a journal that remained radical while also breaking with the Communist Party, *Partisan Review* articulated problems, questions, and lines of inquiry in its first decade that represent some of the richest, most incisive criticism of the period.

A mode of criticism that we still recognize today—one defined by resistance, misdirection, subversion, complication, surface, depth, and against-ness; championing forms of writing that actively engages readers by challenging or frustrating them and thus disrupting, destabilizing, and defamiliarizing potential world-views[14]—took on its distinctive form in a historical moment defined, from the perspective of its practitioners, by an experience of intense political disillusionment. Contributors to *Partisan Review* in its first decade were no strangers to such frustration: a 1938 review of John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* trilogy, for example, finds Lionel Trilling praising the novel's "despair" because he "can think of no more useful *political* job for the literary man today than, by the representation of despair, to cauterize the exposed soft tissue of too-easy hope" (Trilling 1938, 28).

Central to *Partisan Review*'s mission in this period was a key question: given the ideologically compromised nature of pro-Communist literature, how could a text with no explicit politics or call to action (i.e., an ambiguous modernist work, as distinct from a proletarian novel with a pro-Communist message) be shown, nevertheless, to have a political, even subversive

[14] For more on the theoretical stakes of difficulty, see White; Bowie; Felski 2015, 32, 42; Purves.

dimension? The answer lay in the idea of difficulty: the political dimensions of culture were submerged and intricate and required careful unspooling to be properly understood. Difficulty and discontent were closely connected as well as hotly contested in the 1930s, frequently on political grounds: when Max Eastman (a leftist critic) disparaged T. S. Eliot and "the cult of unintelligibility," he did so for its failure to connect with and thus mobilize its readership (Diepeveen 16). In this sense, difficulty was not seen as being inherent in texts, but rather as a "recurring *relationship* that came into being between modernist works and their audiences" (Diepeveen xi).[15] Rather than view difficult texts as disconnected from the everyday politics of their readership, critics at *PR* found modernist complexity to be just the ticket for re-politicizing literature during a period of dissatisfaction and disillusionment. While Theodor Adorno and the Frankfurt School theorized these issues intensively around the same time, little of their work was immediately available in English—*PR* thus represented a home-grown movement shaping debates on Marxism and art in American letters.

In short: it matters that a mode of relating texts to larger political and/or cultural concerns has its roots in one of the most politically radicalized periods of American history, when economic turmoil led to organized action and visions of future emancipation. That these impulses were frustrated—over and over again—also matters.[16] In what follows, I trace the history of *Partisan Review* through its first ten volumes (1934-1943), highlighting three key moments that chronicle the development of discontent as a critical mood: the first, from 1934-1937, follows the journal's initial investigation of a newly difficult relationship between aesthetics and politics; the second, from 1937-1939, builds on the innovations of the first while

[15] On the role of frustration and difficulty in activating readers, see Van Zuylen 3-4, 124-127; Butler 199, 205.
[16] For more on the "failures" of *Partisan Review* and leftist politics in America more generally, see Teres's *Renewing the Left* (114-115) and Gilbert (6-7).

also frustrating then-standard modes of Marxist literary criticism, using Leon Trotsky and Edmund Wilson as models, as well as marking a growing disillusionment and resentment with the Communist Party. The third, from 1939-1943, marks the overt development of what Flatley might call a "counter-mood" in literary criticism (Flatley 2012), defining itself against both official Communist criticism as well as the emerging "scientific" approaches associated with John Crowe Ransom and the New Critics, as it realigns itself with the work of T. S. Eliot while allowing for a wider spectrum of affective attachment in its criticism—specifically, leaving ample space for politically-motivated frustration.

1934-1937: Revolutionary Difficulty

In the first few issues of *Partisan Review*, editors and contributors put one of its main concerns clearly: "What social mind exists today that includes both a complete acceptance of the value of MacLeish, Proust, Joyce, on the one hand, and of the growing proletarian literature on the other?" (Phelps 48). In other words: how can critics integrate the perplexing difficulty, formal experimentation, and artistic autonomy of a Joyce or Proust with a radical political vision? This is a question of how, where, and to what end aesthetics and politics meet. When William Phillips—using his pen name Wallace Phelps (Rozendal 913)—insists in this review that "Proletarian literature does not 'enforce a specific article,'" but rather "introduces a new way of living and seeing into literature" (Phelps 49), we see that, for him, aesthetic questions are political questions. Ways of living and seeing—a formulation which Teres describes as "a far cry from 'the dialectical-materialist point of view'" (Teres 1996, 45)—are nevertheless bound up with the "Marxian outlook" (Phelps 49). In this sense, the aesthetic dimensions of a text like Joyce's *Ulysses* that upsets, unsettles, and disturbs certain 'ways of seeing' are also political

dimensions of that work—even if other Marxists at the time had dismissed it and works like it for belonging to a bourgeois (and therefore compromised) tradition.

This argument is now so familiar in literary criticism as to be commonsensical, canonized in Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Terry Eagleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990), and more recently in Jacques Rancière's *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004). Though seventy years apart, the line between Phillips' "new way of living and seeing" and Rancière's "distribution of the sensible" is a relatively straightforward one. And Phillips was not alone in *Partisan Review*: many of its contributors (and editors) in this period put the relationship between the aesthetic powers of literature and its political powers in similar terms (Calmer 20, 19; Conroy, 30; Phelps and Rahv 1934, 3, 5; Phelps and Rahv 1935, 20; Phillips 1936, 16).[17] These writers acknowledged the unique nature of aesthetic objects and worked to find ways to translate these qualities into political meaning.

Doing the translation, however, proved a difficult task. In 1934 the idea of recovering the political dimensions of experimental literary works from the 1910s and 1920s was by no means a given in American criticism, or even in the pages of *Partisan Review.* In a review immediately following Phillips's piece, Obed Brooks pans a book of poems by Archibald MacLeish for the same reasons Phillips has just defended him, deriding MacLeish as one of many "champions of an insulated art" (Brooks 1934, 52) while Phillips, only a few pages before, argued that there was

[17] A few issues later, Phillips co-writes an article with Rahv in which they argue that the political power of this "new literature" will be as "a new way of looking at life—the bone and flesh of a revolutionary sensibility taking on literary form" (Phelps and Rahv 1934, 3); to look at the work only in terms of its immediate political expediency "drains literature of its more specific qualities" (Phelps and Rahv 1934, 5). Elsewhere we see that the "ideological depth" of poetry is something that "issues from the depths of man's way of seeing the world, which is the way of seeing of a *poet*" (Calmer 19); a novel does not give us "ideology directly, but *specific content* in the shape of attitudes toward character, painting of moods, patterns of action, and a variety of sensory and psychological insights" (Phelps and Rahv 1935, 20); what makes a novel so powerful is its capacity to "[translate] the effects of a political decree into the actions and thoughts of breathing human beings," to make a political event "interpreted in terms of flesh and blood" (Conroy 30); what makes Malraux's novel *Man's Fate* revolutionary is not that it is some "trumpet call to concrete action," but rather "the entire range of its perceptions" and "the specific experience that a novel draws upon" (Phillips 1936, 16).

something of "value" in the "insular" art of poets like MacLeish. So which is it? In the friction between these back-to-back reviews lie new sparks of a foundational problem for literary criticism: the idea that the political life of a work of literature may be separate from—even contradictory to—its author's purported beliefs. In an essay a year later, Phillips and Rahv write that "[i]t is conceivable that a writer taken in by the NRA may support it politically, but in writing a novel about a factory, his *specific content* about the lives of factory workers, if he has observed them accurately, *may belie the political views he is upholding*" (Phelps and Rahv 1935, 21, emphases mine). They argue, in short, that "[t]he treating of general ideology and specific content as synonymous falsifies literary history" (21).

This idea is, in some ways, a revolutionary one: that the aesthetic nature of a work of art, if "accurate" (i.e., describing a Marxist reality defined by struggle, class conflict, exploitation, etc.), has a political life distinct from its author's. Engels had pointed toward this concept as early as 1888 in a letter to Margaret Harkness, claiming that Balzac was "compelled to go against his own class sympathies and political prejudices" in depicting the deterioration of the French nobility (qtd in Murphy, 93). The contents of this letter, however, did not gain traction in English until a 1933 translation (Foley 151; Murphy 88-92). Moreover, as Barbara Foley argues, it took Georg Lukács to "develop the aesthetic embedded in these writings into a full-blown theory of literary mimesis" (Foley 151). While the first English translation of a book by Lukács came only in 1950,[18] the second number of *PR* included a translation of the essay, "Propaganda or Partisanship?" that rearticulates Engels' idea in more forceful terms: that when bourgeois writers do "perceive the real, objective forces of social development, they do so with the 'wrong consciousness,' unintentionally, unconsciously, and often against their own will" (Lukács 43).

[18] *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki and Others*. Translated by Edith Bone, 1950.

Phillips and Rahv were thus up to speed on international discussions of the politics of aesthetic objects (Foley 153). Indeed, the against-the-grain readings that they endorsed preceded Wimsatt and Beardsley's New Critical denial of "authorial intention" by more than a decade, and the practice of troubling authorial intention in the name of politics soon became a standby among *PR* contributors.

This mode of reading depends on a hierarchical depth model of interpretation, where deeper truths (the "specific content" of MacLeish's poetry) are more profound, more real, and more determining than truths closer to the "surface" of a work (what it seems to say). But here this familiar model is coupled with new affective dimensions: the deeper one goes the more difficult reading and understanding become. In short, a critical mood wherein "real" meaning exists only at depth, but in which this depth is difficult and requires expertise. Overturning an author's political views based on the "specific content" of their work involves disentangling "the *apparent* idea of a work" from its "actual meaning" (Rahv 1936, 11): and this is a task that requires rigorous explication as well as daring, skill, and finesse—a surgeon's touch ("Comment" 179). Other contributors make similar claims, though in less figurative language than Rahv's pearl-diving (Burgum 82; Calmer 20; Schwartz 49; Schapiro 1938, 57; Phelps and Rahv 1935, 19).[19] In this period, then, the community of editors and contributors to *Partisan Review* intervened in the way that critics thought about the intersections of aesthetics and politics: in the same manner that we use Marxist thought to unearth the economic determinism

[19] For example, one claims that "sociological reflections … lie *behind* the action of the novel and give form to its accumulation" (Burgum 82, emphasis mine). Those "urges to action" that a radical poem might "crystallize" are "latent," rather than apparent (Phelps and Rahv 1935, 19). While poetry has "ideological depth" that readers must be able to excavate in order to understand, poetry is itself subject to a depth model wherein it must "penetrate to the bone of contemporary reality" in its attempts to "put its essence in enduring poetic shape" (Calmer 20).

buried beneath the surface of our society, so can we use Marxist thought to unearth determining ideological content buried beneath the surface of a poem or novel.

The practice of recovering seemingly non-political aesthetic objects as political objects, then, depends at a fundamental level on this coupling of depth with difficulty: literary criticism must now complicate, unsettle, overturn, demystify, block easy understanding, make difficult what was once straightforward. We see this most clearly in attempts to recover the modernist literature of the 20s, in which *PR* contributors challenge the "crude" dichotomy of literary complexity precluding a text from having revolutionary potential (Arvin 1935, 25; Phillips 1936, 18; Rolfe 33).[20] When Phillips and Rahv respond to those critics who "have denied, directly or indirectly, a useable tradition in post-war poetry" on the grounds that it "is obscure and pessimistic," they attempt to revitalize this obscurity as a source of political power. Using Eliot, the name cited most often in these arguments and also an important critical influence on Rahv and Phillips,[21] they claim that the "'restlessness and futility' of Eliot is a form of revolt against existing society"—a fact that "establishes a point of contact (usable elements) between him and the revolutionary poets" (Phelps and Rahv 1935, 24). In response to those radical critics for whom "Eliot has become a sort of bogeyman," they claim that "it is not Eliot's recent ideology

[20] [20] For example, Newton Arvin argues that "there has been too strong a tendency to deal with literary problems in terms of crude alternatives: *either* a writer's work is generally acceptable (perhaps mainly on political grounds), *or* it is inacceptable and even mischievous; *either* ideas (in this case literary or critical ideas) are easily stateable in materialistic or revolutionary terms, *or* they are survivals of bourgeois ways of thinking." (Arvin 1935, 25). William Phillips criticized those revolutionary writers who "construct a fabulous Christian world where political virtue triumphs over political evil, where neon signs point the moral" (Phillips 1936, 18). Rather, the "demands of the utilitarians on the 'left'" too often criticize a work "for not showing the 'way out'"—these critics "confus[e] political meanings with political pointers" and "become the spokesmen for the most extreme literalisms" (Phillips 1936, 18). It is also this ambivalence that allows Edwin Rolfe to argue that "Those of us who are writing poetry today still remember and cherish many of these poets at their best. But we value them as we value T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound—as poets whose best work was a spur toward our own poetic activity; also, unfortunately, as poets whose best work, whose very lives, fell far short of our needs and our aims" (Rolfe 33).

[21] For more on the role of T. S. Eliot in the critical writings of Rahv and Phillips, see Teres, "Remaking Marxist Criticism" and *Renewing the Left*, Chapter 2.

(his royalism, Anglo-catholicism, etc.)" that is of value to revolutionary poets, but again "the specific content of his early poetry" as "informed by a large degree of social realism" (24).

In a review of *Murder in the Cathedral*, Rahv goes so far as to justify the difficulty of Eliot's poetry with language from Eliot's own critical prose: in his praises of the "creative contradiction" at work in this play, he justifies the difficulty of the work—that it is "a poetry various and complex"—by claiming that "[t]he variety and complexity—yes, exactly that—of our philosophy and of our experience, to be recreated, must command a poetry both various and complex" (Rahv 1936, 14).[22] This is a *good* kind of obscurity—obscurity in what he calls a "secondary, conditioning sense" (14)—that is obscurity as a *mode*, as a specific principle of approach concomitant with the affective orientation of a specific critical mood. In other words, obscurity and difficult complexity are the unfortunate realities of a world mystified by ideology, and the moderns—i.e. Eliot—understood this in their work; yet a theory of similar complexity and difficulty—Marxist thought—is required to process and understand this situation fully, both in poetry and in criticism, and critics like Rahv can provide this theoretical corrective. Critical discontentment is the affective medium through which this process takes place. What's most fascinating about this formulation, however, is not just Rahv's rehabilitation of Eliot's poetry—it is his reuse of exact phrases from Eliot's critical prose. Where Rahv writes in 1936 that "the variety and complexity" of our world requires "various and complex" poetry (14), Eliot wrote in 1921 that "[o]ur civilization comprehends great variety and complexity" and thus "must produce various and complex results"—both arguments made in the name of difficult literature and its importance to society (qtd in Diepeveen xi). In short: Eliot's politics may be bad, and his poetry

[22] Not everyone in *Partisan Review* feels this way about Eliot: Alan Calmer in a review of MacLeish's poetry claims "Unlike Mr. Eliot's instruments, which were put out of commission more than a decade ago—causing him to turn into treacherous channels—MacLeish's compass has enabled him to move ahead" (Calmer 21).

may be difficult to read, but the politics of his poetry is alive and thriving—it simply requires a different way of reading to uncover.

Through these discussions of obscurity and complexity surrounding Eliot, the writers at *Partisan Review* began to theorize not only the political dimensions of art, but also the aesthetic and affective dimensions of criticism. Phillips and Rahv frequently theorize on the ties between critic, proletarian writer, and radically-minded audience, often framed in terms of shared mood and expectation, arguing that art is "not a system of signposts, but an instrument of reorienting social values, attitudes, and sympathies," and that, like art, the "effect [of criticism] is a slow one" (Phelps and Rahv 1935, 18-19, 17). In "A Letter on Proletarian Literature," Newton Arvin tackles the situation more directly:

> As I see it, one of the troubles is that too few of the critical writers on the left have quite realized what a rich and interesting form of expression criticism can be, or how truly it can give voice to just as many kinds of thought and feeling as, in a wholly dissimilar vein, poetry and fiction do. There is no reason under the sun why it has to be drily expository or prosaically analytical, or why it can only be written from the eyebrows up. Yet that is what too much of it is like. ... [one can] still wish that when he [Granville Hicks] writes criticism he would let himself give vent to more of the energies in a remarkable temperament than he often does. Imagination, anger, the subtle sense of form, the historical fancy and plenty of other things have as legitimate a role in criticism as the practical will or the discursive intelligence has… (Arvin 1936, 13-14)

Frustrated with what he views as criticism's status quo—dry, prosaic, intellectual analysis—Arvin envisions an alternate affective orientation for this particular "form of expression" that is lively, emotive, imaginative, and accessible. Referencing an essay by Phillips and Rahv specifically, Arvin argues that "critical writers on the left" can write "in a less scholastic manner"—that is to say, from a number of alternate affective stances—while still writing "in a Marxist spirit" (13). It is no stretch to hear a resonance between the status quo Arvin cites and what Rita Felski calls the ubiquitous mood of "critical detachment," one "tied to the cultivation

of an intellectual persona that is highly prized in literary studies and beyond: suspicious, knowing, self-conscious, hardheaded, tirelessly vigilant" (Felski 2015, 6). Felski's descriptors certainly apply to much of the criticism in *Partisan Review*, but Arvin here shows that such moods were already an object of debate and that critical detachment was not taken for granted as the only means of relating literature to politics for a given readership. How should critics relate to the works they write about? In what style and tone, with what energy, temperament, and feeling? Such self-reflection—with an eye for connecting radical criticism to its imagined audience—would take on even more significance as *PR* began to define itself against competing "Marxist" approaches.

1937-1939: An Independent Marxism

In the years that followed, as these questions took concrete shape in *Partisan Review*, enormous changes began in the political world from which *PR* drew its readership, philosophical tradition, and intellectual community. In response to the threat of fascism in Europe, the goals of the CP under Stalin shifted away from revolutionary ideals and towards an enlistment of the broadest coalition possible, known as the Popular Front (Wald 1982, 191; Murphy 185; Farrell 207-208). Argument, dissent, and diversity of thought within the revolutionary movement could no longer be taken for granted in the quest for a united front against fascism. For many supporters of the CP, this shift represented not only a volte-face in policy but a betrayal of everything the Party had stood for—it was a defeat in the fight for international socialism, but for writers like Rahv and Phillips it also vitiated of Marxism's legitimacy as a mode of criticism. Where before they had worked to re-legitimize the seemingly conservative literature and criticism of the moderns by grafting it to the larger base of Marxist thought, they now viewed

that base itself as blighted (Rahv 1938a). Communism—and, by association, leftism—began to develop an ideological repugnance that increased over time (Murphy 185).

With the shift to Popular Front politics and dissolution of the John Reed Clubs in the United States, *Partisan Review*—a journal whose opening editorial in 1934 claimed that "[t]he defense of the Soviet Union is one of our principal tasks" ("Editorial Statement" 1934, 2)—now had to fight for its continued existence in moral, philosophical, and operational terms. In 1937 *PR* relaunched itself as "unequivocally independent" with "no commitments to any political party," convinced that the "totalitarian trend" of the Communist movement could "no longer be combatted from within" ("Editorial Statement" 1937, 3). Though still committed to the idea that unlocking literature's revolutionary potential required skill, patience, and a willingness to struggle with complexity (Rahv 1938a, 27; Phillips 1938; Rahv 1938b, 6-7; "This Quarter" 10), *PR*'s editors jostled against Popular Front criticism as they hashed out their own way of reading literary texts. The resulting critical mood once again revolved around the axis of difficulty, but was now quickened by the experience of botched political hopes and intellectual disillusionment. What might a truly radical criticism look like, given the embarrassing failures of the CPUSA?

Demystification, disillusionment, false hope, dissimulation—in this period, the editors of *PR* developed a vivid and influential vocabulary for translating its model of difficulty, depth, and discontentment to non-literary texts associated with the Communist Party. We still find a commitment to the re-politicization of seemingly unpolitical art: in the 1937 editorial statement in which the editors of *PR* declared the journal to be "unequivocally independent" and with "no commitments to any political party," they used this break as an opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to the criticism emerging from "the tradition of aestheticism": they argue that "the forms of literary editorship, at once exacting and adventurous, which characterized the

magazines of the aesthetic revolt, were of definite cultural value," and that it is the goal of *Partisan Review* take "these forms" and "adapt [them] to the literature of the new period," a literature "which, for its origin and final justification, looks beyond itself and deep into the historic process" ("Editorial Statement" 1937, 3). Likewise, in a retrospective on the Second Writers' Congress, Rahv still asks: "how can one take seriously an approach to writing wholly determined by the immediate political dividends it can be made to yield?" (Rahv 1938a, 27). Exploring the revolutionary potential of literature, Rahv maintained, required skill, a willingness to struggle with complexity, and most importantly, patience—cashing out on literature prematurely for the expedience of today's "political dividends" foreclosed tomorrow's revolutionary possibilities. *Partisan Review*'s emphasis on these problems—and the models of depth, difficulty, and critical discontentment on which they depend—only continued to grow in this second period.[23]

But reorienting the field of the radical literary critic to include larger political surfaces—mystifications in need of rigorous, exacting explication—had serious consequences in the extending the reach of critique, as well as the class of texts that count as viable critical objects. For example, *mystification* as a term appears to take on new weight in the *PR* issues of this period as a metric both for the potential riches cached beneath the surface of a literary text, as well as the damning, insidious realities lurking below bad (including both Stalinist as well as politically naïve) criticism. We see this most clearly in an essay by William Phillips in the

[23] Take, for example, Delmore Schwartz's review of Wallace Stevens: he argues that "The poems of Wallace Stevens present an elegant surface," but uncovering the "affiliations" beneath these surfaces requires work and is often "misunderstood." He writes: "The surface would seem to be a mask, which releases the poet's voice, a guise without which he could not speak. But the sentiments beneath the mask are of a different order." (Schwartz 49, 39). Or, consider Meyer Schapiro's review of a Thomas Benton novel, in which he writes: "Benton has been criticized as fascist, but such a judgment is premature. To accept his ideas and art on their face value, to welcome them as an expression of 'democratic individualism,' would be no less absurd." (Schapiro 1938, 57). Or, consider Lionel Trilling's "Hemingway and His Critics" from 1939, in which he argues that "the use of literature is not easy" (Trilling 1939, 57).

following issue called “The Esthetic of the Founding Fathers.” In a section titled “*The Myth*,” he writes the following:

> By all the devices of propaganda, the organs of the Communist Party have circulated the myth that there exists a ready-made set of esthetic principles, fashioned by the hand of Marx himself, and known as ‘Marxist criticism.’ In its name polemics have been conducted against ‘bourgeois criticism’; there were heresy hunts for ‘deviations’; and Marxist criticism was regularly invoked as the final arbiter of all literary questions. Yet what was actually presented as this revolutionary esthetic hardly went beyond a few platitudes about the political roots of art, while no extended treatment by Marx or Engels has ever been uncovered. (Philllips 1938, 11)

Stalinist critics, he goes on, are responsible for “the most monstrous mystification, for they have created a ‘Marxist criticism’ out of the whole cloth”—an “illusion” which they “foster” in “conduct[ing] [their] theoretical adventures under the auspices of Marxism” (11-12)—all this despite “[t]he truth of the matter [being] that Marx was not a literary critic, and no amount of textual research can convert him to one. Nor was Engels” (13). The terms of Phillips’ critique still revolve around depth and difficulty: for Phillips, the bright shiny surfaces of the “Marxist criticism” packaged and offered by the CP belie shallowness, emptiness, and ideological deception; this criticism “hardly [goes] beyond a few platitudes”; it is a “myth,” “illusion,” and “monstrous mystification”; it is a sinister experiment playing out beneath the surface, hidden “under the auspices” of Marx’s writings. Moreover, the “esthetic principles” associated with it lack nuance, complexity, and the rigor necessary for revolutionary criticism: they are “ready-made[s]”—prefabricated, mass-produced, cheap, easy, artless, naïve, ingenuous, lacking critical reflection, and so on.

But here the mystifying force is not a “dislocation of the poet’s intention,” as Rahv had it two years prior: it is the phony Marxism of the Communist Party itself, the illusions they as an organization have “foster[ed],” myths they have “circulated” and enforced with “heresy hunts.”

The duplicitous "dislocation" of their own intentions as an institution—saying one thing but meaning another—are, to Phillips, monstrous, and in need of decisive, forceful criticism. The editors of *PR* describe the situation in similarly monstrous terms in a 1938 editorial:

> When the giant squid ceases to churn and roil the waters of controversy, it will no longer be so difficult to distinguish friends from enemies. Once the interests of the mind are no longer confused with the interests of the Soviet bureaucrats, it may again be possible to define political differences without mystification and to revive the original meaning of the socialist doctrine. ("This Quarter" 1938, 10).

In this shift we see that the affective dimensions of *PR*'s discontented literary criticism have expanded to allow for feeling at a larger, structural level: conceptual difficulty, ambiguity, and confusion are likened to the physical roiling of a giant squid, and the water in which these thinkers, writers, and artists had been muddied because of it at an almost bodily, sensory level. The *mood* of radical criticism—the water in which these writers operated—has changed. And in order to clear these conceptual waters, *disillusionment* as a critical orientation—expansive, structural, and dispersed—becomes a kind of solvent for the frustration, mystification, and confusion of the "giant squid" and its aesthetic doctrine. Moreover, it is now not just aesthetic objects that demand a difficult interpretive mood, but their larger political contexts: literary methods are used to debunk the philosophical and political writings underpinning literary methodology, and the frustration that results from this—the frustration of botched hopes, disillusionment, and even disenchantment—is ultimately a good thing for literary criticism. [24]

[24] In this same editorial, the editors claimed that while "the crumbling of the Comintern represents the frustration of proletarian hopes," this collapse also "removes one of the causes of this frustration"—promising "to put an end to the People's Front regime of ambiguity in politics and literature alike." ("This Quarter" 1938, 10). Personal frustration accompanies political frustration—it is painful to know that "proletarian hopes" have, at an international level, been frustrated. But the frustration is ultimately productive in nature. See also Trilling's "The America of John Dos Passos": "And it is this despair of Dos Passos' book which has made his two ablest critics, Malcolm Cowley and T. K. Whipple, seriously temper their admiration," their general idea being: "that the emotion in which *U. S. A.* issues is negative to the point of being politically harmful" (Trilling 1938, 27-28).

From the perspective of political ideology, the practice of literary criticism has become, in a word, discontented.

In the essay on the fallout of the Moscow trials that opens the following issue, Rahv puts the problem in similar terms. He reflects on "the professional illusionists of the Comintern," and how the need to anticipate, preempt, and suspect these mystifications has changed the larger critical situation—a situation in which deception and disillusionment are now in the water, coloring the kinds of arguments, questions, and ideas critics are capable of proposing (Rahv 1938b, 5). He writes:

> 'I am not what I am.' It is Iago speaking, as he dissects the means of mystification. The problem is to make sure of identities. Your interlocutor, your correspondent, your confidant—who are they? And he who is pressing your hand, is he wearing a disguise? The idea too is capable of blackmail; likewise the theory, it will soon disown itself. Ideology has its subconscious, its secret corridors. Its neuroses contrive amalgams. (Rahv 1938b, 6)

In Rahv's reflections we see seeds of the political paranoia that would flourish into the strangling affective politics of the Cold War. But in this moment we also see Rahv harnessing the affective dimensions of political paranoia—one inflected with the heightened stakes of international espionage ("your correspondent, your confidant")—as a means of describing concepts, thought, and ideology. In 1938—almost fifty years before Fredric Jameson would publish *The Political Unconscious*—Rahv gives ideology a "subconscious": that is, "secret corridors" that can both "disown" themselves—become suddenly what they seemed not to be, the volte-face—and commit "blackmail"—extort and exploit those foolish or unlucky enough to become embroiled with them.

With this newly-tempered critical mood at work, we see Rahv—as well as the other *PR* editors and writers like Phillips—orient themselves to the surfaces of non-literary documents as they did with literary ones: as deceptive surfaces belying problematic truths, uncovered only

through a newly difficult and exacting kind of criticism that exploited a newly difficult relationship between aesthetics and politics. We see these even more clearly as Rahv goes on:

> The trials are juridical metaphors of counter-revolution; but it is necessary to analyse them in such a way as to disclose their broad historical content. … But the trials are also performances, plays, dramatic fictions. If literature reflects life, then their reality or unreality as literature ought to affect our judgment. It might be useful to examine them from the point of view of literary criticism. Are they tragedies or comedies? What perceptions, what psychological insights do they contain? (Rahv 1938b, 7)

Political meaning has become vexed in a manner normally reserved for literary-aesthetic meaning. As with an Eliot poem the mystifications of which requires careful aesthetic decipherment so as to redeem (by complicating) its potentially radical political valences, the latent meaning of the trials also requires analysis in order to be "disclose[d]"; these trials can even be subject to literary conventions such as genre, and offer the kinds of "psychological insights" reserved for literary works. In short, now in both literature and politics, it is the duty of the critic to cut through the frustrating complexity of duplicitous surfaces: disillusionment is general; "I am not what I am"; the revolutionaries aren't the revolutionaries and the trials aren't just trials—things aren't, in short, what they seem to be. And only a critic oriented to her object in such a way that anticipates duplicity, bewilderment, frustration, and deception, can dispel these confusions and determine the difference with confidence.

The editors of *PR* found in the writing of Leon Trotsky an exemplar of this self-reflexive, discontented literary criticism. In the vein of Eliot's elite, detached, and forward-thinking vanguard, Trotsky—himself an exiled veteran of the Revolution, patron saint of non-Stalinist Marxism, and enormously influential critic on the literary left (Callinicos 90-93)—argued for progressive "splinters" in radical literary criticism that approached mainstream criticism with wariness, skepticism, and criticality (Macdonald 1940; Phillips 1938, 15-16). In a letter

published in a 1938 issue of *PR*, Trotsky's grievances with present revolutionary political activity evolve into an argument for an intellectual vanguard: that it is not only normal, but necessary and productive for big changes to start with a small cadre of forward-thinking individuals (Trotsky 9). This elite "splinter" must bear the burden of scorn from those who are not yet "able to look at the world with new eyes," satisfied with the knowledge that they represent the emancipatory future of the masses, even if the masses today do not see them as such (9).

In grappling with the idea of an intellectual vanguard—which has a long, contested history in Marxist and socialist thought in the 19th and 20th centuries (Maerhofer; Walzer)—Trotsky grapples with a question central to the relation between literary criticism and radical political activity: to whom, exactly, should the literary critic speak? Like many publishing in *PR* during this period, he reckons with this issue through the lens of a critical mood in which a shared political purpose has been frustrated by present circumstances. But where Newton Arvin sought a criticism that could couple "discursive intelligence" with anger and imagination so as to bring an equally angry readership into fresh contact with literary works, Trotsky's "splinters" represent a departure from this relationship to non-specialist readers. Tempered by painful lessons from the strict artistic policies of Stalin's Third International, Trotsky argues that although art lacking a "relation to the revolution" will wither in the face of the present impasse, "a truly revolutionary party is neither able nor willing to take upon itself the task of 'leading' and even less of commanding art" (Trotsky 4, 10). Thus political possibilities emerge from a dialogue between enlightened (but non-programmatic) vanguard and aspiring revolutionary artists—not from a dialogue the mass base of non-critic laypersons.

Trotsky's formation took hold in *PR*. In a retrospective from 1939, Rahv cites Trotsky while arguing that the shape, texture, and nature of an aesthetic work's political dimensions has its roots first and foremost in the "moods and ideas" of the intelligentsia (Rahv 1939, 11). Two years later, Phillips argues that "the special properties of modern literature"—the properties a discontented critic is best equipped to identify and interpret—"are readily associated with the characteristic moods and interests of the intellectuals" (Phillips 1941, 482). The possibilities of radical art, in other words, emerge from the critical mood in which critics and intellectuals operate: what excites, bores, or piques their curiosity; which texts, scenes, or ideas satisfy or fail to satisfy; how they attach themselves to a poem, turn of phrase, contemporary event, or line of theoretical argumentation (Felski and Fraiman vii). Because modern art baffles and alienates readers with its "highly complicated techniques," its revolutionary potential ultimately depends on the expertise of critics charged with its interpretation (Phillips 1941, 482)—a position Harvey M. Teres describes as a rejection of "the revolutionary character of the proletariat" in favor of "intellectuals as the body most likely to promote change" (Teres 1996, 12). Trotsky's intervention, then, represents one perspective on how critical moods can change over time: in the case of discontent, a mood defined more than ever by duplicitous surfaces, thorny interpretive maneuvers, and the satisfaction of—after much critical labor—revealing a text's ideological content to be what it does not seem to be.

Unlike Trotsky, another eminent contributor to *PR*—Edmund Wilson—gave no proscriptions on the role of criticism in the radical cause. In fact, his political commitments to socialism often appeared quite tenuous (Dupee 50; Aaron 1982, 186). But among the various disagreements in the scholarship on Wilson's publications in this period, most agree that he represents a happy exception to the mechanical criticism of the 30s in his applications of a

historical Marxian outlook, and that this published criticism influenced greatly the newly independent literary left (Gilbert 99; Leitch 91; Baldick 68, 89, 90, 104; Graff 151; Howe 27).[25] Another essay by Phillips in 1939 discusses the merits of Wilson's skepticism of Marxist thought as an explanatory mode and quotes him at length:

> Marxism by itself can tell us nothing whatever about the goodness and badness of a work of art. A man may be an excellent Marxist, but if he lacks imagination and taste he will be unable to make the choice between a good book and an inferior book, both of which are ideologically unexceptionable. (qtd in Phillips 1938, 17)

Critics must go beyond what makes a work of art exceptional in terms of political ideology and interrogate what makes it exceptional in terms of its aesthetic features and capacities—a continuity with Newton Arvin's argument in 1936 that criticism requires as much "discursive intelligence" as it does "imagination," "anger," and "historical fancy."

The potential dangers of tying effective criticism to "taste" and appreciation, appealing to a vague, unspoken-but-agreed-upon, seemingly Kantian subjective universal of "goodness and badness" in art are clear and present—the proscription of one particular person's or group's aesthetic sensibilities (i.e. Wilson's) as universal, eternal, or essential is practically the dictionary definition of ideology in a Marxist sense.[26] But Wilson is speaking in shorthand for the purposes of a different argument: not to argue that what makes a "good book" good is an easy or obvious question—it isn't, though it is something we still ask in earnest today[27]—but to argue that

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[25] To offer a few examples: Baldick writes that he used "the insights of Marxism more sensitively to examine the implied social criticism in the works of novelists" (Baldick 104), cultivating an "imaginative sympathy" and "a duly discriminating formal appreciation" of difficult literary works (in this case modernism) that "could be accommodated with progressive political views" (Baldick 90). Graff likewise argues that even as early as his 1931 *Axel's Castle*, the "influence of Marxist criticism" made itself apparent in his uncovering "of 'a reactionary point of view' hiding behind the pretense of disinterestedness" in Eliot's poetry (Graff 151). Farrell claims that, where most literary critics of the period "accept[ed] ready-made slogans merely because a radical brand was put on them," Wilson was "one of the exceptions" in that he "retained his judgment, perception, and independence" while shifting leftward (Farrell 206). Howe similarly argues that amidst "the crude Marxism of the thirties," Wilson represented one sole "fragment[] of distinction" (Howe 27).

[26] See *The German Ideology* in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 172-173 (Marx 1978).

[27] See Bourdieu on "taste," as well as Highmore.

aesthetic issues cannot be made subordinate to political or ideological issues in trying to figure out the "goodness and badness of a work of art." Wilson's words inspire Phillips towards the most vital questions of the article: "what we want to know is whether a critic with taste and imagination is able to make more profound and more valid observations about literature through a use of the Marxist method … [and] whether Marxism provides a method of perceiving the unique qualities of a writer while relating them to his social *milieu*" (17-18). It was a return to basics—exactly the kind of "self-critical renewal" that Harvey M. Teres identifies in the radical writing from this period, and a key component of discontent as a critical mood—that Wilson as a contributor helped to make possible.

His politically independent, methodologically apprehensive, and affectively energized criticism made waves in *PR*, with strong echoes in particular in the work of Lionel Trilling (Trilling 1939, 55-58; Trilling 1940; Trilling 1942).[28] When Trilling—in an essay on Hemingway's somewhat perfunctory turn to socialism— writes that, when it comes to politics, "the use of literature is not easy," his claim resonates with the tradition of increasingly independent Marxist criticism to which it speaks: art is "complex" and "subtle"; critics (like those in Popular Front) who demand "precise moral and political latitude and longitude" snuff out this vital complexity (Trilling 1939, 57, 55). Amidst collective moods of bafflement, fear, and despair, contributors to *PR* distanced themselves from the Communist Party, turned a critical eye to the philosophical thought undergirding then-standard Marxist thought, and began

[28] For example, in his examination of Hemingway's work in the second half of the decade, Trilling writes: **"**In short, we looked for an emotional leader. We did not conceive Hemingway to be saying, Come, let us look at the world together. We supposed him to be saying, Come, it is your moral duty to be as my characters are. We took the easiest and simplest way of using the artist and decided that he was not the 'man' for us. That he was a man and a Prophet we were certain; and equally certain that he was not the 'man' we would want to be or the Prophet [58] who could lead us. That, as artist, he was not concerned with being a 'man' did not occur to us. We had, in other words, quite overlooked the whole process of art, overlooked style and tone, symbol and implication, overlooked the obliqueness and complication with which the artist may criticize life, and assumed that what Hemingway saw or what he put into his stories he wanted to have exist in the actual world" (Trilling 1939, 57-8).

codifying this thinking in the practice of exemplary models. In doing so, *PR* laid the groundwork for an entirely new critical orientation toward texts—one arguing that the quest to recover the political edge of complex literary texts must also be careful, cautious, and not too easily satisfied, despite the need for revolutionary politics in increasingly desperate times.

1939-1943: Developing a "counter-mood"

Trilling's writing on Hemingway here represents the latest stage in the long arc of the critical project began by *Partisan Review* with its first issue in 1934: when we think of the artist as "a man perpetually on the spot" in terms of their political beliefs, and of their literary works as capable of reporting their "precise moral and political latitude and longitude," readers and critics "have quite forgotten how complex and subtle art is and, if it is to be 'used', how very difficult it is to use it" (Trilling 1939, 55). In other words: an art object's political dimensions inhere within its aesthetic dimensions and vice versa (a combination with revolutionary potential and possible political purpose), but the products of this joining are autonomous from their creator and that creator's intentions. And because of this autonomy, the intersection between aesthetics and politics is an exceptionally difficult one to parse—a difficulty that requires readers of a certain critical orientation to make sense of literature's political properties and potential "use." The question remains, however: how *does* one make use of literature?

In this third stage, *PR* begins to consciously define a methodology amidst a constellation of the other powerful critical modes of the period: they are against a blatant "leftism," but in favor of a historical criticism that is Marxist in nature; they are against emerging "scientific" (read: New Critical) modes of criticism, but in favor of the examination of aesthetic problems and the modernist literature on which New Critical methodology focuses. In these articles, many of which reflect explicitly on the role of criticism itself, we see the same axes of difficulty, depth,

intentionality, and unconsciousness that emerged in the journal's first year as a means of recuperating political meaning—we also see, however, the importance of criticism's affective dimensions (moods, orientations, attachments) to the art of the period, and how the affective situations presented by the larger "mood" of the age (what Dwight Macdonald calls in 1941 a "frustrating historical situation") might give shape to the kinds of creative and critical production available to American writers in the 30s, and thus the critical modes, moods, and methods inheritable by more recent kinds of scholarship (Macdonald 1941b, 442).

To this end, the critical methodology that *PR* codifies in this period might be considered what Johnathan Flatley calls a "revolutionary counter-mood," one of "those world-altering moments where new alliances, new enemies, and new fields of action become visible and urgently compelling" (Flatley 2012, 504). For Heidegger, mood opens the world to us—making it available for our experience, a state arising "out of being-in-the-world"—at the same time that it forecloses this world from other possible phenomenal experience. As new ways of attuning oneself to objects, ideas, and realities emerge, potential changes in our mood as a whole also become possible: realities that once seemed "impossible, futile, foolish, or obscure" can become "obvious, achievable, and vital" (503-4). For Flatley, shared affective attunement is one way of thinking about "how we get from one mood to another" when it comes to the emergence of revolutionary possibility (504)—how "it happen[s] that a collective, deeply interested in, committed to, and capable of political action is formed where before there had been none" (504, 503). In this sense, the "counter-mood" presented by *Partisan Review* in this period intervened in its critical atmosphere so as to make the political "use" of literature possible once again after the complete disillusionment following the Nazi-Soviet pact: by combining the aesthetic project of the moderns (and the emerging New Critics) with the political/historical project of Marxism, it

changed once again the *feel* of how artistic works could relate to political ideas and situations despite growing cynicism with Communism, socialism, and Marxism—a practice they hoped to show was no longer unethical, amoral, or intellectually compromised, but vital to intellectual and political freedom.

We can begin with an examination of *Partisan Review*'s intentional shift to thinking through the recent history of criticism, its own role in that history, and the potential futures that criticism has with regards to art and politics. In a retrospective piece from 1939 titled "This Quarter: Twilight of the Thirties," Philip Rahv argues that "[a]n examination of the special role and changing status of the intelligentsia is … essential to any social examination of modern literature" (Rahv 1939, 591). Why? Because literature has no simple, direct relationship to class groups—rather, it "associates itself with (or dissociates itself from) the life of society as a whole … by giving expression to the given bias, the given moods and ideas of the intellectuals" (591). In other words, literature—like intellectual or philosophical thought—is detached or semi-autonomous from "the life of society as a whole": it emerges from social and historical conditions like any other cultural formation, but has in its aesthetic dimensions the capacity to subvert, complicate, or confound its relationship to these conditions. We've seen this component of Rahv's claim many times in *PR*: you can't guess the political content of an artistic work simply by its (bourgeois, proletarian) origins, or its (reactionary, revolutionary) intentions. This content can only be uncovered through careful, difficult, and suspicious critical labor. What Rahv introduces here, however, is the idea that the shape, texture, and nature of this intersection of aesthetics and politics as it plays out in a given literary work has its roots first and foremost in the "moods and ideas" of the intelligentsia: radical criticism (and a journal like *Partisan Review*) plays a crucial role in the development of radical literature. For Rahv, Trotsky again is the

exemplar of a criticism willing to investigate these threads and operate in dialogue with potentially revolutionary literature.

In an article appearing in *PR* two years later, William Phillips articulates this idea more forcefully in discussion of the "modern art" of the 20s: "It would be more accurate, I believe," he writes, "to locate the immediate sources of art in the intelligentsia" (Phillips 1941, 485). He argues that "the special properties of modern literature"—the property of literature that critical discontentment is best equipped to identify and interpret—"are readily associated with the characteristic moods and interests of the intellectuals" (485). Like Rahv, it is not just the ideas of the intellectuals that matters to literary artists, but their *moods and interests*: what excites, bores, or piques their interest; which texts, scenes, or ideas satisfy or fail to satisfy; how they attach themselves to a poem, turn of phrase, contemporary event, or line of theoretical argumentation—to return to Rita Felski and Susan Fraiman, the possibilities of radical art are bound up with the "affective atmosphere in which" critics and interpreters of both literary works and political problems "are steeped" (Felski and Fraiman vii). Phillips goes on:

> But modern art, with its highly complicated techniques, its plaintive egotism, its messianic desperation, could not have come into being except through the formation by the intelligentsia of a distinct group culture, thriving on its very anxiety over survival and its consciousness of being an élite. In no other way could it have been able to resist being absorbed by the norms of belief and behavior… they [intellectuals] managed through the years to build what might be called a tradition of approach or perspective. In the realm of literature this tradition amounted to a highly elaborate sense of its achievements and its tasks, thus providing creative imagination with a fund of literary experiences—a kind of style of work—to draw on. (Phillips 1941, 485, 487)

Having echoed Rahv's emphasis on the affective dimensions of art and criticism—how "mood impinges on method" (Felski and Fraiman vi)—Phillips now reiterates the centrality of *difficulty* to both "modern art" and criticism itself: a difficult mood lives in the "highly complicated techniques", "plaintive egotism," and "messianic desperation" that baffle, anger, or alienate

readers, but also in the readerly poise and painstaking interpretive maneuvers required to make sufficiently sophisticated inquiries into the aesthetic/political depth of these "complicated techniques," without which there would be no "tradition of approach or perspective". This shared orientation is the mood of critical discontentment: a disposition that "arises" not from a work of art or a critic alone, but from the particular mode of being-in-the-world that they share—the art in question "could not have come into being" without the "fund of literary experiences" and "sense of [literature's] achievements and its tasks" provided by the intelligentsia, and it is implied that this critical community similarly "could not have come into being" without the "creative imagination" of the artists themselves. In this, then, we see contributors to *Partisan Review* re-examining and re-presenting some of its original claims—these articles are, in a sense, concretizing the canon of critical thought on which they can base current and future (independent, Marxist) counter-moods in literary criticism writ large.

As *Partisan Review* began again to foreground the role of the critic and intellectual with regards to its newly politicized canon—a radicalization independent of any political party—the journal also began to publish articles defining its own methodology against what Marxism *had come to represent* for its readers. Theirs was a disillusioned, skeptical, and discontented Marxism, one capable of self-critically "examining the instrument [of Marxist thought] itself" (Macdonald 1940, 350) and forming still-radical intellectual communities engaged in vital political thought. It was, in many ways, an attempt to reacquire a movement's ideological footing in keeping with the back-to-basics approach of Edmund Wilson—a re-examination not just of what Marxism can bring to literary analysis, but of what "thinking about politics" means when it comes to thinking about literature.

We see this "return" already in full force in a 1940 editorial "Comment" that "enter[ed] the controversy on what is living and what is dead in Marxism," a "crisis" that was "primarily caused by the fact that everywhere, including the Soviet Union, it is not the social revolution but the counter-revolution which has triumphed" ("Comment" 175). The goal, the editors argue, is "renewal and revision" of a body of thought whose "assets still far exceed its liabilities": they must not only "cut away" this "diseased tissue," but replace it "creatively" (178-179). Marxism, in other words, requires professional medical attention—the surgeon's touch and rigorous, detached poise of an intellectual used to dealing with bodies of writing (and their symptomatic relationship to underlying issues) as one might deal with a medical patient. And *Partisan Review* makes clear its intentions to prep, operate on, and provide recuperative care for this body of thought.[29] Moreover, that this convalescence would require returning to its initial project of recovering political meaning through modernist difficulty: in the pages immediately following this editorial "Comment," the editors choose to publish nothing other than T. S. Eliot's "East Coker." This editorial decision links the poem's vivid first stanza—its vision of renewal, destruction, beginnings and endings, urban and domestic decay—with the philosophical dilapidation and proposed renovation of Marxism discussed only pages before. "In my beginning is my end," the poem begins, "In succession / Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended, / Are removed, destroyed, restored" (Eliot 1940, 181). In this world of "Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires," where "Houses live and die," (Eliot 1940, 181) we see how the "diseased tissue" within Marxist thought (like "a patient etherized upon a table") might be replaced

[29] This language is still going in this period: see Meyer Schapiro's 1940 review of Wilson's *To the Finland Station* , in which the outstanding metaphor for criticism is one of medical autopsy: "If Marx stood Hegel on his head and gave him a new life, and if modern critics have laid them both out horizontally in their graves, Wilson performs a crude autopsy in order to show that the belief in dialectic was the cause of most of the ills of Marxism, its inconsistencies, its political errors and even the support of the World War by the 2nd International and the acquiescence of the 3rd in Stalin." (Schapiro 1940, 472)

"creatively," a "renewal and revision" that is bound up with the creative literary works it hopes to investigate and explore.

In this sense, as *Partisan Review* revisited and revised the Marxist heritage on which it was founded—continuing to honor Eliot as a kind of patron saint for "the tradition of aestheticism" and "forms of literary editorship, at once exacting and adventurous, which characterized the magazines of the aesthetic revolt" that they had spent years integrating into a Marxist criticism that "looks beyond itself and deep into the historic process" ("Editorial Statement" 1937, 3)—they also entered into conversation with a competing school of literary thought that claimed a similar heritage, also deriving its pedigree from the complex, intricately staged poetry of the moderns: namely, New Criticism.

Between the years of 1939 and 1943, the dispersed academic and methodological movement we refer to as New Criticism was in the process of securing itself institutionally (Graff 152). Like the mechanical "leftism" of radical critics in the 30s, the "New Criticism" of the 30s and 40s is often known through a series of heuristic stereotypes that offer historiographical purchase on the shifting, heterogeneous networks of actors out of which this "movement" emerged (Graff 145; Brooks 1979, 592). For our purposes, this retroactively labeled grouping of like-minded thinkers—as well as the shared values and methodologies they came to develop—took initial shape around Professor John Crowe Ransom and his students (including Cleanth Brooks and Allen Tate) (Gaff 155). An oft-cited text in this institutional history is Ransom's 1937 "Criticism Inc.," in which he imagines a criticism practiced by university professors—not amateurs—and thoroughly installed in institutions of higher learning (Ransom 1937). From this professionalized standpoint, this criticism would model itself on scientific communities and the scientific method, contrasting itself with "moralistic Humanists, Marxist

propagandists," and "historical reductionists" on one side and against the "positivist philosophers" and scholars currently installed in universities on the other (Graff 145). For Ransom, the radical criticism practiced by journals like *PR* (what he calls "the Leftists, or Proletarians") represent a "diversion from the orthodox course of literary studies"—they were moralists rather than literary critics or scholars, seemingly incapable of holding a debate "on aesthetic grounds" due to their insistence on "ethical values" (Ransom 1937, 591, 589, 591).

This is not to say that New Criticism "turn[ed] their backs on the moral and social functions of literature," as Gerald Graff has it, "[n]or did the early New Critics explicate literature in a vacuum" (Graff 149): for critics like Ransom in the early- and mid-thirties, the goal was to discover these social dimensions in "the formal texture of the work," arising out of its unique aesthetic properties rather according to an outside body of thought like Marxism (Graff 148-150)—a project more similar to that of *Partisan Review* than he would have readily admitted. Towards the end of the decade and into the 40s, however, particularly after the Hitler-Stalin pact in 1939, New Critical claims that "the politics of literature should be seen as part of its form modulated subtly into the idea that literature had no politics, except as an irrelevant extrinsic concern" (Graff 150). Thus politically-minded art criticism represented a "diversion" from the proper purpose of literary study, and it was up to critics like Ransom to exorcise political meaning of all kinds (even those independent of any party) from literary texts and sanctify them against its reentry.

Significantly for us, Ransom makes many of his claims on affective grounds: the new criticism he describes should contain no "declarations of the effect of the art-work upon the critic as reader," and be purged of the "uncritical" vocabulary that "ascribes to the object properties really discovered in the subject"—words like "*moving*, *exciting*, *entertaining*, *pitiful*," even

"*great*," "*admirable*," and "*beautiful*" (Ransom 1937, 597-98). Although he seems to want to expunge subjective 'feelings' from his critical vocabulary—arguing in the negative for the neutral, detached mood of criticism that became the institutional norm—Ransom's intervention occurs largely in affective terms. When he claims that good critics should "wish[] to know what he [the poet] is doing, and how," it seems instead a question of affective orientation—a claim that good critics should "wish to know" the poem *in a certain way* so as to produce a certain kind of criticism, orienting themselves to literary texts the way a scientist orients herself to a scientific object of study (Ransom 1937, 601; Ransom 1942). He goes on:

> For each poem even, ideally, there is distinguishable a logical object or universal, but at the same time a tissue of irrelevance from which it does not really emerge. The critic has to take the poem apart, or analyse it, for the sake of uncovering these features. With all the finesse possible, it is rude and patchy business by comparison with the living integrity of the poem. But without it there could hardly be much understanding of the value of poetry, or of the natural history behind any adult poem. (Ransom 1937, 602)

From this it is relatively clear that Ransom treated most radical literary criticism as a strawman of the worst sort—as we know, the diversionist, moralist tactics of "the Leftists, or Proletarians" against which he defines himself here represented only one aspect of the literary criticism of the 30s. In fact, despite his desire to draw a stark line between himself and all politically-motivated criticism, he has adopted many of the questions asked by radical writers in journals like *PR* and asks them on similarly affective terms. Where contributors to *PR* imagine literary texts as having shallow, tricky surfaces that belie great ideological depth (recall in 1934 Rahv's "under-sea level of ideology" and the "pearls" therein), Ransom conceives of them as puzzles with numerous interlocking parts that need to be disassembled and examined individually as well as in relation to one another in order to be understood. Both critical orientations require a practice of discontentment: analytic "finesse," the careful "uncovering" of otherwise unknowable

"features," and an appreciation of the "living integrity" (or aesthetic uniqueness) of the work in question. We see a hint of knowing disavowal in his description of the practice of dissecting literary works for hidden meaning as a "rude and patchy business" which he begrudgingly adopts for nobler purposes ("rude" in its crass reductionist tendencies, "patchy" in its ignorance of the loftier, more truthful possibilities of the art object). But he offers no further acknowledgement of a shared critical project—or shared critical mood.

Partisan Review, on the other hand, regularly engaged with emerging New Critical trends, ideas, and scholars, despite—and often seemingly for the express purpose of defining—their contrasting visions literary criticism. When *PR* reached out to Ransom—and a number of other writers—in 1942 to comment on a recent essay on Van Wyck Brooks, Ransom claimed again that the "painfully self-conscious and bewildered" writers of today need to "discover if they can just what literature is calculated to do" (Ransom 1942, 41). Where Ransom here wants to know "the value of poetry," contributors to *PR* like Trilling wants to better understand "the use of literature"—two projects that, while different in purpose, were not so different in nature, mood, nor methodology. Both pursue what Graff calls, in summary of the New Critical interest in the unique aesthetic nature of literary texts, literature's "own special 'mode of existence,' distinct from that of philosophy, politics, and history" (Graff 145). What is it, exactly, that literature can do that political tracts, propagandizing speeches, or a nonfictional essay cannot? How might aesthetic issues have "use," "value," or any relationship with the outside world at all?

Engaging directly with this shared line of inquiry, and a shared literary heritage on which it was based, *PR* continued to publish essays on Eliot, making arguments that were methodologically in keeping with the critical approach they had spent the better part of a decade developing. But this was now often from a standpoint that consciously acknowledged the general

decay of Marxism as an explanatory mode in recent history. In a review of Eliot's *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Trilling offers an account of how Eliot "has always figured with excessive simplicity" within "the imagination of the Left" in his path "from the horrible realities of the Wasteland" to "the arms of Anglo-Catholic theology," but tempers this account with a critique of Marxism's own ideological pitfalls in recent years (Trilling 1940, 369). Moreover, the editors couple reviews like this by *PR* regulars such as Trilling with contributions from people like Cleanth Brooks, a rising New Critic and student of Ransom who had already published *Understanding Poetry* (1938), *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939), and was only a few years from *Understanding Fiction* (1943) and heading *The Sewanee Review* (1944)—all integral texts to the growing New Critical canon. In his review of Eliot's *The Family Reunion*, however, Brooks seems to adopt what had become the standard protocol for literary interpretation in *PR*: with regards to those who "cannot accept Eliot's metaphysic," he warns that it would be "folly to prejudge the play as representing an intolerable narrowness of interest by narrowing our own interests in advance" (Brooks 1939, 116). Brooks goes on: "Eliot has not lost touch with the realities. The desiccation, the fatuousness, the deadening complacency of the British upper classes are revealed in this play … mercilessly" (116). In other words, part of the worth of this play stems from it being in "touch with the realities"—from being somehow connected to the larger social and political world—and that this value is distinct from Eliot's authorial politics: by orienting ourselves to the play in such a limiting fashion, we would miss the potential complexity of the play and what it "reveals" upon closer examination about material, historical realities.

Other contributors engage New Critical trends—and the push for a "scientific" criticism of which they were a part—regularly and much more directly: in a 1939 review of *Finnegans Wake*, William Troy quotes William Empsons' *Seven Types of Ambiguity* and cites I. A.

Richards' *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* in discussion of the unpredictable complexity of literary language (Troy 1939, 100); a few years later Troy reviews *The Language of Poetry*, a collected volume of four essays Brooks, I. A. Richards, Philip Wheelwright, and Wallace Stevens. Though the volume's editor, Allen Tate, claims that the analysis of "semantics" presented within is indicative of "an exhaustive study of poetic language such as criticism has not attempted either here or in Europe in any previous age", Troy argues that the collection "is more important for what it undertakes and promises than for what it manages to accomplish" (Troy 1942, 169). He praises Wheelwright and Richards, questions Brooks' and Richards' Eliotic emphasis on Donne, and acknowledges that while Brooks' "exegetical operations" are "not always convincing," they are certainly "high-powered": he finds that the emerging methodological tools of New Criticism show promise, even if misapplied in this volume (Troy 1942, 170). Given the similarities between New Critical approaches and those developed by *Partisan Review* in this period I have outlined here, this qualified praise should come as no surprise: the two modes shared not only analytical tools like explication, but more fundamentally a critical mood that allowed them unpack difficult meaning from difficult literary objects in a skillful, satisfying manner.

By redeeming and a disgraced Marxism and redefining its own peculiarities as against the other competing critical modes of the period, *Partisan Review* began to produce what I consider to be some of its most compelling criticism—powerful articulations of a now-refined critical discontentment that reopened the political dimensions of literary criticism, offering a revolutionary counter-mood that would make what once seemed "impossible, futile, foolish, or obscure," entirely "obvious, achievable, and vital" for politically-minded scholars in the decades to come (Flatley 2012, 503-4). For example, in a 1941 discussion of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Dwight MacDonald more or less coins the term "political unconscious":

> The misconception of the nature of politics leads Mr. Wilson—and many others—to conclude that since Hemingway in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* explicitly rejects the political catchwords of Stalinism, he has therefore liberated himself from 'politics' in general … [Hemingway himself] may well suffer from the same delusion. But those who see no further into a political program than its catchwords are likely to imagine, when they lose faith in the catchwords, that to reject them is also to free themselves from the program. It may be, however, that they merely become *unconscious* of their political values. … Hemingway tries to write a non-political political novel and Jordan tries to participate in a revolutionary war and yet reject politics. But these are merely *other forms* of political thought and action. (Macdonald 1941a, 26-7)

For Macdonald here, extricating oneself from a given political perspective is a sticky process—it is not so easy to "free [oneself] from the program," and in fact a shortsighted delusion to think that we can "liberate[]" ourselves from politics by simply rejecting political language, ideas, forces, etc. Rather, when we "see no further" than these surfaces of political ideology we become vulnerable to more insidious forms of politics—we become "*unconscious* of [our] political values." Consider this alongside the opening chapter of Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*, published forty years later: "It is in detecting the traces of that uninterrupted narrative [that Marxism offers], in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history, that the doctrine of a political unconscious finds its function and its necessity." (Jameson 1981, 20) For both writers, political dimensions of cultural formations do not, and cannot, simply go away when we want them to; direct, straightforward rejection simply slips political thinking from one mode or level to another, to what Macdonald calls "*other forms* of political thought and action". It is elusive, chameleon-like, mercurial in shape and form—difficult to pursue, identify, and intercept. And for both writers, a rehabilitated, independent Marxism offers the historical perspective necessary to see, grapple with, and make sense of how "this fundamental history" takes shape in aesthetic objects.

Consider what Jameson, in a preface, calls "the moral of *The Political Unconscious*"—"Always historicize!"—alongside a 1942 essay in *PR* by Lionel Trilling titled "The Sense of the Past": in the essay Trilling offers a vision of methodology that is both "historical" and "critical," despite New Critical claims that "the scientific study" of literature occurs without the distractions of historical context and social significance (Jameson 1981, 9; Trilling 1942, 229, 231). He sympathizes with New Criticism despite its transformation of "the elucidation of poetic ambiguity [into] a kind of intellectual calisthenic ritual," but argues that their method ignores the deceptively historical (and, I would argue, affective) nature of all critical work, which he elucidates at length:

> To read, say, Wordsworth's Immortality Ode properly requires as much translation of its historical circumstances as of its metaphors. This the trained critic forgets; his historical sense is often so deeply ingrained that he is not conscious of it. But whether or not it is made conscious, the historical sense is one of the aesthetic and critical faculties. […] if the historical sense is always with us, it must, for that reason, be refined and made more exact. Above all, it must be kept complicated. (Trilling 1942, 234-235)

As with Macdonald's essay, and others in this period, the conscious/unconscious and surface/depth paradigm remains an important one for Trilling: here, however, he describes not a political unconscious but an *historical* unconscious—that we, as readers, carry with us an "historical sense" that impinges on our critical activity (it "is always with us"), but is "so deeply ingrained" in the fundamental building blocks of our reading practices that even "the trained critic forgets" to account for its effects. "We are creatures of time," Trilling argues," and our familiarity and faith in this intuitive, seemingly natural relationship with "history" obscures the fact that "the leap of imagination which an audience makes when it responds to Hamlet is enormous; and it requires a comprehensive, though not necessarily a highly instructed, sense of the past" (Trilling 1942, 233). For Trilling, and for others publishing in *PR* at this time, this

sense of the past that we often take for granted allows us, at a very basic level, to interact with historical objects in a meaningful way. It becomes the job of thoughtful critics everywhere to maintain a discontented, self-critical relationship with this automatic historical faculty. As his argument develops, his inquiries into this process become metaphysical, almost Derridian before-the-fact, as he tries to parse how historical meaning resides in an aesthetic object ("what is the real poem?", he asks, "Is it the poem we now perceive? Is it the poem the author intended?" [234]). Through pursuing these many lines of thought, he concludes that "historical circumstances" require as much "translation" as do metaphors when it comes to reading and making sense of literary works ("Always historicize!"); that we, in fact, always perform these translations when we read even if we do not realize it—they occur always, a set of automatic, invisible subroutines that, if left unexamined, operate without any political oversight or critical reflection.

This lack of reflection is precisely what concerns Trilling when it comes to the competing forms of criticism in the early 40s: rather than allowing the historical sense to operate uncritically (as it does, he suggests, in New Critical exegesis), it needs to "be refined and made more exact" and "kept complicated"—in other words, it must be theorized, systematized even, kept *difficult* and discontented to the core. The echoes with more contemporary criticism are profound—consider Judith Butler's argument that "to pass through what is difficult and unfamiliar is an essential part of critical thinking within the academy today," and that "accepting translation"—conceptual, linguistic, historical, cultural, translations of all kinds—"as the common predicament" is the only way we might provide an "effective politics" in the academy (Butler 199, 205). In short: difficulty and discontentment reside at the heart of any "effective" critical labor; not only because translation itself is a difficult task, but because we are

"unconscious" of those feelings, values, orientations, and perceptions that impinge most intensely on our ability to engage in these sense-making endeavors. Making meaning—historical, political, aesthetic, and more—not naïve to complexity of the world is, at a very basic level, a frustrating task.

T. S. Eliot himself contributed similar ideas to *Partisan Review* in this period of competing critical methodologies. In an article called "The Music of Poetry," he argues that while it may be "commonplace to observe that the meaning of a poem may wholly escape paraphrase"—a "heresy" that a New Critical scholar like Brooks would famously coin in *The Well-Wrought Urn* a few years later—"[i]t is not quite so commonplace to observe that the meaning of a poem may be *something larger than its author's conscious purpose,* and something remote from its origins" (Eliot 1942b, 499-500 emphasis mine)—an observation contributors to *Partisan Review* had been making for almost a decade. For Eliot, while the paradigms of the New Critic (paradigms that were in the process of being institutionalized in the academy) are useful, they have enormous interpretive blind-spots that contributors to *PR* have considered in a thoughtful, systematic, and philosophically sound way. Like Trilling, Eliot's reflections on the meaning of a poem (like its "use" or "value") become intricate, knotty, and even metaphysical: "A poem may appear to mean very different things to different readers," he writes, "and all of these meanings may be different from what the author thought he meant" (Eliot 1942b, 500). To ignore, as New Critics do, that aesthetic objects might be interpreted in unforeseen ways by unknown readers in unanticipated circumstances, each of whom has their own political and historical "unconscious" to deal with, ignores "the fact that the poem means more, not less, than ordinary speech can communicate"—it ignores, in short, the powers and capacities unique to aesthetic objects in a fundamental way (Eliot 1942b, 500). The variegated critical approach

cultivated by *Partisan Review* in the past decade and concretized in this period, then, the only aesthetically, historically, and politically sound course for the future of criticism to take—despite the national atmosphere of political disillusionment out of which it emerged.

Conclusion: "culture will be attacked in the name of culture"

In 1942 the editors of *Partisan Review* "asked some twenty writers to comment on Van Wyck Brooks' theory of modern literature" and a Dwight Macdonald essay that discussed it in the previous issue ("Editors' Note" 38). In the Macdonald essay, he called the theory an "official approach to art" reminiscent of "the Stalinist writers' front" and symptomatic of "a frustrating historical situation—the breakdown of the political, social, and cultural values of the bourgeois, and the simultaneous impotence of any progressive revolutionary force to sweep clear the debris" that, if followed, would lead our greatest thinkers "back to the long discredited values of the bourgeoisie," or "towards a totalitarian 'solution'"—both "historical dead-ends" (Macdonald 1941b, 450-1, 442). For Macdonald, and for *PR* as a whole, the moderns—"Eliot, Joyce, Proust, James, Valéry"—are not, as Brooks argues, "an end," but rather a beginning—they represent what "is still the most advanced cultural tendency that exists" (Macdonald 1941b, 451).

The article and call inspired a number of respondents to write in, among them William Carlos Williams, Allen Tate, James T. Farrell, Louise Bogan, and John Crowe Ransom (in which he inquired, as quoted above, into the question of "just what literature is calculated to do"). The segment concluded with a note from the editors and a cablegram from T. S. Eliot, with the promise that he would send comments soon. In the following issue, Eliot's letter was published as a letter to the editor in which Eliot offers a somewhat ominous account of the situation in literary criticism. Given all that had transpired in the past decade, the modes of criticism now

gaining popularity, and the prescriptivism of the "Brooks-MacLeish thesis" in particular, he reflects on where to go from here:

> Literature has at some times and in some places been condemned for infraction of laws of religious orthodoxy; in some places at some times it has been condemned for infraction of laws of political orthodoxy: but in such a situation we can at least know where we are; and religious and political criteria need not be confused with literary and artistic criteria. In Britain and America we are not likely to find our issues defined so clearly as that: what is more likely is that democracy will be attacked in the name of democracy; that culture will be attacked in the name of culture, literature in the name of literature—even, perhaps, religion in the name of religion. (Eliot 1942a, 116)

In this letter we see a kind of roadmap to the recent decade in radical American letters. The ties binding aesthetic objects with political and religious ideologies have oft been highlighted in their abuse and misuse: literature has been "condemned" in the name of many other things, but in those situations "we can at least know where we are"—literary criteria "need not be confused" with other kinds of criteria, be they religious, political, and so on. For Eliot, however, in recent years these relationships have become much more fraught; the issues are no longer "defined so clearly as that". Now, literature is condemned not "for infraction of laws of political orthodoxy," but condemned "in the name of literature"—this is not to say that political and religious systems of value no longer have purchase on literary issues, but rather that they *are no longer recognizable as such*. They have been masked, submerged, counterfeited: political or religious claims now disguise themselves as aesthetic claims. As Macdonald has it above, literary-critical arguments become "merely *other forms* of political [or religious] thought and action". And the frustrating difficulty of this situation comes to bear directly on our use and misuse of competing literary methodologies, which likewise have become difficult to evaluate, no longer as clear-cut as they once were in the era of Popular Front propagandistic critical prose. Where Rahv argued along similar lines four years prior after the Comintern's volte-face in "Trials of the Mind"—"I

am not what I am," "the idea too is capable of blackmail," "the problem is to make sure of identities"—now, as Eliot describes it, the situation has become even murkier. Deception, difficulty, and obscurity once again suffuse the waters of literary criticism in newly insidious ways.

Other contributors to *PR* in this period agree: Dwight Macdonald called the dearth of "intelligibility and reasonability in the world we live in" a symptom of the times, "because we are in a period of profound social frustration, in which all roads ahead seem to be blocked." (Macdonald 1943, 321); Sidney Hook described a more general "failure of nerve" in his critical community brought about by "the frustrated hopes, the anxiety, the sense of being lost and alone, the growing bewilderment, the fear and horror" of the time (Hook 1943, 8). The mood of the moment—what Felski and Fraiman call the "affective atmosphere in which we steeped"—arose from a situation defined by frustration, bewilderment, and blockages. When literature is attacked in the name of literature, how are we as critics, writers, readers, to respond? Carefully and cautiously, according to Eliot and many other contributors to *PR*, with suspicion, distance, and skepticism—to never find ourselves too easily taken in, convinced, or satisfied. Put another way: finding ourselves—as we learn to read, dive into, and pull away from literary texts, as we question and interrogate, seek out absences and aporias, prep and isolate analyzable quotations, pull out thematic threads in a classroom, offer a historical anecdote that troubles what we might have otherwise thought—assailed by a reluctance to be satisfied with easy answers. We are assailed by a new way of "being-in-the-world" with literature, a need to go further and deeper, to trouble and nuance and complicate, to uncover, parse, and untangle—assailed, in a word, by discontentment.

Chapter 2: Measured Protest in the Poetry of the Black Arts Movement

This chapter investigates how the poet/critics of the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s and 70s transformed frustration into a means of sharpening their poetry to have a targeted impact on a particular readership. I argue that this process of honing and brandishing the affective dimensions of a poem so as to provoke a particular readerly response occurs largely in the realm of *tone*—a formal feature of literary texts that, despite its importance for understanding the political dimensions of artworks, has received little serious examination in the last half of the century. Unlike mood, which scholars have used as a lens for investigating both "the low-key affective tone of critical and theoretical writing" and more broadly "the fundamental ways in which we *find* ourselves *disposed* in such and such a way," (Felski and Fraiman vi; Heidegger 67) *tone* tends to have a more specific meaning in literary contexts: a word used to recognize that web of affective relationships between writer, reader, subject matter, and world established by the writer according to specific rhetorical strategies. The most prominent writer on tone is I.A. Richards, who defined it as a writer's "*attitude to his listener*" and simultaneous "*recognition of his relation to them*" (Richards 175); much more recently, Sianne Ngai has expanded discussions of this "promiscuously used yet curiously underexamined" concept to view tone as the broader "affective 'comportment' of a literary text," a concept "pos[ing] the additional difficulty of aesthetic immanence, of being something that seems 'attached' to an artwork" (Ngai 41, 43). However, the exact nature of this "aesthetic immanence"—its relation to a more global "comportment" of a text, as well as to specific feelings like frustration or anger—remains difficult to pin down.

Emerging as it does from an affective situation governed by the persistent, systemic frustration of quests for racial justice in America, Black Arts poetry often adopts a tone of *protest*. A body of work famous for tying heightened affects to an explicitly political quest for racial justice in America, this poetry was also written in the shadow of government surveillance programs, active FBI counterintelligence operations, and a larger culture fearful of radical thought. With this in mind, my analysis of *measured protest*—which I define below—in this poetry involves a form of exploratory computational analysis, in which I use a natural language processing technique called sentiment analysis to "evaluate" poems for different kinds of sentiment. In this sense, this chapter explores the fraught methodological implications of using distanced, potentially decontextualizing computational text analysis techniques to think through BAM poetry, and how these digital methods might best be used to pursue questions, problems, and lines of inquiry centered around black thought and experience. Indeed, rather than blunt this poetry's radical, experimental edge, techniques like sentiment analysis can highlight how writers like Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, and others wrote with an eye for maintaining their tone of protest even for future audiences and unanticipated contexts.

I describe this tone as "measured protest" to emphasize its linkage to the frustration out of which it emerges—this includes its role as both *feeling* and *status*, both situationally structured and structur*ing*. "Protest" as a noun refers to "any action, act, or statement expressing (emphatic) objection to or dissent from something" ("protest, noun," 4a, OED Online). In order to emphasize what Ngai refers to as the "aesthetic immanence" of tone, I qualify this protest as being "measured" to emphasize that, as poetic language, it is also "carefully weighed or calculated; regulated, moderated, restrained" ("measured, adj.," 2b, OED Online). The term "measured" also highlights the unique computational aspects of my methodology as I undertake

an exploration of where and how tone happens in these poems; specifically, it applies to my use of natural language processing techniques designed to "measure" or evaluate sentiment in snippets of text, which many literary scholars have begun to use to evaluate literary language (Jockers 2015, 2013; Swafford; Heuser et al. 2016; Long and So 2016; Cavender et al.). Though it may appear counterintuitive, I believe computational methods can offer new perspectives into how we read for and understand the "aesthetic immanence" of a given text's "affective 'comportment'"—a perspective into which, as far as I can tell, no scholarship (digital or otherwise) has attempted to inquire. Moreover, as my discussion of the history of race and technology will show, inquiries that make use of such tools must also grapple with the limits and potential dangers of using such methods on texts that tie formal experimentation to an explicitly political quest for racial justice in America.

In a sentence: my project uses a natural language processing (NLP) technique called sentiment analysis to evaluate a corpus of 26 books of poetry from BAM writers for different kinds of sentiment. At their core, sentiment analysis tools measure "sentiment" in words or groups of words. The end result of this process involves assembling a corpus (in this case, twenty-six .txt files each of which contains many individual poems), running a program on that corpus, and interpreting the results. Because I have parameterized my project around the poetic line, my results take the form of a line-by-line assignation of sentiment values, which vary depending on the sentiment analysis tool I have chosen to use. This is natural language processing: using a program to computationally process "natural language," in our case sentences or snippets of sentences in English.

Poetic language, however, is not the natural language such tools have been built to evaluate. Sentiment classifiers are, in fact, extremely limited in their ability to process the

emotional valences of a poem when compared with, for example, a human reader. The classifiers I use completely ignore historical context, rhetorical form, linguistic play, punctuation or capitalization, and layered meaning of any kind. They examine, exclusively, individual words (with minor considerations of grammatical context) and the sentiment value of their denotative meaning(s). Moreover, in the case of the two programs I use, they evaluate only for "negative" and "positive" sentiment. In this sense, my goal is not to use sentiment classifiers in such a way that accurately predicts the "sentiment score" of snippets of experimental poetry in English. I am fully aware that, as one scholar puts it, "sentiment analysis continues to struggle to capture complex sentiment like irony, sarcasm, and mockery," where a human reader would not struggle (Saldaña). Instead, my goal is to see what existing classifiers like Pattern and VADER—both of which I will discuss more below—can show us about a specific corpus of poetry, and how the affordances of computational analysis might shape my inquiry into my corpus of poetry. Moreover, throughout the course of my investigation, I will offer perspectives on stages of this process often left "black-boxed" in digital humanities projects: the many human decisions involved in transcription, parameterization, and pre-processing the text of my corpus for analysis, as well as how these decisions affect the insights such tools might offer.[30]

In short: in addition to exploring the challenges faced by these tools and frankly addressing their limits, I hope to show their potential value. As mentioned above, tone, as a literary concept, seeks to describe a somewhat precarious relation between writer and reader: a product of the ever-changing relationship between denotation, connotation, context, and poetic function. If *measured protest* involves an emphatic objection through a vivid expression of feeling, it also involves responding carefully—through poetic rhetoric—to its particular

[30] For a broader, data-sciences view on such problems, see Cathy O'Neil's *Weapons of Math Destruction* (2016).

historical moment. Despite its limitations, sentiment analysis can actually prove useful in investigating one aspect of this complex relation—denotation—"measuring" not only sentiment scores, but also the distance between the feeling a word or phrase conveys on its surface, and what it conveys when understood as being embedded in a rich rhetorical situation.

Introduction: Baraka, controversy, misconstruction, and the problem of tone

In a prefatory note to his 1969 collection *Black Magic*, Amiri Baraka offers an "Explanation of the Work" that touches on three of his earlier books setting, the stage for the militant tone of the collection as a whole. "*Sabotage*," he writes of the first book, "meant I had come to see the superstructure of filth Americans call their way of life, and wanted to see it fall. To sabotage it," in a word (Baraka 1969, n.p.). The second book, he argues, takes this intensity even further: "But *Target Study* is trying to really study, like bomber crews do the soon to be destroyed cities. Less passive now, less uselessly 'literary'" (n.p.). As these opening comments indicate, the poetry of *Black Magic* has a certain level of affective intensity. These poems articulate rage: some thunder, fulminate, and protest, venting a vindicated anger at racial injustice in America; others simmer with a more restrained heat; others still, like the sentences above, crackle with calculated iciness. On the whole, these poems adopt intense affective stances and tend to employ an often unsettling rhetorical violence.

Consider, for example, the conclusion of a poem from *Sabotage* titled "A POEM SOME PEOPLE WILL HAVE TO UNDERSTAND":

> We have awaited the coming of a natural
> phenomenon. Mystics and romantics, knowledgeable
> workers
> of the land.
>
> But none has come.
> (repeat)
> but none has come.

Will the machinegunners please step forward? (6)

Though startling, this final image punctuates a familiar narrative: the mounting of frustration while waiting and waiting for justice. The speaker's closing remark seems to respond to the question asked in Langston Hughes's poem "Harlem"—"What happens to a dream deferred?"—but raises the ante of the inquiry, and shifts from Hughes's suggestive but still open-ended conclusion ("*Or does it explode?*") to an unsettling direct request ("Will the machinegunners please step forward?").

Both poems are, at their core, explosive responses to *frustrative situations*. The poem above, however, also seems aware of its high dramatic tone: on the one hand, it conveys the gravity of deferred deliverance with somewhat formal rhetoric like "We have awaited" and "But none has come." On the other hand, it highlights—and perhaps undercuts—its own theatricality by embedding a stage direction in the poem, "(repeat)". We've waited for long enough, the poem seems to argue, but stages this claim in such a way that the final line's delivery hangs suspended somewhere between deadpan and dead serious—depending on the reader and context of reading, it could be taken either way.

This ambivalence, I argue, emerges from the problem of tone: whether speaker and reader are "on the same page"; of construal and misconstrual, of mutual attunement and a shared wavelength; those moments when readers seem to miss the point, take things the wrong way, or "not get" a text despite having read it carefully. Familiar as the problem may be, solutions are not obvious: the thorny intersection of historical context, aesthetic style, and unpredictable affective response make issues of tone—that is, how we *take* the meaning of a poem—a touchy subject, particular with regards to overtly political poetry that aims to stir up powerful responses in its readership.

Baraka, in particular, has become famous for this kind of poem and the extreme responses it can provoke. Militant, angry, revolutionary, provocative, with a troubling dose of violence—the incendiary tenor of his poetry has led one scholar to describe his oeuvre as "a lifetime of saying the unsayable" (Keleta-Mae 278). With regards to *Black Magic* specifically, editor William J. Harris of the 1991 *The Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader* describes this collection as one in which Baraka "traces his painful exit from the white world and his entry into blackness," an "exorcism of white consciousness and values [that] included a ten-year period of professed hatred of whites, and most especially Jews" (Harris xxiv). Baraka looks back at this period in his 1984 autobiography at a remove from the red-hot intensity of the poems themselves: "I guess, during this period, I got the reputation for being a snarling, white-hating madman. There was some truth to it, because I was struggling to be born, to break out from the shell I could instinctively sense surrounded my own dash for freedom" (Baraka 1997, 286). From this perspective, this is the violence of escape, of "struggling to be born" from within a constricting "shell"—a version, perhaps, of the violence of the deferred dream that explodes at the end of Langston Hughes's poem "Harlem."

But Baraka continued to write and perform poetry in the 2000s that confirmed his reputation for starting fires, subverting political systems, and, in certain circles, making public hate speech. "Somebody Blew Up America," written by Baraka in the months following 9/11, is perhaps one of his most infamous poems. Cacophonous, insistent, and hyperbolic, the poem interrogates various systems of oppression throughout history and across the planet. The problem of tone, however, persisted: for everything that "Somebody Blew Up America" does as a poem, as a piece of public speech the poem lost Baraka his job. The backlash following its performance at the Geraldine Dodge Poetry Festival in September 2002 was so intense that Baraka published

a defense of the poem in *counterpunch*, citing "[t]he recent dishonest, consciously distorted and insulting non-interpretation of my poem" as "fundamentally an attempt to defame me" (Baraka 2002). Unable to remove him from his post as poet laureate for the state of New Jersey, the New Jersey State Senate abolished the post altogether rather than have Baraka continue to fill the position. Obviously someone—either Baraka or the state of New Jersey—was "missing the point" with regards to how and what poems are allowed, or not allowed, to protest.

"Somebody Blew Up America" alludes persistently to the world of politics and history, often in the form of the list. But unlike a text like *The Waste Land*, which invokes Greek myths, Dante Alighieri, and the New Testament, "Somebody Blew Up America" names the names of those in positions of power within systems viewed as oppressive (President George Bush, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Clarence Thomas, etc.) as well as those killed or harmed while fighting for social change (Medgar Evers, Fred Hampton, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and many more). In this sense, the poem's historical erudition draws from a different constellation of names, images, myths, and histories than much poetry considered "canonical," like Eliot's. In doing so, it mobilizes a different audience of readers for a different purpose while still remaining in the rhetorical realm of the literary: it is a protest poem in terms of tone, simmering with frustration towards a whole suite of historical injustices, but one whose protest has been carefully weighed, fitted, and measured to the formal constraints and aesthetic medium of lyric poetry.[31]

[31] Watching a video of Baraka performing this poem (as of writing there are many available online), the pacing and affective artistry of Baraka's performance foregrounded a very different poem than the one seemingly read by the State of New Jersey: what seemed slower, weightier, and even more solemn on the page felt faster, lighter, and even breezier in performance. Drawing from my own viewing experience, Baraka's performance made the poem suddenly feel much more humorous and playful, despite the gravity of its contents—as if I, too, had been misreading the tone somehow on the page. Now when I go back to reading the poem I can't help but hear the tone of Baraka's deliver, its "affective bearing" having shifted after viewing his performance.

Scholars have tried to weigh this poem's aesthetic form alongside its political feather-ruffling. In discussing the poem's role "in the business of defining and disrupting what can be said," one scholar notes the poem's rhetorical force draws in part from "its torrid mixture of factual, ambiguous, humorous, grotesque, suggestive, and intentionally provocative content" (Keleta-Mae 275). With regards to readerly misconstruals of this poem, others note that "[t]he fact that the anaphoric structure of the poem with its interrogating litany of *Who*'s begins by raising the question of the status of the utterance, by throwing into question the political and rhetorical ground on which the saying takes place, would seemingly make more difficult some of the charges that have been leveled against the poem, *but that would require an actual reading of the poem*" (Harris and Nielsen 184, emphases mine). Another critic describes its "arresting diatribes against the evils of imperialism and the attendant evils of racism" as part of what makes it "an angry poem, perfectly consistent with Baraka's traditional 'angry' persona, fashioned as a response to historical acts of violence caused by imperialist and racist thinking," and cites the controversy surrounding this poem as a powerful example of how difficult it is "to read such [political] poetry in an unbiased, informed, appreciative way and how to stay attuned to its aesthetic quality without compromising its ideological potential. In other words, *the challenge is how to read overtly political poetry as poetry*" (Gwiazda 464, 463, emphases mine).

So the question remains: how *do* we read overtly political poetry as poetry? What does an "actual reading" of a poem that is "intentionally provocative" look like? If taking a protest poem at face-value results, to use Baraka's words, in a "non-interpretation" of the poem, what is the *right* way to approach a poem like this? As a cool, imperturbable critic? Or as someone who allows themselves to be disturbed, exasperated, or emboldened? Perhaps the better question is: how does this poem comport itself with regards to its readers and listeners? What is its "affective

bearing, orientation, or 'set toward' its audience and world" (Ngai 43) —in other words, what is its tone? Though "affective bearing" might feel secondary or even tertiary with regards to how institutions of literary criticism judge, weigh, and evaluate the significance of a given poem, a recent example shows this not to be the case—rather, at stake here is the artistic merit of poems like "Somebody Blew Up America" or Baraka's infamous landmark poem "Black Art" from 1966. It is a question over which scholars and professionals still disagree.

Consider the following exchange in *The New York Review of Books* between Helen Vendler and Rita Dove. The anthology in question is *The Penguin Anthology of 20th Century American Poetry*, edited by Rita Dove and published in 2011. The issue in question is whether or not poetry by poets like Baraka should appear in it. Vendler writes:

> Rita Dove, a recent poet laureate (1993-1995), has decided, in her new anthology of poetry of the past century, to shift the balance, introducing more black poets and giving them significant amounts of space, in some cases more space than is given to better-known authors. … Dove is at pains to include angry outbursts as well as artistically ambitious meditations. … Dove must realize that the new 'literary standards' behind this example of Baraka's verse ["Black Art"] don't immediately declare themselves. Printing something in short lines doesn't make the writer a poet; it only makes him a person with a book of short lines. … If one wants evidence of black anger against 'whitie' and 'jewladies' and 'mulatto bitches,' here it is. But a theme is not enough to make a poem. (Vendler)

And an excerpt from Dove's response:

> It is astounding to me how utterly Vendler misreads my critical assessment of the Black Arts Movement, construing my straightforward account of their defiant manifesto as endorsement of their tactics … [she] focuses on that handy whipping boy, Amiri Baraka, plucking passages from his historically seminal poem "Black Art" in which he denigrated Jews, thereby slyly, even creepily implying that I might have similar anti-Semitic tendencies. … I would not have believed Vendler capable of throwing such cheap dirt, and no defense is necessary against these dishonorable tactics except the desire to shield my reputation from the kind of slanderous slime that sticks although it bears no truth. (Dove 2011b)

To summarize, Vendler argues that poets like Baraka—whose poetry she denigrates as "angry outbursts," lacking "literary standards," and not so much poetry as "a book of short lines"—

should not appear in such an anthology at the expense of poets (to cite the examples she gives) like Wallace Stevens and James Merrill. Dove, on the other hand, argues that the "defiant manifesto" of the Black Arts poets matters for our understanding of 20th century American poetry, and deserves to be represented in an anthology claiming to cover that historical and geographical ground.

The terms of Vendler's attack, however, are revealing. To paraphrase her many complaints: Baraka's poems are *too angry* to be significant poems, allowing "showy violence" and a desire to "rant" to triumph at the expense of what she believes to be the proper form and feel of a poem. Her criticisms, in this sense, unfold almost entirely on affective grounds: where Baraka's poems *should* be "artistically ambitious meditations," they are instead "angry outbursts"; rather than viewing "black anger" as the stuff of which a poem could be made, Vendler relegates it to the level of a "theme" and claims it alone "is not enough to make a poem"; for Vendler, even if Baraka's poetry looks like other poetry, presents itself as poetry, and is printed and sold as poetry, having the appropriate tone is, ultimately, a crucial factor in whether or not "a book of short lines" transforms into art. In the case of Baraka, according to Vendler, this tonal element—and the "literary standards" it implies—does not "immediately declare [itself]." She weighs the poetry of Baraka against that of Wallace Stevens, James Merrill, and other "contemporary poets […who] ask more of their language, [who] embody more planes of existence, [who] dip and pivot like the seagull," adding that, in Dove's decision to include poetry like Baraka's at the expense of a poet like Stevens, she must have "envisag[ed] an audience who would be put off by a complex text" (Vendler). In short: rather than viewing them as complex rhetorical genres with unique features, histories, and poetic interlocutors, Vendler suggests that the outburst, rant, complaint, and objection, as well as the frustration out of which

they emerge—all forms of protest—are simplified or dumbed-down poetic forms that, to rephrase her claim, "ask little of their language."

Almost fifty years after its initial publication, Baraka's poem—in particular, what I will argue is its tone of *measured protest*—still has the power to piss people off. As Dove says in a later interview in which she discusses the *Penguin Anthology* controversy, this response to certain aspects of Baraka's poetry makes sense:

> No question about it: Amiri Baraka's poem 'Black Art' is highly problematic in a social sense, a rant with racist, Antisemitic and sexist elements. There's nothing in this poem I would agree with on a social level … And yet it's not only a seminal poem of the Black Arts Movement, important for understanding the shock engendered when such indiscriminate rage was thrust into the public, but it is also—no matter what Helen Vendler decrees from *her infuriated tone-deaf cosmos*—a poem that pushes language to despairing extremes and ultimately cracks it wide open. (Dove 2011a, emphases mine)

For Dove, Vendler's hostile response fails largely at the level of tone—though her critiques come from a place of great scholarly expertise, they also come marked by a certain tone-deafness ("her infuriated tone-deaf cosmos"). In other words, "understanding" a poem does not exclude her from missing the poem's point. As indicated above in Dove's original response to Vendler—which echoes Baraka's and scholarly responses to the outcry surrounding "Somebody Blew Up America"—Dove characterizes Vendler's attack as a misreading, a perhaps purposeful misconstruction that misses the point of Dove's introductory note on the BAM and commits the "dishonorable tactic" of cherry-picking passages from Baraka's work with an eye for defaming and discrediting him as well as, by extension, Dove herself. She suggests, in short, it is possible for frustration and anger to be presented *through* poetic forms—what she calls the "defiant manifesto" of the Black Arts Movement—rather than merely at their expense.

Dove's comments here also point to another set of problems that scholars continue to have with Baraka's work: a question of whether or not the angry, often militant provocation

Black Arts poets made to "literary standards" should be taken seriously, especially when they make use of racist, anti-Semitic, and sexist language. All these factors together contribute to the "shock," "indiscriminate rage," and "despairing extremes" of this poem and others like it—part and parcel of the poem's tone of protest—as they challenge what counts as poetry, what aesthetic practices are legitimate, and how poems should point themselves toward social or political issues.

I take the time to follow through with the example of Baraka's work to emphasize the significant role that *tone* plays in how his poetry becomes—and stays—provocative, as well as to emphasize the value in viewing this poetry from the perspective of tone, as poetry that emerges, often explosively, in response to a frustrative situation with *measured protest*. Examining the features of this tone, I argue, helps us to get at questions central to scholarship on affect as well as on the Black Arts Movement: how are we to evaluate what Rita Dove calls the "indiscriminate rage" of much of this poetry from the perspective of literary scholarship? Where and in what ways does this feeling *happen* in a poem—what does it mean for a poem to "be angry"? And how, more generally, do we as scholars "read overtly political poetry as poetry"?

First, tone: as a critical concept, tone has received little attention since its introduction into more general scholarly use by I. A. Richards's *Practical Criticism* in 1929. For Richards, tone represents one of "the four kinds of meaning" in verbal utterances, along with sense, feeling, and intention. He defines tone as follows:

> Furthermore, the speaker has ordinarily *an attitude to his listener*. He chooses or arranges his words differently as his audience varies, in automatic or deliberate *recognition of his relation to them*. The tone of his utterance reflects his awareness of this relation, his sense of how he stands towards those he is addressing. (175)

For Richards, tone has to do with the relationship between speaker and audience. Despite the term's proximity to other analytical concepts like "mood," however, we can distinguish it by its focus on how the speaker—deliberate choices in how a writer presents themselves to a given listener. While Richards' definitional language for the term implies more abstract affective dimensions—an "attitude" that involves a "recognition of his relation" as well as "sense of how he stands towards those he is addressing"—tone actually stems directly from the formal features of a literary text.

In this sense, tone *inheres* within literary language. But it inheres in such a way that invokes a specific and complex *affective situation,* in which the affective dimensions of these relations are both situationally structured and structuring. For example, Richards continues this argument by claiming that

> … many of the secrets of 'style' could, I believe, be shown to be matters of tone, of the perfect recognition of the writer's relation to the reader in view of what is being said and their joint feelings about it. (198)

Tone "happens" in a literary text, then, when a writer imagines a reader's response to whatever they intend to write in light of how that writer intends to present this content; then the writer folds a "recognition" of this anticipated "relation" between writer, reader, and content into the writing of the actual thing itself. For example, a belabored version of this might look like: "if I present corrupt politicians as a topic worthy of humorous scorn, will my reader find this kind of joke original, trite, or unpatriotic? Well, because my reader will have already heard many jokes about corrupt politicians from the perspective of someone who thinks them worthy of humorous scorn (and I'm not worried about those who will view it as unpatriotic), I can anticipate their potential jadedness by allowing a certain knowingness, or sympathetic jadedness to inflect my

own perspective on such a joke and thus be on the appropriate page with regards to my reader and the content of the joke itself."

Described in this way, it seems a small miracle that literary texts ever settle on the appropriate tone and "land" with their audience. If we take Richards at his word, finding the right tone involves a delicate balancing act between writer and reader occurring atop an interpretive house of cards—a dizzying stack of anticipatory hypotheticals as to how an imaginary reader might "take" the meaning of given line depending on how the writer *imagined* said reader taking the meaning of the line ("what is being said and their [writer's and reader's] joint feelings about it").

Scholars since Richards have emphasized the limits of viewing tone from this perspective. The entry on "tone" in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* describes how "in more recent lit. crit. the concept has received considerably less [attention], partly because of the psychological assumptions that support it in Richards's definition" (Marno 1442). Taking this one step further, the entry claims that "recent reluctance to use *tone* as an analytical concept" stems from tensions in Richards' definition, most conspicuously between "*tone* as an expression of the author's attitude to an audience" and "the tone of a written text [being] identified not in particular textual features but by its alleged effect on the reader" (Marno 1442). The entry also acknowledges, however, that despite these difficulties and ambiguities, the term began to be used "precisely in order to refer to that intangible quality of the text that cannot be immediately accessed through an analysis of individual textual features; it is, rather, a holistic quality, something that belongs to the text as such" (Marno 1442). In short: while we may not understand where or how tone "happens" in a literary text, the "holistic" and "intangible" quality

of the work that it represents nevertheless results in real and concrete feelings and experiences stemming from encounters with literary texts.

In the chapter of *Ugly Feelings* titled "Tone," Sianne Ngai highlights similar advantages for reconsidering this "promiscuously used yet curiously underexamined" concept (Ngai 41). Distancing herself from Richards' sense of tone as "dramatic 'attitude,'" she describes it as "a global and hyper-relational concept of *feeling* that encompasses attitude: a literary text's affective bearing, orientation, or 'set toward' its audience and world" (Ngai 43). She elsewhere describes tone as "the affective 'comportment' of a literary text," a concept resembling "collective mood" but "pos[ing] the additional difficulty of aesthetic immanence, of being something that seems 'attached' to an artwork" (Ngai 43). Bearing, orientation, comportment—though not far from Richards's "attitude," Ngai also seems to reach for that intangible and holistic quality indicative of the way that a text orients itself to its world of readers. She writes that "[t]o speak of tone is thus to generalize, totalize, and abstract the 'world' of the literary object" (Ngai 43). For Ngai, then, as for Richards, where tone "happens" in a literary text remains difficult to pin down.

If our above example of responses to Amiri Baraka's work is any indication, however, the problem of tone is especially relevant to poetry making an affectively charged political protest. The particular "comportment" of Baraka's poetry—the attitude it takes with regards to its reader as well as the "hyper-relational concept of *feeling*" that surrounds this attitude—has left many readers from different contexts extremely disturbed. As scholars note, Baraka "is a poet who has heard his own poetry read back to him by a sentencing judge as evidence that he is a dangerous man who should be put away. He is a poet who has been arrested and brought before a grand jury purely for the content of his publications" (Harris and Nielsen 186). Tone, though

difficult to concretize, matters for our understanding of what these poems do in the world. As does an understanding of the frustrative political and social situations from which they emerge.

Overview of Black Arts Movement, BAM scholarship

In an article discussing the difficulties of teaching "protest literature," Paul Lauter notes the challenges of reading explicitly political texts outside of their original context. Offering examples of poems that seem impossible to understand without having some familiarity with the political scene out of which they emerge (for example, a poem about "the politics of Indian removal in the Jackson administration"), he asks: "Does protest literature exist, or more accurately perhaps, in what forms does it exist when it is lifted from its specific historical context?" (Lauter 9).[32] Implicit in this question, I would argue, is the idea that literature's capacity to "protest" relies largely on its tone—the web of affective relationships between writer, reader, and subject matter that emerges from the use of specific rhetorical strategies. Moreover, we see the idea that this set of relationships is temporally precarious: a number of variables intersect to determine whether or not a poem with a certain tone—for example, measured protest—lands properly with a given readership. Unlike Lauter's example of a poem that has trouble landing with students, Baraka's "Black Art"—which Helen Vendler denigrates for its "angry outbursts" and abusive, violent, and often hateful rhetoric—still seems to pack a great deal of punch almost half a century after its original publication.

[32] In discussing teaching "protest literature," Paul Lauter poses difficult questions along similar lines: "Does protest literature exist, or more accurately perhaps, in what forms does it exist when it is lifted from its specific historical context? Is it then a fossil or a force?" (Lauter 9). Citing the example of Lydia Sigourney's 1834 poem "Indian Names," he claims that "[it] seems to me that there is no way to understand that poem, much less to appreciate its moves, without first understanding something, at least, about the politics of Indian removal in the Jackson administration" (Lauter 9). Ultimately he concludes that, because protest is not "a conventional literary term" but rather a "social dynamic," and because "the relationship of art—largely produced by individuals—to such social movements is always, at best ambiguous and conflicted," the exact status of protest literature's "resonance" through time is similarly conflicted (Lauter 11).

But not, of course, the same impact this poem had when first published by Baraka in 1966, one year after the assassination of Malcolm X—an event that informed much of the raw feeling in Baraka's early work, and a historical moment in which Baraka's poems appeared alongside a number of other similarly-toned poems, essays, and plays, all in the larger context of an active political movement. Because of this, I think any attempt to understand the role tone plays in these works requires an examination of the affective situations out of which this art emerges—in particular, I want to offer examples of how writers within the Black Arts Movement conceptualized themselves and their artistic, social, and political goals.

The Black Arts Movement first took shape at the height of the Black Power Movement with the foundation of the Revolutionary Theatre by Amiri Baraka in 1965. As Larry Neal—one of its principle theorists—says in a 1969 manifesto, the "Black Arts movement seeks to link, in a highly conscious manner, art and politics" toward "the liberation of Black people" (Neal 1969, 54). As we have seen above with the case of Baraka, the movement's "black esthetic" is also famous for its affective dimensions, often exploring the limits and political uses of anger, frustration, and poetic rage.

In his seminal essay "The Black Arts Movement," published a year prior in a 1968 issue of *The Drama Review*, Neal defines more fully what he sees as the mission of the movement:

> The Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community. Black Art is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America. In order to perform this task, the Black Arts Movement proposes a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic. It proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology. (Neal 1968, 29)

Black Arts poetry, then, is poetry with a social mission. But unlike art coming from the kind of intellectual vanguard advocated by Trotsky and others in the pages of *Partisan Review*, Neal

demands poetry that "speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America"—in other words, poetry that remains accessible and understandable (a far cry from the "difficulty" central to *PR*'s critical discontentment)—and demands poetry by poets who remain directly connected to their communities (as opposed to fearlessly charging ahead of them on the road to political and aesthetic revolution).

This kind of political and social commitment does not mean, however, that these poems are straightforward. To give an example of what Neal's "radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic" might look like, consider the experimental indentation, spacing, punctuation, capitalization, and overall typography from this excerpt of Sonia Sanchez's "a/coltrane/poem," from her 1970 *We A BaddDDD People*, a text included in my corpus:

> (soft rise up blk/people. rise up blk/people
> chant) RISE. & BE. what u can.
> MUST BE.BE.BE.BE.BE.BE.BE-E-E-E-E-
> BE-E-E-E-E-E-
> yeh. john coltrane.
>
> my favorite things is u.
>
> (72)

Like many of the poems from *We A BaddDD People*, "a/coltrane/poem" makes dramatic use of indentation, punctuation, the spaces between words, and the spaces between lines so as to emphasize different words in different ways (even to differentiate stage directions from "spoken" lines). Formatting this poem to appear correctly in a text editor like Microsoft Word, even, requires a significant amount of fiddling—something I will discuss more in the section on my transcription process. Also important to note that this "separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology" included dedicating poems to African American figures like John Coltrane or Malcolm X (see, for example, the 1967 anthology *For Malcolm: Poems on the Life and the Death of Malcolm X*, edited by Dudley Randall and Margaret G. Burroughs).

Glances at other texts from the period offer a similar vision of a concrete social mission behind artistic production. See, for example, excerpts from a preface to Haki R. Madhubuti's (then Don L. Lee) *Don't Cry, Scream* (1969) written by Gwendolyn Brooks:

> [Lee] is well-acquainted with 'elegant' literature (what hasn't he read?) but, while certainly respecting the advantages and influence of good workmanship, he is **not** interested in supplying the needs of the English Departments at Harvard and Oxford nor the editors of Partisan Review … He speaks to blacks hungry for what they themselves refer to as "**real** poetry." … Don Lee has no patience with black writers who do not direct their blackness toward black audiences. (Brooks 1970, 9)

In this brief excerpt, we can see Brooks already anticipating and countering attacks like those made decades later by Helen Vendler. Brooks, like many Black Arts writers, aims here to make the social and political mission behind the work felt as explicitly as possible: not only to make art that spoke first and foremost to black communities ("Blackpoetry is written for/to/about & around the lives/spiritactions/humanism & total existence of blackpeople," Madhubuti writes in a preface of his own following Brooks' [Lee 1970, 15]), but felt that the need for this art was urgent, even an imperative ("Lee has no patience with black writers who do not direct their blackness toward black audiences").[33] More specifically, however, Brooks writes that, while Madhubuti knows the rules of "'elegant' literature" and respects "good workmanship" and artistry, he does *not* write for "the needs of the English Departments at Harvard." To read his poems with those institutional "needs" in mind—as English professors at Harvard (like Vendler) might—means to read them wrongheadedly, according the wrong set of expectations and standards of practice. It means, in a word, to *mis*read them: to be *mis-attuned* to their bearing, orientation, and comportment—their tone of measured protest.

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[33] See also, from Haki R. Madhubuti's preface to *Don't Cry, Scream*: "What u will be reading is blackpoetry. Blackpoetry is written for/to/about & around the lives/spiritactions/humanism & total existence of blackpeople. … Blackpoetry in its purest form is diametrically opposed to whi-te poetry. Whereas, blackpoets deal in the concrete rather than the abstract (concrete: art for people's sake; black language or Afro-american language in contrast to standard English, c.). Blackpoetry moves to define & legitimize blackpeople's reality (**that** which is real to us)" (Madhubuti 1960, 15).

As the controversy between Vendler and Dove over *The Penguin Anthology* might indicate, scholarship has, until only recently, resisted serious critical treatments of Black Arts poetry that read it on its own terms, rather than according to "the needs of the English Departments at Harvard and Oxford." As James Edward Smethurst's pivotal *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (2005) argues, even "many of the most high-profile institutions and scholars of African American studies and ethnic studies maintained … [an] ambivalent, if not hostile relationship to the Black Power movement, the Black Arts movement, and other forms of political and artistic nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s" (1-2). When referenced at all, it was common practice for Black Arts to be "invoked and then dismissed with minimal description as a sort of nonmovement against which the new black creativity could be favorably judged"—this despite the fact that, for many scholars, "their place in the academy was largely cleared for them by the activist nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s—however narrow that nationalism might seem to them now (or seemed to them then)" (Smethurst 2005, 2).

That said, recent texts have started to shift the critical landscape of approaches to Black Arts poetry towards reading these literary texts closer to their original contexts and, I would argue, more attuned to the *measured protest* of the works themselves. Moving beyond key critical texts from the period itself—such as Stephen Henderson's *Understanding the New Black Poetry* (1973), or Addison Gayle Jr.'s introduction to *The Black Aesthetic* (1971)—works like Smethurst's *The Black Arts Movement*, as well as edited volumes such as Lisa Gail Collins' and Margo Natalie Crawford's *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement* (2006), have begun to offer serious and broad-reaching historical introductions to the Movement's many moving parts (including its links to the Communist Left of the 1920s and 1930s), while works like Lorenzo

Thomas's *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (2000) and Kimberly W. Benston, *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism* (2000) investigate the Movement's relationship with the larger literary scene in postwar America, as well as its unique aesthetic practices.[34]

My approach, to which I will now turn, builds on this work through a combination of traditional historical contextualization and close reading of poems, newer computational methods, as well as an interrogation of the limits of those methods. As discussed in my introduction, my project uses an NLP technique called sentiment analysis to evaluate a corpus of 26 books of poetry from BAM writers for different kinds of sentiment. In this computational work, however, the historical specificity of this poetry has remained at the center of my investigation—for example, I draw heavily from Howard Rambsy's *The Black Arts Enterprise and the Production of African American Poetry* (2011) and Melba Joyce Boyd's *Wrestling with the Muse: Dudley Randall and the Broadside Press* (2003), both of which contribute to what Rambsy describes as "[a]n explanation of the forces that created an environment for the display of these kinds of provocative statements" typical of Black Arts writing and artistic production, from anthologies and journals/magazines to specific literary publishers like Randall's Broadside Press and Haki R. Madhubuti's Third World Press (Rambsy 2011, vii). Given the fraught role that gender played in this movement, and my own interest in how this history may have contributed to expressions of different kinds of sentiment, I also draw from Cheryl

[34] From Ishmael Reed, a 1995 interview quoted in Kalamu ya Salaam, "Black Arts Movement," in *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (1997): "I think what Black Arts did was inspire a whole lot of Black people to write. Moreover, there would be no multi-culturalism movement without Black Arts. Latinos, Asian Americans, and others all say they began writing as a result of the example of the 1960s. Blacks gave the example that you don't have to assimilate. You could do your own thing, get into your own background, your own history, your own tradition and your own culture. I think the challenge is for cultural sovereignty and Black Arts struck a blow for that" (Salaam 70).

Clarke's *"After Mecca": Women Poets and the Black Arts Movement* (2005), which investigates how female artists within the BAM navigated its more misogynistic aspects.[35]

Natural language processing as a methodology in literary analysis, however, draws from its own histories and specific scholarly conversations. In a sentence, NLP techniques involve using computational programs to process "a language that is used for everyday communication by humans; languages such as English, Hindi, or Portuguese" (Bird). This kind of language contrasts with "artificial languages such as programming and mathematical notations"—languages that computers find very easy to process—because "natural languages have evolved as they pass from generation to generation, and are hard to pin down with explicit rules" (Bird). Examples of NLP techniques include everything from "counting word frequencies to compare writing different writing styles" called stylometry (Bird), with more complex computational and statistical approaches like topic modelling[36], in which an algorithm processes a body of texts as a giant "bag of words" (unlinked from word order, meaning, or grammatical context) for its lexical patterns (i.e., words A, B, C, and D tend to occur together).

Many NLP techniques already have a vibrant life at the intersections of literary study and digital approaches. For example, Andrew Goldstone and Ted Underwood use topic modeling on an archive of "seven generalist literary-study journals with long print runs" (including *PMLA*, *Critical Inquiry*, *New Literary History*, and *ELH*) to offer an alternative narrative of the "quiet transformations of literary studies" based on computational methods and statistical analysis (Goldstone and Underwood 364). In another more recent example, Mark Algee-Hewitt uses

[35] Even more focused works, like Jerry Gafio Watts' *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (2001) focus on individual writers—but Baraka seems to be the poet from this period to have received most of this kind of treatment. Also see: Clarence Major, *The New Black Poetry* (1969); William J. Maxwell, *F. B. Eyes: How J. Edgar Hoover's Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature* (2015); Klytus Smith and Abiola Sinclair, *The Harlem Cultural/Political Movements, 1960-1970: From Malcolm X to "Black is Beautiful"* (1995).

[36] See for more on this the *Journal of Digital Humanities* issue devoted to topic modeling, vol. 2, no. 1 (2012).

quantitative analysis of a corpus of 3,568 texts from almost four-hundred years of English theater to offer "character networks" that give spatial representations of the interactions between characters through lines of dialogue (Algee-Hewitt 752).

Poetry, however, remains somewhat under-examined when it comes to quantitative methods, most likely in large part due to its rhetorical complexity—stanzas, enjambed lines, and grammatically tricky or conceptually layered turns of phrase are not exactly the "natural language" that NLP techniques are designed to handle. That said, an important predecessor here is Lisa Rhody's work on topic modeling highly figurative ekphrastic poetry—particularly as a model for how unexpected failures in textual analysis can prompt us towards new questions as well as new understandings of familiar methods like close reading (Rhody 2012). Another more recent example is Hoyt Long and Richard Jean So's work on using machine learning techniques to identify patterns in the modernist haiku—two scholars who also view error or failure in models attempting "literary pattern recognition" as productive sites of tension, arguing that "[w]hat the machine learning literature treats as misclassifications, then, we treat as opportunities for interpretation" (Long and So 261).

The use of sentiment analysis in literary study, however, has also been relatively limited. Significant examples include Matthew Jockers's work on the *syuzhet* package, in which he analyzes positive and negative sentiment in a corpus of approximately 50,000 novels for "archetypical plot shapes"; Ryan Heuser et al.'s work coming out of the Stanford Lit Lab on using sentiment analysis as part of their project of "mapping eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels' affective investments with places in London," including feelings like *fear* and *happiness* (Heuser et al., "Mapping the Emotions," 25-26); and finally Kurt Cavender et al.'s more recent chapter in *Reading Modernism with Machines* (2016) in which they "use digital methods to

explore and develop some predictions … regarding a formalism of affect in James Joyce's *Ulysses*" (Cavender et al., 223). But, as far as I can tell, very few scholars[37] have published work using sentiment analysis to investigate poetic corpora. In this sense, my work on this corpus of Black Arts poetry represents one of the first forays into the use of sentiment analysis to study poetry in English.

With regards to the mixture of close reading and computational analysis in my methodology, I build on Andrew Piper's use of vector-space models—a form of NLP—to examine the language of conversion in a corpus of novels; in particular, I build on what he calls the "'strange hermeneutics' of computational reading" as it combines with more traditional methods (Piper 69). In Piper's figuration, critics cannot help but combine both "close" and "distant" reading techniques "when trying to construct literary arguments that operate at a certain level of scale" (69). Moreover, computational approaches become "strange" in the way their iterative process reveals both the unexpected and the "mind-numbingly familiar"; the way in which "[w]e don't so much unmask with the computer as puzzle over the meanings of quantitative facts or just get bored by their incapacity to tell us anything new" (69-70). Citing Piper and taking his argument even further, Paul Fleming argues that close reading—a method defined by what he calls "exemplary reading," or the selection of the right examples—and computational methods "recursively refine and hone each other, as in the return to one approach offers insights that, in turn, modify the other" (Fleming 440). In keeping with this scholarship, my own method involves a similarly recursive process: as Fleming argues, "there is no close reading without the (well-chosen) example" (438), and while sentiment classifiers cannot explain

[37] There is a notable exception of one: Yufang Hou and Anette Frank's "Analyzing Sentiment in Classical Chinese Poetry," *Proceedings of the 9th SIGHUM Workshop on Language Technology for Cultural Heritage, Social Sciences, and Humanities*, Beijing, China, July 30, 2015: 15-24.

why a poem, line, or word matters (or even what it means), such exploratory computational analysis allows me to enter into dialogue with these poems in intellectually productive ways, freshly foregrounding those decisions that go into my "selection" of what to look at more or less closely and why.

Finally, my work on the Black Arts Movement is greatly informed by scholars who have investigated the intersections of race, technology, computational approaches, and the digital humanities—particularly with regards to honing a critical stance toward my own use computational methods. My interlocutors here include contemporary debates in the digital humanities as well as what Roopika Risam calls the "longer history" of "earlier, oft-unrecognized instances of digital humanities work that engages with difference" (Risam 2015). This longer history includes the work of Alondra Nelson and Afrofuturist scholars in the 1990s (as well as the special issue of *Social Text* in 2002 edited by Nelson titled *Future Texts*) challenging and moving beyond "late-1990s digital boom" and "digital divide" narratives in which "Blackness gets constructed as always oppositional to technologically driven chronicles of progress" (Nelson 2002, 1)[38]; it also includes the work of Lisa Nakamura on the persistence and transformation of race in digital media,[39] as well as edited volumes exploring race and technology around the turn of the millennium.[40]

With regards to more recent debates, many have criticized the "digital humanities" as it exists in academic departments for failing to bring the insights and criticality of decades of humanistic study to bear on digital means and methods, particularly with regards to cultural

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[38] Alondra Nelson, "Introduction: Future Texts" *Social Text* 71, Vol. 20, No. 2, Summer 2002. From the same issue, see in particular Anna Everett, "The Revolution Will Be Digitized" (2002).
[39] See in particular Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (2007) and *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (2002).
[40] Alondra Nelson and Thuy Linh N. Tu, eds., *Technicolor: Race, Technology, and Everyday Life* (2001) and Beth E. Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, Gilbert B. Rodman, eds, *Race in Cyberspace* (2000)

criticism, feminist criticism, and critical race theory. This has inspired a great deal of scholarly response from which my work draws directly.[41] Turning more specifically to my use of computational techniques on a corpus Black Arts poets from the 1960s, I also draw from recent scholarship that engages more directly with computational techniques and critical race theory: this includes, for example, a 2017 special issue of *The Black Scholar* introducing "Black Code Studies," a project that seeks to work "beyond the dyad Black + Digital" while also "root[ing] itself in the challenge of living in the wake of black people rendered inhuman, non-existent, and disposable by the slave ship, the plantation, the colonial state, the prison, the border" (Johnson and Neal 1).[42] Also several chapters from the collective volume *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*—in particular, Kim Gallon's "Making a Case for the Black Digital

[41] For example: the #transformDH movement, which began in 2011 as a response to the feeling that DH was "replicating many traditional practices of the ivory tower, those that privileged the white, heteronormative, phallogocentric view of culture that our home disciplines had long critiqued" (Bailey et al. 2016); the Critical Code Studies Working Group, which formed in 2010 and describes itself today as a field seeking to explore "the rhetoric, material history, style, and culture of code—aspects that have previously been only marginally discussed in computer science courses and scholarship" (The Humanities and Critical Code Studies Lab); discussions fostered by Adeline Koh and Roopika Risam on the *Postcolonial Digital Humanities* blog, such as that following their 2013 post titled "Open Thread: The Digital Humanities as a Historical 'Refuge' from Race/Class/Gender/Sexuality/Disability?" (Koh and Risam); flashpoints like the 2013 MLA roundtable titled "The Dark Side of the Digital Humanities," featuring intentionally provocative papers by Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, Richard Grusin, Patrick Jagoda, and Rita Raley, as well as its various responses, including a special issue of *differences* in 2014 titled "In the Shadows of the Digital Humanities"—for original papers, see Wendy Hui Kyong Chun et al., "The Dark Side of the Digital Humanities" in *Debates in the DH 2016*. For various responses, see Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, Lisa Marie Rhody, "Working the Digital Humanities: Uncovering Shadows between the Dark and the Light" in *differences* (2014), Fiona M. Barnett, "The Brave Side of Digital Humanities" in *differences* (2014), and Moya Z. Bailey, "All the Digital Humanists Are White, All the Nerds Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave" in *Journal of Digital Humanities* (2011). This also includes specific articles that have been returned to again and again since their publication, such as Alan Liu's 2012 "Where Is Cultural Criticism in the Digital Humanities?" and Tara McPherson's 2012 "Why Are the Digital Humanities So White? or Thinking the Histories of Race and Computation," in which details the intersecting histories of "racial organizing principles" and the digital, computationally-based "technological organization of knowledge" in the shifting terrains of the 1960s (McPherson 2012), as well as Alexis Lothian and Amanda Phillips's 2013 "Can Digital Humanities Mean Transformative Critique?", in which they seek out digital scholarship that challenges the academy's traditional "commitment to the works of white men, living and dead; its overvaluation of Western and colonial perspectives on (and in) culture; its reproduction of heteropatriarchal generational structures" (Lothian and Phillips 5).

[42] In this issue see, in particular, Aleia M. Brown and Joshua Crutchfield, "Black Scholars Matter: #BlkTwitterstorians Building a Digital Community"; Tara L. Conley, "Decoding Black Feminist Hashtags as Becoming" (2017); Ahmad Greene-Hayes and Joy James, "Cracking the Codes of Black Power Struggles: Hacking, Hacked, and Black Lives Matter" (2017); Ashleigh Greene Wade, " 'New Genres of Being Huma': World Making through Viral Blackness" (2017).

Humanities," in which she argues that "any connection between humanity and the digital … requires an investigation into how computational processes might reinforce the notion of a humanity developed out of racializing systems," (Gallon) and Amy E. Earhart's "Can Information Be Unfettered? Race and the New Digital Humanities Canon," in which she claims "[w]ithout careful and systematic analysis of our digital canons, we not only reproduce antiquated understandings of the canon but also reify them through our technological imprimatur" (Earhart).[43] Lastly, of great value to me were blogs and websites of individual scholars like Howard Rambsy who regularly explore and discuss such issues.[44]

In crafting my own methodology and approach to this corpus of poetry from the Black Arts Movement, I have done my best to take the full complexity and urgency of these debates into account. This manifests itself in my detailed and rigorous interrogation of the computational technologies I deploy at every stage of their use, from initial transcription to querying of individual sentiment values. To put it simply: this self-critical reflection is not something I have performed so as to be able to more confidently perform sentiment analysis on a corpus of poems. Rather, these interrogations and their resulting complexity are an integral to the insights I hope to offer in this chapter; they have fundamentally shaped my understanding of sentiment analysis as it pertains to literary study, as well as what I believe these tools can show of the affective dimensions of a given poem or group of poems.

In what follows, I will offer an explanation of my process—how I prepared these poems for analysis, how I implemented NLP techniques, and how I deployed these tools as a means of analysis—alongside a discussion of my results—my "findings," the evidence in support of my

[43] In *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*, see also Roopika Risam, "Navigating the Global Digital Humanities: Insights from Black Feminism" and Amy E. Earhart, Toniesha L. Taylor, "Pedagogies of Race: Digital Humanities in the Age of Ferguson."
[44] See, for example, Rambsy's website: http://www.culturalfront.org/

argument. This means that, rather than separate my discussion into "methodology" and "results" sections, I have integrated my discussion of tools, methods, as well as the various stages in the assembly and analysis of my corpus into my discussion of the poetry itself. My reasoning for this stems from the desire to use these tools in such a way that centers my inquiry on black thought and experience. In many ways, the poetry that I examine resists computational approaches: as discussed above, such tools fail to gain any purchase on many of these poems' finely-honed tone of protest. Taking this resistance seriously means interrogating the biases, assumptions, and limits of the tools that I am using, as well as the conceptual affordances of a distanced, potentially de-contextualizing approach. Throughout this analysis, I will argue that a computational approach to this corpus provides a new perspective on how we think about *tone*—specifically, a tone of *measured protest*, in which poems strategically apply a specific set of affects to a specific set of issues with an eye for inciting change, often with drastic disparities between what I call the *surface sentiment* of these works and the social purposes towards which a poem brandishes them.

Assembling and analyzing my corpus

In a recent *PMLA* issue on digital methods, Johanna Drucker concludes her article "Why Distant Reading Isn't" by claiming that distant reading's

> literalness makes it the closest form of reading imaginable. What distant reading lacks is distance. That distance is critical; it is the space between the literal text and the virtual text, between the inscriptional, notational surface and the rhetorical, cognitive effect that produces a text. (Drucker 633)

In other words, when an algorithm "reads" a corpus by scouring it for patterns of one kind or another, it does not transform the text the way that a human reader does. It can get so "close" because it reads without the powerful and dynamic cognitive filters through which human readers conjure, out of the written word, literary worlds. For Drucker, closing the gap between

"reader" and text in this way is one of the things that makes distant reading "the closest form of reading imaginable."

But, crucially, human decisions shape how a program closes that gap in the first place. As Drucker argues elsewhere in the article, "modeling and paramaterization"—decisions made by scholars and programmers as to what a program will look for and, therefore, be able to find—not only "shape the terms by which a text is analyzed to produce quantitative data," but are also "rendered almost invisible by the forms in which results are expressed" (Drucker 632). These before-the-fact decisions, then, are what allow an algorithm to read from such a close range—ignoring the "rhetorical, cognitive effect that produces a text," they engage with "the inscriptional, notational surface" according to a set of pre-established instructions to produce results of one form or another. In this sense, some might argue that the "distance" distant reading "lacks" is the gap in which literature happens: the unpredictable, unwieldy interpretive space in which a reader transforms text on a page or screen into a living work of art.

In assembling my corpus of poetry from the Black Arts Movement, this gap between "inscriptional, notational surface" and "rhetorical, cognitive effect" came increasingly to the fore. This corpus of Black Arts poetry includes, in alphabetical order, the following texts:

1-3. Amiri Baraka, *Black Magic: Sabotage, Target Study, Black Art: Collected Poetry, 1961-1967* (1969)
4. Gwendolyn Brooks, *In the Mecca* (1968)
5. Jayne Cortez, *Festivals and Funerals* (1971)
6. Jayne Cortez, *Pissstained Stairs and The Monkey Man's Wares* (1969)
7. Mari Evans, *I am a Black Woman* (1970)
8-9. Nikki Giovanni, *Black Feeling, Black Talk, Black Judgement* (1970)
10. Nikki Giovanni, *Re:creation* (1970)
11. Etheridge Knight, *Poems From Prison* (1968)
12. Audre Lorde, *Cables to Rage* (1970)
13. Audre Lorde, *From a Land Where Other People Live* (1973)
14. Haki M. Madhubuti, *Black Pride* (1968)
15. Haki M. Madhubuti, *Don't Cry, Scream* (1969)
16. Haki M. Madhubuti, *Think Black* (1969)

17. Dudley Randall, *Cities Burning* (1968)
18. Dudley Randall, *More to Remember* (1971)
19. Ishmael Reed, *Catechism of d neoamerican hoodoo church* (1970)
20. Carolyn M. Rodgers, *Paper Soul* (1968)
21. Carolyn M. Rodgers, *Songs of a Black Bird* (1969)
22. Sonia Sanchez, *Home Coming* (1969)
23. Sonia Sanchez, *It's a New Day* (1971)
24. Sonia Sanchez, *We a BaddDDD People* (1970)
25. Askia M. Touré, *Juju* (1970)
26. Quincy Troupe, *Embryo Poems, 1967-1971* (1972)

Of these 26 books of poetry, I transcribed 23 of them by hand. This means that I looked at every page of all of these books in sequence and typed their contents into a text editor. In many ways, this represents the kind of "reading" that we expect a machine to be good at: tedious and time-consuming, sure, but also mechanical, even mindless—something lacking that human "distance" Drucker describes above.

When it comes to transcription, however, the devil is in the details. And optical character recognition (OCR) software that transcribes text from images still struggles to get all the details right. After scanning pages into images and processing them with a program like ABBYY FineReader, the resulting text files are often garbled with mistakes—errors that require a human reviewer to identify, compare with the original, and correct by hand. Though an extremely useful piece of software, a program can't be all things to all people, and I found this especially true for experimental texts like the poetry in my corpus that employ unusual indentation, spacing, punctuation, capitalization, and non-traditional spellings.

Anticipating setbacks and roadblocks such as this went into my decision to transcribe my texts by hand. What I failed to anticipate, however, was how much trouble I—a presumably well-trained human reader—would have transcribing text from these physical documents into a text editor. This being the case even when my documents were fully intact and the text completely legible. In the transcription process, I found that this hairs-breadth, closest-form-of-

reading-imaginable reading—the kind that seems to go no further than inscriptional surface—is also a complex task requiring creativity, imagination, and resourcefulness. Moreover, rather than being a mindless or merely mechanical task, the transcription of these texts frequently presented thorny decisions that demanded my judgement as a reader, scholar, and programmer. Arriving at these decisions often required not only a knowledge of digital methods, but also of bibliographical methods and questions of poetic form (how, for example, does one identify a stanza vs. a page break? Or poetic enjambment vs. poetic runovers?)

Moreover, tensions in this process were often heightened further by what I will call *computational resistance* within the poems of my corpus. By this I mean the consistent presence of formal features that resist, defy, bewilder, and otherwise frustrate computational reading practices at its various stages. For example, in Haki Madhubuti's *Don't Cry, Scream*, the word "white" appears a total of zero times while the word "whi-te," with a hyphen separating the "i" and "t," appears eleven times. On one occasion, the word and its hyphen even splits over the enjambment of two lines, becoming "whi-/te". For a human reader performing a traditional close reading, Madhubuti's replacement neologism might give pause, inviting readers to rethink the conceptual relationship between "whi-te" and "white," what these characters signify as well as the speaker's relationship to this signification. For an NLP program reading only at the text's inscriptional surface, however, these two word-tokens are two completely separate, unique strings of characters with no links whatsoever. Depending on the parameters and model being used, this rhetorical move might present a significant stumbling block, tripping up the program's analysis and skewing results. For example, any form of analysis examining the string "white" and its relationship with other words in the corpus would be unable to see Madhubuti's "whi-te." The rhetorical maneuver—and others including alternative spellings, neologisms, onomatopoeia,

aural puns, splitting words with enjambment or additional white space—resists certain modes of computational reading.[45]

That is, unless, the user were to rewrite the program to reconcile "whi-te" and "white" into the same word token. Such workarounds are common in NLP, particularly in pre-processing a text so that it is machine readable at all—for example, making everything lowercase so that strings like "Poem" and "poem" are treated as the same word for word frequency purposes. Making a text more amenable to computational forms of reading, then, often involves manipulating the voice of the poet by making changes to the original text. Negotiating this strategic deformation of a literary work becomes even more fraught when considering that the authors in question may have laid rhetorical speedbumps to *resist* just this kind of distanced reading technique, pushing towards a more humanistic form of interpretation—a digital echo, perhaps, of what Simone Browne calls "dark sousveillance," resonating from the 1960s and 70s to the present in an emergent and "imaginative space from which to mobilize a critique of racializing surveillance, a critique that takes form in antisurveillance, countersurveillance, and other freedom practices" (Browne 21).[46] This is particularly the case for my corpus, given the

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[45]For example, in a poem titled "Hero" in *Don't Cry, Scream,* Madhubuti breaks the word "posthumously" apart letter by letter with enjambment, giving each letter its own line ("p/o/s/t/h/u/m/o/u/s/l/y") (Madhubuti 1970, 39). For an example of alternative spellings and word-splitting enjambment from a different book, see the following from Carolyn Rodgers' "JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED, or, It Must be Deep (an epic pome)" in *Songs of a Black Bird*:

> and she sd it is it is and deep deep down
> in yo heart u know it's true
> (and i sd)
> it must be d
> eeeep
> she sd i mon pray fuh u tuh be saved. i sd thank yuh. (Rodgers 1969, 11)

These alternative spellings, enjambed words, and written representation of a specific black vernacular, would stymie most any NLP program.

[46] Elsewhere in *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, Browne writes: "One of the tasks of *Dark Matters* has been to situate the dark, blackness, and the archive of slavery and its afterlife as a way to trouble and expand understandings of surveillance? … In the beginning of this book, I named dark sousveillance as a form of critique that centers black epistemologies of contending with surveillance … Dark sousveillance is an analytical frame that takes disruptive staring and talking back as a form of argumentation and reading praxis when it comes to reading

contemporaneous interpretive practice being employed by J. Edgar Hoover's COINTELPRO, a 1956-1971 FBI program designed, in Hoover's own words, to "expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize" targets like the Black Panther Party and Martin Luther King Jr., often illegally and intentionally violating the rights of those targeted (qtd. in Cunningham 6).[47] With this in mind, I offer the following account in an effort to investigate "how computational processes might reinforce the notion of a humanity developed out of racializing systems," including those stages of corpus assembly and textual pre-processing (Gallon). This includes the many decisions I made in preparing my corpus for the use of any NLP techniques, prior to the use of sentiment analysis itself.

Take, for example, lines from the poem quoted earlier in this chapter by Sonia Sanchez, "a/coltrane/poem," the final poem from her 1970 collection *We A BaddDDD People*:

> (soft rise up blk/people. rise up blk/people
> chant) RISE. & BE. what u can.
> MUST BE.BE.BE.BE.BE.BE.BE-E-E-E-E-
> BE-E-E-E-E-E-
> yeh. john coltrane.
>
> my favorite things is u.
>
> (72)

Like many of the poems from *We A BaddDDD People*, "a/coltrane/poem" makes dramatic use of indentation, punctuation, the spaces between words, and the spaces between lines to transform in what counts as a poetic word-unit. Even transcribing these lines to be written in a word processor

surveillance and the study of it … Routing the study of contemporary surveillance—whether that be biometric technologies or post-9/11 security practices at the airport—through the history of black enslavement and its attendant practices of captivity opens up the possibilities for fugitive acts of escape, resistance, and the productive disruptions that happen when blackness enters the frame" (164).

[47] For more information on COINTELPRO and actions taken by Hoover's FBI to undermine the efforts of civil rights leaders, see *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars Against Domestic Dissent*, Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall (1990); *COINTELPRO: The FBI's Secret War on Political Freedom*, Nelson Blackstock (1976); David Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here: The New Left, the Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence* (2004).

or web browser, however, raises a number of technical issues. For example, there is no easy way to produce this kind of whitespace in HTML. When web browsers parse the whitespace in poetry—indentation, tabs, etc.—they more or less get rid of it. While investigating the poetry of Mina Loy, Andrew Pilsch argues in his chapter in *Reading Modernism with Machines* that "the nature of HTML resists—even *prevents*—the easy introduction of … typographic experimentation" (Pilsch 245). But even before trying to print parts of this poem in a word processor or in HTML, at an even more basic level I had to get it into a text editor, a process which also raised a number of questions requiring practical decisions. As I type out the above lines into a text editor, I have to ask: how many spaces should separate the words that seem to be a stage direction on the left— "(soft / … / chant)"—from the words on the right?

In an ideal world, I would have access to all materials used by Dudley Randall's Broadside Press to publish this 1970 edition, as well as publication materials from all subsequent editions. Comparing these various documents, I would have a better sense of the typographical materials and units of measurement used to represent Sanchez's poem on paper. This would provide me with a more holistic sense of how to represent Sanchez's poem in my text editor, a representation that then plays in to how a NLP program goes about analyzing it. However, given constraints on my time and resources, as well as the size of my corpus, deciding how deep I should dig in the archive to answer such questions requires serious consideration. Moreover, as far as I can tell, while there were printings of this edition of *We A BaddDDD People* as late as 1973, there were no other new editions of the work—so the edition I have is the only one I have to work with.

So when faced with the question—how many spaces should separate these words in a text file?—I looked at how far a space gets me in relation to other characters, gauged this against the

kinds of spaces in poems elsewhere in the book, and made an educated guess: three after "(soft", and one after "chant)". The same goes for the space between "& BE.", which is slightly larger than the gaps separating most other words. I am not sure exactly how much larger this gap is, so I make another educated guess, giving it two spaces instead of one.

In a multiple-page poem defined by such visual experimentation, however, trying to measure and align every word, space, and line break so that the text in my text editor resembles the text on the page—even roughly—is a real challenge. In some cases, given the functionalities of the editor I'm working with, this challenge becomes an impasse. Even in the example above: the space separating the line "yeh. john coltrane." from the preceding line—"BE-E-E-E-E-E-"—matches the size of other line breaks within stanzas in this volume. But the space separating this line from its succeeding line—"my favorite things is u."—is both larger than line breaks within stanzas and smaller than breaks indicating new stanzas. While transcribing, I normally represent adjacent lines in a poem with adjacent lines in my text editor; I represent stanza breaks with an empty line. How do I represent in my text editor a line break that is effectively 1.5 times the size of a normal line break? Without reworking my entire spacing system across all of my poems, I cannot—so I decided to transcribe them as adjacent lines despite the clearly visible difference on the page. At almost every stage, the poem's challenge to what counts as a poetic line, stanza, or word-unit also challenges any attempt to process it into a machine-readable form. In this case, I am still able transcribe the poem into a text editor—but not without substantial losses in typographical meaning and having grappled seriously with the poem's formal resistance to computational approaches.

The nature of these challenges would come as no surprise to scholars—like Drucker—interested in textual study, bibliographical study, and scholarly editing. Such methodological

lenses help us to ask questions like: what exactly, is a literary work? Is Sanchez's *We A BaddDDD People* the words printed in ink on the pages of the physical book I now hold? If there are discrepancies between this book and later editions, how do we reconcile them? And, more relevant to my current project, how does the digital copy of this work in my text editor differ from the bound copy held at UVA's library from which I make my transcription?

In considering these questions, I find helpful the vocabulary used by textual scholar G.T. Tanselle that distinguishes between *document*, *text*, and *work*. To offer a reduced shorthand for Tanselle's nuanced thinking on these distinctions: there are *texts of works* and there are *texts of documents*. *Texts of documents* refer to the words, markings, or inscriptions on a physical object that is completely unique though it may seem to be identical to other artifacts. *Texts of works*, on the other hand, are slightly more complicated—they consider the words as instructions for performing that intangible thing that is a verbal literary work in the minds of readers.

Though seemingly abstract, conceptual distinctions such as these have emerged from some of the most concrete, hands-on, rubber-meets-the-road scholarship in literary thought. A distinction like Tanselle's between texts of documents and texts of works offers a guiding light for scholar down in the often bewildering weeds of a given archive. As Tanselle argues in "Textual Criticism and Deconstruction,"

> The distinction between the texts of documents (handwritten or printed, private or published) and the texts of works is basic to textual criticism. The effort to "reconstruct" or "establish" the texts of works presupposes that the texts we find in documents cannot automatically be equated with the texts of the works that those documents claim to be conveying. (Tanselle 1)

In other words, scholars must exercise a great deal of judgement as they try to reconcile meaningful—and sometimes extremely significant—discrepancies between versions of a given physical text as found in physical documents in their efforts to determine the text of the work

itself (for example, how a hand-typed .txt file of *We A BaddDDD People* relates to a physical codex made of paper and ink). The role that "intentions" play in all this— as in the words that were meant to be put down—and how best to account for the mediating forces and actors at work in the publication of a book, is a point of debate in textual scholarship, often dependent on the kinds of research questions one hopes to investigate.[48] And as many scholars have argued, these conceptual distinctions central to textual criticism and thought extend to digital artifacts as well—see, for example, Matthew Kirschenbaum's ".txtual condition" (Kirschenbaum).

All of this is to say: transcribing texts from book to screen can get very complicated and involves a number of invisible, behind-the-scenes decisions that—like modeling and parameterization—give shape to the results a text analysis project like mine produces. I paid a

[48] For more reading here, see D F. McKenzie's *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (1999), Jerome McGann's *The Textual Condition* (1991), and Tanselle's "Textual Criticism and Literary Sociology" (1991).

great deal of consideration, for example, to stanza and page breaks[49] as well as poetic runovers[50] in my transcription process, and often encounter problems with no straightforward or

[49] As discussed in the example of Sanchez's "a/coltrane/poem" above—and unlike extra spaces between words in a line—the issue of stanza breaks directly impacts the results my analysis aims to produce, as they impact what "counts" as a line or stanza in my model, which determines in what ways a given snippet of text is analyzed for sentiment.

In my day-to-day reading practice, identifying a stanza break usually feels straightforward: lines grouped together in a poem, probably separated by white space. Digging a little deeper, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics* begins its entry by defining a stanza as "a unit of poetic lines organized by a specific principle or set of principles" (Krier 1358). Likewise, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines a stanza first and foremost as

> A group of verse lines forming a section of a poem and sharing the same structure as all or some of the other sections of the same poem, in terms of the lengths of its lines, its metre, and usually its rhyme scheme. In printed poems, stanzas are separated by spaces. ("stanza")

While this definition offers little purchase on a text like Sanchez's "a/coltrane/poem"—a poem that more or less flies in the face of traditional stanzaic form—it does offer some insight as to how to go about making a "stanza" a parameter in my analytical model, or even in figuring out how best to separate lines and stanzas in text files.

But even in more traditionally stanzaic poems—of which there are many in my corpus—deciding what "counts" as a stanza can get messy. Something as simple as page breaks, for instance, can wreak havoc in making such decisions. This is particularly the case when only one edition of a work exists, and one doesn't have access to original manuscripts.

Consider, for example, a poem titled "Malcolm Spoke/ who listened?" from Haki R. Madhubuti's 1969 collection *Don't Cry, Scream*, published with Broadside Press. The poem is stanzaic, and distinguishes stanzas with what seem to me like normal breaks. These groupings, however, have no regular rhyme scheme, no regular use of capitalization, no regular number of lines, no tight thematic or narrative structure (i.e. a point of view that alternates from stanza to stanza), and no regular pattern in punctuation (i.e. some stanzas conclude with no punctuation while some conclude with a period). And, crucially, the poem extends partway onto a second page. These are the two groups of lines on either side of the page break:

> animals come in all colors.
> dark meat will roast as fast as whi-te meat
> [PAGE BREAK]
> especially in
> the unitedstatesofamerica's
> new
> self-cleaning ovens. (Madhubuti 1970, 33-34)

For a few reasons, I decided to transcribe these two sections as a single stanza. First, at a more visual, design level, the poem has no other stanzas as short as two lines. The book as a whole, in fact, has very few two-line stanzas, and while there are a few single unattached lines, they usually come right at the end of a poem. In comparison with the rest of the poem and the other poems in the collection, then, it seemed more likely to be a larger stanza than not. More convincingly, however, my feeling that these two chunks are one unit comes from the poem itself—the group of lines above seems, to me, to develop a coherent line of poetic thought. The first two lines introduce the metaphor of meat of "all colors" roasting, and the following line (after the page break) intensifies this imagery by locating this metaphor in the United States and its "new /self-cleaning ovens." The lines after the page break make most grammatical and metaphorical sense when taken as part and parcel of the lines prior to the page break.

This is not to say that other poems in this volume don't break up grammatical expressions across stanzas—they definitely do. Other poems in this volume also develop specific metaphors or images over the course of several stanzas. But with this poem in particular, stanzas seem to be doing something else. Each has a kind of conceptual

focus—they stand alongside one another as evenly-weighted, coherent units of expression. For example, the stanza preceding the one quoted above is as follows:

> the double-breasted hipster
> has been replaced with a
> dashiki wearing rip-off
> who went to city college
> majoring in physical education. (Madhubuti 1970, 33)

This stanza develops, from line to line, a description of—and stance towards—this "dashiki wearing rip-off" who replaces the "double-breasted hipster." Each line builds on the last, slowly unfolding different aspects of how one figure "has been replaced" with another: the speaker discloses a skeptical attitude towards these figures, identified by what they wear, where they went to school, and what they studied. Like the stanza with the page break, this group of lines seems to me to develop a coherent line of thought that doesn't spill over into subsequent stanzas.

Understanding these stanzas in light of the poem as a whole, then, aligns with this reading: the rhythm of the poem as it moves from stanza to stanza seems to emerge from a feeling of moving from one idea to the next—and, for me as a reader, breaking this group of lines at the page break into two different stanzas feels like it disrupts that rhythm. It could certainly be argued that the group of lines with the page break was meant to be two stanzas specifically so as to disrupt the rhythm of this stanzaic form—that such a disruption is vital to the poem's meaning. But, as is the case with scholarly editing, I had to make a judgement call to proceed with my project. So I considered everything I knew, tried to find out more if possible, and made the best decision I could given what I had in front of me.

[50] Lines of poetry can be very long. Sometimes, lines get too long for the physical documents on which they're inscribed. During an enlightening conversation with Jahan Ramazani, one of the editors for *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, he gave the example of having to print and number the extremely long lines of Allen Ginsberg's "Howl." Central to this decision-making process was considering standard practice on what the *Chicago Manual of Style* calls "Long lines and runovers in poetry."

The *CMS* defines runovers as "the remainder of lines too long to appear as a single line," which are "usually indented one em from the line above." In other words, when lines get too long—as in Ginsberg's poetry, or Walt Whitman's—a hanging indent about an em-dash in length tells the reader that the line was too long for the book. The entry concludes, however, by indicating that it might not always be so clear when an indentation is a runover and when it's a new line:

> Runover lines, although indented, should be distinct from new lines deliberately indented by the poet … Generally, a unique and uniform indent for runovers will be enough to accomplish this. (*Chicago Manual of Style*).

As we have already seen in the few examples given from my corpus, much of this poetry rebels against traditional poetic form, including standard indentation and spacing practices. Determining whether or not a group of words is one or two lines, however, is extremely important for this project—the "line" is the basic unit I have used evaluating snippets of text for sentiment. In short: what counts as a line really matters, and ambiguities surrounding runovers could very well add up to have a significant impact on the results of my analyses.

An excellent example of this appears a few pages earlier in Madhubuti's *Don't Cry, Scream*, in a poem titled "Gwendolyn Brooks." Halfway through the poem there is a distinct sequence, over a dozen lines long, that lists a series of portmanteaus describing different kinds of "black"—from "360degreesblack" to "blackisbeautifulblack" and "i justdiscoveredblack" (Madhubuti 1970, 23). Over the course of this sequence, there are three indented lines, each one-word long, that interrupt the otherwise steady stream of images.

At first bluff, these three indented lines struck me as runovers. The list-like nature of the lines felt like they lent themselves to running a little long—as we see with a poet like Whitman, once a list starts, it can just keep going and going. Moreover, no thematic or poetic reason jumped out at me as to why someone might indent these words as opposed to any others. Of course, there is the possibility that such indentations were completely on purpose, and are part of a project to disrupt and transform any resonance with someone like Whitman and the canon he represents. I could become more sure, of course, through more extensive research: tracking down other appearances of the poem, if not in later editions then perhaps archival draft materials, or even appearing somewhere in a collection. The choice to pursue these loose ends, however, presents a fork in the road of my research that feels, to me, typical of

unambiguous resolutions. More than a simple act of mechanical reproduction, transcription can stump us with questions about literary works and their historical contexts that seem to have no discernible answers. From one moment to the next, it can demand a working knowledge of bibliographical methods, digital methods, aesthetic form, the history of race and technology, and how to manage a project's resources. And—as Drucker above argues regarding text analysis more generally—navigating these questions requires rigorous human judgment every step of the way, even in situations where the practicalities of project management and the realities of our textual archive make this judgment feel all-too-fallible. In a commitment to transparency with my own project—a process of step-by-step, critical self-reflection that, I believe, responds in part to Alan Liu's call for cultural criticism in the digital humanities—I have foregrounded challenges too often kept hidden behind the scenes, critiquing from a humanistic perspective the messiness of decisions necessary to computational analysis.

What, then, does my actual analysis of this corpus look like? To give an example of how computational approaches intersect recursively with more traditional close reading practices, consider the following: Quincy Troupe's "Come Sing a Song"—the 11-line poem that opens his 1972 collection *Embryo Poems, 1961-1971*—is a poem that welcomes the reader with a series of invitations that are also requests. Apostrophizing in the imperative, the speaker begins with an appeal ("Come sing a song, Black Man") and goes on to make similar appeals in almost every subsequent line. For example, the final three lines of the poem:

> sing jazz, rock, or R &B
> sing a song Black Man,
> sing a "bad" freedom song

computational approaches: how best to balance my limited resources with my commitment to being as thoughtful and thorough as possible as I work with poetry from a revolutionary art movement. There are a lot of anthologies containing poetry from the BAM out there, so I have to weigh the time it would take to locate and look through them all for instances of those poems from my 26 book corpus that may have runover lines against the potential impact it would have on the results of the analyses I hope to perform.

(Troupe 3)

A first reading of this poem might see it as an invitation for black life to be newly acknowledged, recognized, and celebrated. More specifically, the speaker grounds this "singing" in black history, particularly black music, asking elsewhere in the poem that "a blues," "a blackblues song," and "a work song" be sung. In this sense, we might see in this poem a desire that this recognition and celebration of black life be sung by black voices with an ear for black audiences.

In the context of the Black Arts Movement, this reading makes intuitive sense: many of Troupe's contemporaries invoked and entered into dialogue with black music (consider, for example, Jayne Cortez's "How Long Has Trane Been Gone" or Sonia Sanchez's "a/coltrane/poem" discussed above). And many writers of the BAM sought explicitly to make art that spoke first and foremost to black communities—see, as two examples among many, Addison Gayle, Jr.'s extensive introduction to the edited collection *The Black Aesthetic* (1972), in which he argues that "today's black artist … has given up the futile practice of speaking to whites, and has begun to speak to his brothers" (Gayle xxi). Or Haki Madhubuti's 1968 article in *Black World / Negro Digest* where he claims that "Black poets write out of a concept of art for people's sake and not art for art's sake. … The black poet is writing to black people and not to whites" (28).

This reading is also in keeping with the general scholarly consensus on Troupe's work. The first sentence of his entry in the academic reference series *Black Literature Criticism* describes Troupe as "an acclaimed African American author whose jazz-inflected poems explore political and personal themes and celebrate the contributions of black artists, writers, musicians, and athletes" (Krstovic and Dodson 310). With all this in mind, it makes

sense that, in opening the collection, Troupe's "Come Sing a Song" feels almost like a kind of invocation, asking black voices to sing songs celebrating black life.

PatternAnalyzer, the default sentiment implementation in TextBlob (which makes use of the Pattern sentiment classifier)[51], considers "Come Sing a Song" to be the single most negative poem in the entire corpus. As one might gather from my reading above, I disagree strongly with Pattern's judgment in this case. In a corpus of poetry containing direct attacks, extreme invective, and explicit takedowns of individuals, groups, and institutions, I did not find this poem to contain an exceptional amount of negative sentiment. On the contrary, I found "Come Sing a Song" to be positive and celebratory.

So: this sentiment classifier's and my reading of this poem do not stack up. This program, with features designed to evaluate sentiment in text, is, to my mind, clearly missing something with regards to evaluating sentiment in "Come Sing a Song." That said, however wrong I find PatternAnalyzer's understanding of this poem to be, I don't find this wrongness to be particularly bizarre or bewildering. PatternAnalyzer is, after all, just following instructions—making programmatic decisions about how much positive or negative sentiment is in a given snippet of text according to rules given to it by humans. The humans that built PatternAnalyzer intended it to be "a Python package" that "provides general cross-domain functionality" across "web mining, natural language processing, machine learning and network analysis, with a focus on ease-of-use" (Pattern). They did not intend Pattern to be a thoughtful or savvy reader of modern American poetry.

In order to make sense of disagreements like this—between a sentiment classifier like Pattern and a trained human reader like myself—we must consider the larger use context of

[51] For more on pattern, see its website here: https://www.clips.uantwerpen.be/pages/pattern-en. For more on TextBlob, see its website here: https://textblob.readthedocs.io/en/dev/.

sentiment analysis alongside my use of it in the study of poetry. To do this, we need to look carefully at the nitty-gritty details what these tools are, how they work, as well as the biases and assumptions they bring to any analyses they might perform.

A sentiment analysis tool—like Pattern—classifies snippets of text as having certain sentiment values by judging it against rules that it has already "learned." This learning process—training an algorithm on a corpus of known input/output pairs so that it will be able to generalize from these examples to accurately predict the outputs (sentiment values) of new future inputs (snippets of text)—is where machine learning comes in. Unlike the use of a pre-made sentiment analysis tool on a given corpus, understanding this earlier stage of these tools' histories is often more complicated, requiring more time, resources, and expertise.[52] To offer one definition of machine learning from a recent essay analyzing modernist haikus:

> Machine learning refers to a whole suite of statistical algorithms that treat every text as an amalgam of certain quantifiable features. They assume these features are distributed across texts in ways that help to identify differences between them and attempt to *learn* these features in order to classify or predict the category or group to which a text is likely to belong. Such algorithms, for instance, will help to decide whether an email is likely to be spam or not, based on the features they have learned to associate with messages of each type. (Long and So 250)[53]

[52] See also C. J. Hutto and E. Gilbert discussing their work on VADER: "Machine learning approaches are not without drawbacks. First, they require (often extensive) training data which are, as with validated sentiment lexicons, sometimes troublesome to acquire. Second, they depend on the training set to represent as many features as possible (which often, they do not – especially in the case of the short, sparse text of social media). Third, they are often more computationally expensive in terms of CPU processing, memory requirements, and training/classification time (which restricts the ability to assess sentiment on streaming data). Fourth, they often derive features "behind the scenes" inside of a black box that is not (easily) human- interpretable and are therefore more difficult to either generalize, modify, or extend (e.g., to other domains)" (4).

[53] Long and So go on to cite a number of other scholars who have used such techniques in the past decade: Stephen Ramsay "In Praise of Pattern," (2005); Bradley M. Pasanek and D. Sculley, "Meaning and Mining: The Impact of Implicit Assumptions in Data Mining for Humanists" (2008); Shlomo Argamon et al., "Gender, Race, and Nationality in Black Drama, 1950-2006: Mining Differences in Language Use in Authors and Their Characters" (2009).

In other words, machine learning is a means of using algorithms to identify statistical patterns in data. Within the world of literary scholarship, the "data" here is usually snippets of text, and the "statistical patterns" have to do with the recurrence of lexical features.

Outside the world of literary scholarship, machine learning has become ubiquitous. In addition to the example of a spam filter, think: recommendations from Amazon or Netflix on what to buy or watch based on your past history, or Facebook's capacity to recognize people in photos (Müller). In all these cases, and in the case of building a sentiment classifier, an algorithm has been trained and verified on a dataset that has been structured in terms of inputs and outputs—for example, snippets of text (input) and sentiment values (output).

This is known as a *supervised learning* model, in which a "user provides the algorithm with pairs of inputs and desired outputs, and the algorithm finds a way to produce the desired output given an input … [then] to create an output for an input it has never seen before without any help from a human" (Müller). Compare this with an *unsupervised* model, like topic modeling, where an algorithm is asked to identify any patterns it sees in a given input without an eye for specific outputs (Müller). With regards to *supervised* models, after a training and subsequent verification process, researchers use this new algorithm in an attempt to classify heretofore unseen data accurately. By automating this classifying or decision-making process (as opposed to having a human make each individual decision) users are able to analyze textual data for specific outputs (like sentiment) at new scales.

For sentiment classifiers, these rules are often primarily lexicon- or dictionary-based: a classifier is trained to learn a list of words and their corresponding sentiment values; when it attempts to classify a new snippet of text for sentiment, it checks the words in that snippet against its dictionary and assigns them the corresponding sentiment values, often taking into

account basic grammatical rules like negation ("not bad"), intensification ("extremely good"), and so on. Building a sentiment lexicon with machine learning techniques from scratch, however, is extremely time-consuming and, for many researchers, cost prohibitive. Because of this, "much of the applied research leveraging sentiment analysis relies heavily on preexisting manually constructed lexicons" (Hutto and Gilbert 2)—my research included.

Let's continue with Pattern's analysis of Troupe's "Come Sing a Song" for a more concrete example of these particulars. To recap, Pattern considers "Come Sing a Song" to be the most negative poem in my corpus. I already discussed how I as a human reader thought through the positive, celebratory affective dimensions of this poem, looking to historical context, BAM scholarship and so on. How, then, does Pattern go about evaluating "Come Sing a Song" for its sentiment?

Because it is a *lexicon-based* classifier, Pattern's sentiment analysis of a poem boils down to checking each word in a snippet of text (in this case a line) against a dictionary of words it already knows to be "positive" or "negative," rated on a scale of 1.0 to -1.0. Pattern's dictionary of words-paired-with-sentiment-scores draws from another lexical database called WordNet, which includes metadata about its entries like part of speech, definitions, and so on. Roughly speaking, after scoring each line based on the values of words as found in its dictionary, Pattern weighs the polarity scores of each line to produce the score for the entire poem. In the case of "Come Sing a Song," this score is -0.156.

But where does Pattern's dictionary of positive and negative words come from? Questions like this—crucial for any use of these tools in humanistic research—are oftentimes very difficult to answer. As many have noted, machine learning processes are notoriously "black boxed," that is, difficult to uncover and then reverse engineer in such a way that allows users to

examine and make sense of the many decisions that went into their creation (Hutto and Gilbert 4). Many projects that leverage existing sentiment classifiers do not dig down into the weeds of this kind of documentation. For my project, however, it is an important step toward interrogating the invisible biases that go into the creation of a given classifier.

From what I can gather on Pattern, its sentiment classifier learned which words were positive or negative based on the kinds of adjectives that appeared in positive and negative product reviews.[54] This training process represents a relatively standard workflow in machine learning: in broad strokes, a corpus of text is marked up by hand (in this case as either positive or negative); a program then "trains" or "learns" to identify positive or negative text by seeing lots of examples of each and generalizing rules that will help it to make accurate predictions in the future; the classifier is then tested or validated by being asked to evaluate the sentiment of texts the creators already know to be positive or negative (usually marked up by teams of humans).

Pattern's development history presents a number of red flags immediately for my project. Why, for example, would I use a classifier that was trained on product reviews (rather than on poetic corpora) to evaluate something as rhetorically complex as poetry? For a number of mostly pragmatic reasons: as mentioned above, creating one of these sentiment lexicon requires entire teams of people and lots of resources. Moreover, as stated in the introduction, my goal is not to verify these tools as "accurate" or provide any objective measurement of sentiment in my corpus, but to see what existing classifiers like Pattern and VADER can show us about a specific corpus of poetry, and how the affordances of computational analysis might shape my inquiry into my corpus of poetry.

[54] In addition to Pattern's main website (https://www.clips.uantwerpen.be/pattern), see also their GitHub page (https://github.com/clips/pattern).

So we know that Pattern's sentiment analysis features were not designed to evaluate the sentiment in Troupe's "Come Sing a Song." And, having used them to evaluate this poem, the results seem to confirm this. Consider the lines of the poem I discussed above and their corresponding sentiment scores in Pattern (rounded to the third decimal point):

1. Come sing a song, Black Man, … -0.167
…
9. sing jazz, rock, or, R & B, … 0.000
…
11. sing a "bad" freedom song … -0.700

Pattern assigns the six-word snippet of line 9 a score of 0.000 because none of these words appear in its sentiment lexicon. It assigns line 11 a score of -0.700 because, of the three definitions of "bad" Pattern knows, each sense of the adjective has a score of roughly -0.7 (with some variation in the averaging due to the "confidence" of the score—accounting, I'm guessing, for variation in the original human markup.

Pattern's evaluation of line 1 as -0.167, however, cuts to the core how race and technology often intersect in extremely troubling ways. The only adjective in this snippet that appears in Pattern's dictionary is the word "black." Looking at the code, Pattern knows three meanings to this adjective:

1. "of or belonging to a racial group having dark skin especially of sub-Saharan African origin", polarity = 0.0
2. "extremely dark", polarity = -0.4
3. "being of the achromatic color of maximum darkness," polarity = -0.1[55]

Two of these meanings have a negative polarity (sentiment score) associated with them. As far as I can tell, because Pattern has no idea which sense of the word is being used here, it averages the polarity scores of the three senses to assign a sentiment to the line: -0.167.

[55] This is drawn from the sentiment lexicon on the GitHub page for Pattern: https://github.com/clips/pattern/blob/master/pattern/text/en/en-sentiment.xml.

This means that whenever Pattern sees the word "black" in my corpus, it assigns the word a negative sentiment value. Even acknowledging that a given tool can't do all things in all contexts, this is a serious problem. If Pattern's out-of-the-box sentiment analysis capabilities read the word "black" as expressing negative sentiment—even if the one "sense" of the word referring to race in its dictionary is neutral—that is a huge issue. Moreover, in a project examining poetry from the Black Arts Movement, this particular look "under the hood" renders Pattern's findings not only extremely troubling, but practically useless. If Pattern assigns a sentiment score of -0.167 to the line "I am a black woman" from Mari Evans's 1970 poem of the same name—which it does—it's hard to see the tool as anything but disturbingly biased in terms of race and sentiment.

What's more, this problem only became visible to me because I stumbled across it, stopping to look more closely at what felt like inappropriate results. Nothing I could find in Pattern's (or TextBlob's) documentation explained how these word-by-word judgment calls would be made—i.e., that it would more or less average the scores of different senses of a word in evaluating its sentiment. The discovery came from experimentation on a word- or sentence-level scale—a scale that computational projects often expressly aim to avoid—as well as careful digging through documentation dispersed over multiple webpages, published articles, and commented lines of code.[56] This last isn't any particular fault of Pattern's, but rather indicative of the way that even accessible products designed to have "a focus on ease-of-use" have elements that feel blackboxed—that the details are in there somewhere, even if implicitly in the inner workings of the code itself, but hard to find. Because I am working at the scale that I am,

[56] See De Smedt and Daelemans, "Pattern for Python" (2012); see also specific files on Pattern's documentation on GitHub: "en-sentiment.xml" (available at this url: https://github.com/clips/pattern/blob/master/pattern/text/en/en-sentiment.xml) and "07-sentiment.py" (available at this url: https://github.com/clips/pattern/blob/master/examples/03-en/07-sentiment.py).

however, and have purposefully spent time in the technical weeds, this particular bias was clear as day.

Fortunately, Pattern is not the only sentiment classifier available for projects like mine. VADER (short for "Valance Aware Dictionary for sEntiment Reasoning"), is described by its creators as a "parsimonious rule-based model for sentiment analysis of social media text" (Hutto and Gilbert). Like Pattern, VADER uses a sentiment lexicon (or dictionary). Unlike Pattern, VADER has been trained specifically with an eye for the "sentiment-oriented language of social media text, which is often expressed using emoticons, slang, or abbreviated text such as acronyms and initialisms" (Hutto and Gilbert). Moreover, VADER was designed to incorporate context for these words: "grammatical and syntactical conventions that humans use when expressing or emphasizing sentiment *intensity*" (Hutto and Gilbert).

VADER's sentiment lexicon, available in its entirety online, includes the final weighted score of each item.[57] Where Pattern trained its classifier to find statistical patterns in the "positive" and "negative" adjectives that appeared in positive and negative movie reviews, VADER involved a process of hiring humans to rate words by hand on a scale of -4 to 4 using Amazon Mechanical Turk—thus providing the base, marked-up data from which a classifier could "learn" before being asked to accurately generalize based on its known examples.

With regards to the sentiment in "Come Sing a Song," VADER appears closer to the mark. The three lines it sees as having negative sentiment make more immediate sense: each includes either the phrase "Blind Joe Death" or "prison chain gang," both of which feel more endowed with negative feelings and associations ("death," "prison," and "blind" all have negative scores in VADER's lexicon). Most interesting, however, is VADER's valuation of the

[57] See vaderSentiment on GitHub, particularly the file "vader_lexicon.txt" available here: https://github.com/cjhutto/vaderSentiment/blob/master/vaderSentiment/vader_lexicon.txt.

final line: “sing a ‘bad’ freedom song,” which it scores as slightly positive. As I discussed, Pattern considers this final line to be the most negative in the poem, as “bad” is the only word in the line that Pattern has in its dictionary. While VADER also has “bad” scored as negative (-2.5, with the max being -4), VADER has “freedom” scored as positive (3.2, with the max being 4). In other words, with regards to intensity prior to grammatical context, VADER weighs “freedom” as being more positive than “bad” is negative.

On its own, this math is not interesting. What’s interesting is that, in having to weigh these values against one another in this final line, VADER’s classifier struggles with the layered meanings of Troupe’s words. The classifier is trying to identify conflicting feelings. In a side-by-side comparison, a human reader, of course, would be attuned to such rhetorical and affective complexity with much, much more nuance. Looking at the original punctuation, we can see that Troupe has marked off the word “bad” by putting it in quotation marks—a sign that something special might be going on with this word and how it is being used. Perhaps, like the word “bad” as it appears in the title of Sonia Sanchez’s 1970 collection *We a BaddDDD People*, this “bad” doesn’t read so much negative as it does “dangerously good,” to quote from William J. Maxwell’s work on African American literature and the FBI (Maxwell 289). In this sense, singing a “‘bad’ freedom song” feels like an invitation to *celebrate*—in this case, the “dangerously good” work of black individuals in the struggle for freedom in America, past and present.

But VADER isn’t reading for things like this. With regards to the quotes surrounding the word “bad,” in order to prepare a corpus for natural language processing techniques, most programs—mine included—remove punctuation, capital letters, and the white space between words in preparing them for the use of VADER’s sentiment classifier. So instead, VADER goes

solely on surface meanings—the denotations of words rather than their potential connotations. But while VADER knows nothing about history, freedom, singing, or that the word "bad" might actually mean "good," we can see the classifier in its own way trying to sort out the layers of meaning in this line—that whatever is in this snippet of text might be both negative and positive at the same time, or in different ways.

For me, this instance of conflicting feeling represents an excellent jumping off point for the larger questions of how feeling, affect, and sentiment might be operating in a poem or group of poems, as well as my broader pursuit of a more nuanced understanding of *tone* in overtly political poetry: the cues and signals that VADER struggles with but human readers can take almost for granted; the biases that classifiers bring to evaluating feelings versus those of a human reader; the way individual words carry affective weight both in and in spite of context.

These complex relations play out even more starkly in an analysis of Nikki Giovanni's "The True Import of the Present Dialogue, Black vs. Negro." According to Howard Rambsy's excellent recent book on the larger literary scene of what he calls "the Black Arts enterprise," this poem is "among Giovanni's most anthologized pieces," with Giovanni herself being "a fixture in anthologies of African American verse" (Rambsy 2011, 72). More than just a fixture in anthologies, Giovanni was at the time "undoubtedly one of the most popular" of the new black poets, according to Melba Joyce Boyd in her book on Dudley Randall and the Broadside Press (Boyd 175).

This poem is also famed for exemplifying what Rambsy calls "black arts discourse," which he describes as "characterized by expressions of militant nationalist sensibilities, direct appeals to African American audiences, critiques of antiblack racism, and affirmations of cultural heritage" (Rambsy 2011, 10). According to Rambsy, "The True Import" in particular

holds an "aggressive approach to liberation," similar to other poems in "utiliz[ing] violent and nationalist rhetoric to encourage [a] presumably black audience to liberate their minds from the hegemony of whiteness" (10). Giovanni's entry in *Black Literature Criticism* seconds this, describing the poem as "typical of her early work: a call to black Americans to destroy the whites who oppress them as well as the blacks whose passivity and compliance contribute to their own oppression" (Draper 881). Likewise, *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature* names this early "well-known" poem as one "that led to Giovanni's identification as an angry, militant poet" (Fowler 317).

In short, many see "The True Import" as an angry poem—a poem that is, like Baraka's work discussed at the beginning of this chapter, famous for its anger. This assessment feels in keeping with a first reading. To offer a straightforward gloss, "The True Import" explores the difference between being an African American locked into white supremacist ideology (being a "negro"), versus being an African American who has liberated themselves from white thought and come into their own (being "Black"). With regards to then-contemporary conversations regarding these terms and their significance, Haki Madhubuti's "Toward a Black Aesthetic" and Sarah Webster Fabio's "Who Speaks Negro? Who Is Black?"—both of which appear in the 1968 September-October issue of *Black World / Negro Digest*—are informative and insightful. Madhubuti writes that, unlike the "*black man* (or woman)" who is "positive of [their] identity," "the Negro is a filthy invention" that "didn't come into existence until about 1620"— an "imitation white" (Madhubuti 1968 27). Fabio, meanwhile, writes that "Negro is a psychological, sociological, and economic fabrication to justify the *status quo* in America" (Fabio 34). With regards to Giovanni's "The True Import," this poem explores the role that violent liberation plays in this difference between "negro" and "Black."

But a summary like this doesn't get across what makes the poem so "angry," which has more to do with the poem's style—the texture of its explicitly violent diction ("Can you splatter their brains in the street"), its point-blank, repetitive questions (the phrase "Can you kill" appears 13 times in the 51 line poem), and its rapid-fire tempo (most lines are only a few words) (Giovanni 1970, 19-20). Moreover, "killing" plays a central role in this poem's idea of liberation: killing white men ("Can you piss on a blond head / Can you cut it off") as well as killing the consciousness that has internalized oppressive white thought (to kill part of your "mind / And free your black hands to / strangle" [Giovanni 1970, 20]).

There is, of course, more to this poem than just anger. Cheryl Clarke in her 2004 book on female poets in the BAM notes a tension in its concluding line—"Learn to be Black men"—in that it addresses "Black men" specifically. Clarke suggests this "erasure of black women" might have to do with a desire "to project the urgency for unity and solidarity, to focus on the possibilities for sameness" within the movement (Clarke 53). In his 1971 *Dynamite Voices*, Madhubuti notes Giovanni's references to Vietnam in the poem ("We kill in Viet Nam / for them") as a concern that "Black men have been sent out of the United States to kill other 'colored' peoples of the world when the real enemy is here" (68). In short: scholars and critics have had a lot to say about "The True Import" from a variety of perspectives. Here, however, I am interested in the poem's purported "anger" and the role this plays in the poem's tone.

What, then, do our sentiment classifiers make of this poem? As explained above, Pattern only looks at adjectives. Of the poem's 51 lines, it assigns a neutral score of zero to 43 of them, because the lines lack adjectives Pattern has in its lexicon. Lines like "can you shoot straight and / fire for good measure" both have positive scores because of the adjectives "straight" and "good." The only "negative" words Pattern knows in this poem are "down" and "black,"

meaning the final line—perhaps the most hopeful, affirmational moment of the poem to which the intensity of the prior lines builds--has —score of -0.16, because "Learn to be black men" has the adjective "black" in it, which Pattern, as discussed above, scores as negative. Pattern gives the poem a neutral score (0.02), but for all the wrong reasons, some of which are very troubling.

With regards to VADER, however, I was surprised to find that the classifier's results are very much in keeping with what critics have said. Critics consider "The True Import" to be one of the most significant examples of a certain type of angry, militant, even aggressive poem; having evaluated each of its lines, VADER considers it to be the single most negative poem in the 26-book corpus. That is to say that, in a sense, critics and VADER actually agree about something: that Giovanni's "The True Import" is a poem that, on the surface, has an exceptional amount of negative sentiment compared with its contemporaries.

I add the caveat of "on the surface," however, because, as mentioned above, other elements of this poem complicate our understanding of its angry, revolutionary rhetoric—a fact that scholars, critics, and other readers of Giovanni's poetry note but that VADER does not. VADER does not know the meaning or significance of any of the words it analyzes. It just knows sentiment scores for strings of letters like "kill," "poison," and "die." Having been designed to analyze social media text, VADER is (unlike Pattern) also equipped to deal with slang like "piss" as well as the racial expletives used throughout the poem, which it counts as having negative sentiment. But because it doesn't know anything but sentiment scores for these words, VADER misses what William J. Harris (in his chapter in Mari Evans's edited volume *Black Women Writers*) calls the "complex connotations" of certain racial expletives and the speaker's strategic use of them "to suggest the consciousness that wants to conform to white standards," and, subsequently, the idea that 'killing' this part of the mind will "transform

consciousness" (Harris 221). In short: VADER finds sentiment, but has nothing to add with regards to interpreting its potential significance.

In Piper's "strange hermeneutics" of computational approaches, this, at first bluff, might appear to be the tool's revelation of the "mundane," its "incapacity to tell us anything new" (Piper 70). I will argue, however, that VADER's capacity to isolate valences of sentiment emerging from the denotative meanings of words provides a more illuminating perspective—but only when placed an iterative, recursive relationship with more traditional close reading practices. For example, as a more informed reader of Giovanni's poetry than VADER, I would argue the following: that the role of "negative sentiment" as it appears in "The True Import" goes beneath and beyond the immediate, denotative, and affective impact of individual words or lines and actually relates deeply to the poem's structure, genre, and social purpose.

In her essay "Black Poetry—Where It's At" from a 1969 issue of *Black World / Negro Digest*, BAM writer and poet Carolyn M. Rodgers details "several broad categories" or types of poems in then-contemporary black poetry (Rodgers "Black Poetry," 7). One such type is *signifying* poetry, in this case referring to the black vernacular tradition of signifying. Henry Louis Gates Jr. has since explored the history and significance of signifying in his 1988 work *The Signifying Monkey* as both the commonplace practice of "engag[ing] in rhetorical games" (Gates 68) as well as a more general "theory of criticism that is inscribed within the black vernacular tradition and that in turn informs the shape of the Afro-American literary tradition" (Gates 14).

Rather than adopt Gates' now famous definitions and theorizations of this tradition, I choose here to stay with Rodgers' contemporaneous formulations of it in her essay. Citing Giovani, Don L. Lee, Sonia Sanchez, and "the master of it all" Amiri Baraka as having written

poems in this tradition, Rodgers describes signifying as "a way of saying the truth that hurts with a laugh … a love/hate exercise in exorcising one's hostilities" (Rodgers "Black Poetry," 14-15). She also notes, however, that signifying "is very often a bloody knife job," and because it "often contains such a broad base of truth it has been known to cause—in fact, it is famous for causing—a fight or a death. It can get too down, too real, so true and personal it uncovers too much" (15-16). While acknowledging its long history in black vernacular traditions, Rodgers also emphasizes signifying's fresh significance and potentially productive social purpose as a poetic genre:

> From a literary point of view, it is a significant, exciting aspect of today's poetry. I know, and you know, that we have always signified. On the corners, in the poolrooms, the playgrounds, anywhere and everywhere we have had the opportunity. … However, to my knowledge, no *group* of Black writers has ever used it as a poetic technique as much as today's writers. It is done with polish. … Too much *signifying* can be negative, I think; however, most of today's poets are very conscious of how important positive vibrations are, and few have carried signification to an extreme. In the main, it is being used, for constructive destruction. (14)

Already in these brief descriptions we can see an intense ambivalence and a distribution of "positive" and "negative" elements. These poems are "love/hate exercise[s]"; they speak truth "that hurts," but do so "with a laugh"; they are an opportunity for "exorcising one's hostilities". Poets must demonstrate restraint and moderation so as not to carry "signification to an extreme": they must strike a balance because "positive vibrations" are important and "[t]oo much *signifying*" can be "negative". As Rodgers summarizes at the end, a good *signifying* poem destroys, but in a constructive way. It is "a bloody knife job," but one that can have a productive social purpose.

Rodgers' article offers, I feel, a productive lens through which to view the "anger" in Giovanni's poem. Other scholars would seem to agree—Cheryl Clarke, cited above, notes that,

along with the poem's "harsh repetition," "violent rhetoric and images," and "its castigation of white people and black people," the poem has a "dozens-like resonance" through which it "engages in the politics of conversion by rebuke" (Clarke 60)—the dozens being what Gates calls "an especially compelling subset of Signifyin(g)" (Gates 90). In all of these cases, anger becomes more than just a "feeling" associated with a poem, and can be expressed instead through the poem's formal qualities, including, but not limited to, its tone.

Rebuke, castigation, conversion, "constructive deconstruction," speaking "the truth that hurts"—rather than just an expression of rage or militant feeling, this poem uses "anger" in complicated ways. This poem is not simply angry—it *wields* anger. And by brandishing anger in this way, the poem strategically applies a specific set of affects to a specific set of issues with an eye for inciting change. On the surface, what the poem declares to be "The True Import of the Present Dialogue, Black vs. Negro" seems to boil down to a militant voice asking the question: "Can you kill." Beneath the surface, however, this voice uses negative sentiment (including the repetition of questions like "Can you kill") to urge, push, and even shove the reader into crucial—if painful—awareness: to realize the life-or-death stakes of racial injustice, as well as the different kinds of violence that oppressive racial ideologies can inflict.

This perspective changes not only the "message" of the poem, but how we read the seemingly negative sentiment in individual lines. For example, the poem's final lines make two demands: that the reader "Learn to kill" their own internalized oppression, which, the poem implies, will allow them to "Learn to be Black men." Rather than read this first command as just another instance of the poem's persistently violent rhetoric, we might better see it as a transitional line or hinge—one half of a closing couplet that uses two imperatives to channel a backlog of violent rhetoric into something constructive (Rodgers' "constructive deconstruction").

In this sense, this hinged couplet makes a sudden shift from "negative" sentiment into intense recognition—a kind of poetic *anagnorisis*, or what *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines as "the turning point in a drama at which a character … recognizes the true state of affairs, having previously been in error or ignorance" ("anagnorisis"). Painful knowledge, in short. An important insight acquired through what might also have been "a bloody knife job."

To reframe these ideas with an eye for my argument: this poem, and *signifying* poems Rodgers describes more generally, can employ a *positive negativity*—VADER's worst nightmare. Sentiment-laden language deployed with this depth of rhetorical nuance, figurative complexity, and vision of broader social purpose is exactly what VADER's sentiment classifier *cannot* pick up on. This is not to say, however, that my use of these tools proved entirely unfruitful. To refer back again to Piper, methods requiring us to sort through "this admixture of the strange and the mundane" impact not only the results of our work, but also "our affective attachments to the texts that we read" (Piper 70, 93). Given my interest in such affective attachments, the light shed by VADER's peculiar evaluative logic as to why this poem *seems* so negative allowed me to reflect more seriously on my own understanding of the poem, as well as that of the many other critics who have noted its particular affective charge.

To reiterate: VADER mechanically averages the affective weight of words and phrases according to a sentiment lexicon built to evaluate social media text. Put this way, VADER's approach feels entirely estranged from the way a human reader today might go about getting a first impression of Giovanni's "The True Import." But put another way—that VADER makes messy, snap judgments about a poem's positivity or negativity according to limited, even distorted criteria (diction, nothing else) and unexamined ideological filters emerging from its cultural and historical positionality (more accurately, of the human decisions on which it was

trained)—VADER's methodology does not feel so far off from what a human reader might do, even reflexively, and especially when confronted with a poem designed to provoke, upset, and disturb the implicit assumptions of its readership and audience. In this sense, a recursive dialogue between VADER's partial, biased analysis and my own—more informed but still necessarily partial—analysis allowed me to look comparatively at how judgments might be formed at all with regards to a poem's tone, whether through a strict examination of one feature (like diction) or a more holistic and (historically, poetically) informed perspective. More importantly, doing so revealed a disjoint: the "negative sentiment" on the surface of the poem versus the significance of this sentiment when taken within its rich contextual complexity. This disjoint, moreover, is what supplies "The True Import" with its signature tone of measured protest in the first place: an "affective 'comportment'" that brandishes anger carefully for a purpose, ruffling feathers on first bluff but revealing, upon closer examination, sophisticated rhetorical depth.

To return to I. A. Richards's discussion of tone in *Practical Criticism* (1929), I find unexpected echoes between his experiment (in which he documents and evaluates a corpus of undergraduate responses to anonymous poems in an effort to develop new critical techniques) and certain insights of this analysis. For example, Richards' is greatly interested in the way that his students jump to conclusions about poems based on initial impressions. This is particularly the case when it comes to connections between a word's "sense" and its "feeling"—that is to say, between a stricter understanding of its denotative meaning (sense) and a broader, more holistic understanding of its connotative and contextual possibilities (feeling). As explained in the preceding paragraph, these parameters mirror almost exactly the distinctions that a classifier like VADER invites us to consider: the tension between an individual word's affective impact

(according to its definition) versus that of the word in the larger context of a poetic line, stanza, genre, or historical context. Richards writes:

> Words, as we all recognise, are as ambiguous in their feeling as in their sense; but, though we can track down their equivocations of sense to some extent, we are comparatively helpless with their ambiguities of feeling. We only know that words are chameleon-like in their feeling, governed in an irregular fashion by their surroundings. (Richards 203)

In short, Richards is confident that we can figure out the "sense" of a word in a poem, but less sure about pinning down its "feeling" given how complicated poetic contexts can be.

Moreover, Richards clearly distinguishes between a word's feeling-as-it-exists-in-the-poem in contrast to its more general affective connotations, basically the "external" affective baggage a word might drag into a given gloss or interpretation. He writes:

> …we are concerned, firstly, with the feeling actually aroused by the word in the poem, not with the feelings the word might have in other contexts, or the feeling it generally has, or the feeling it "ought to have," though these may have with advantage be remembered, for a word's feeling is often determined in part by its senses in other contexts. … Is the pull [of the word's feeling] exerted by context … sufficient to overcome what may be described as the normal separate feeling of the questionable word? Can this pull bring it in, as an item either in accordance or in due contrast to the rest? Or does the word resist, stay outside, or wrench the rest of the poem into crudity and or confusion? (Richards 201-203)

Richards is, in short, trying to think through the kind of "feeling" that radiates from a word used in a poem in contrast to its "normal separate feeling." More specifically, he seeks to understand the competing "pull" these two loci of feeling exert on a given reader. For Richards, while a poem often makes strategic use of a word's "senses in other contexts," it is a kind of failure for a poem's use-sense of the word to be overshadowed by the word's meaning elsewhere. Failing in this gravitational contest of feeling—for a word's feeling to "resist, stay outside" the poem in the reader's mind—results in the word "wrench[ing] the rest of the poem into crudity and confusion" as its larger use-context intrudes into its specific poetic use-context.

Though I disagree with this conclusion, I find Richards' distinction to be a useful one: a word's "normal separate feeling" is exactly the kind of sentiment that VADER was designed to evaluate. But where Richards' views this "normal separate feeling" as something external to a poem that threatens to cast it "into crudity and confusion," I view it as a consideration that can be made more central to a poem's aesthetic and affective practice. As explored above, Giovanni's "The True Import" makes explicit use of "apparent" feelings—those affective associations floating nearest to the surface of a word—as well as a word's more complicated affective connections, using a combination of both to urge the reader, with measured rhetorical nuance, towards a specific kind of understanding.

With all this in mind, I view the ability to read for surface sentiment as extremely valuable. In the case of sentiment classifiers, VADER in my mind reads the poem the way that someone unfamiliar with the history of the Black Arts Movement might—a reading more attuned to the general affective impact of words (based on their "normal separate feeling") than to their affective import as shaped by specific poetic, literary, social, and political contexts. As discussed above, while VADER's reading practice is entirely mechanical, the results have parallels with non-mechanical reading practices: I imagine that if this poem were assigned in an undergraduate seminar without any introduction, it might ruffle some feathers; likewise, VADER, by highlighting the intensity of this poem's negative sentiment according to the words and phrases it uses—without their specific literary and historical use contexts—helps us to see why it might. The classifier both anticipates this potential discomfort by showing how specific words might have the power to spark certain feelings in a present-day reader regardless of original historical context—the disjoint between surface anger and poetic form that this highlights for us, however, requires an interested and informed reader to identify, untangle, and make sense of.

I want to note another role that VADER played in addition to its perspective in the readings offered in the preceding paragraphs. When I first read Giovanni's *Black Feeling, Black Talk, Black Judgement*, this poem stood out to me for its particularly charged language and affective stance. But I was reading many poems—hundreds of them—and at the time of reading had yet to learn about the privileged place that "The True Import" has in anthologies, criticism, and scholarship. As a researcher, I only learned this information after having decided to look more closely at the poem as opposed to others, which I did *because* of its prominence in VADER's analysis. Twenty-six books of poetry may not see like that many when compared with other computational projects, but for someone with limited time and resources (i.e., most researchers), VADER's suggestion that 'this poem might be particularly interesting' led me immediately to a text that ended up being extremely relevant to my initial research questions, even if VADER thought it was interesting for different reasons than I eventually would. This is, as far as I can tell, an exciting, relatively unexplored use context for sentiment analysis in literary study. While sentiment classifiers cannot explain why a poem, line, or word matters (or even what it means), they have proven so far to be an intellectually productive way for me to explore the many texts in my literary corpus—particularly when pursuing research questions that I already know matter to the scholars, critics, and other readers of the corpus.

Conclusion: Gwendolyn Brooks' "The Second Sermon on the Warpland"

In closing, I want to return to the questions with which I opened this chapter: how do critics read overtly political poetry as poetry? How do computational methods allow us to read for and understand in new ways the "aesthetic immanence" of a given text's "affective 'comportment,'" to return to Sianne Ngai's definition of tone? If the previous example is any indication, one of the greatest challenges to investigating these questions stems from negotiating

how we read for *protest* years, in this case, decades, after the historical context in which these poems brandished their original anger.

VADER can identify words and phrases that, at the level of denotation (what Richards might call their "normal separate feeling"), bear the markers of negative sentiment. But VADER's understanding of what makes a word or phrase negative emerges from the numerous human judgments on which it was trained: individuals working through Amazon Mechanical Turk in the 2010s, making decisions as to what numerical sentiment score a word has on a scale of 4.0 to -4.0, one after another, for pay, in front of computer screens.[58] And yet, while "*VADER* should be evaluated critically and in the context of the assumptions it makes about communication" (Saldaña), in the context of exploratory computational analysis projects, I found VADER's take on this corpus of poetry extremely illuminating—particularly with regards to the tone of protest poetry (i.e. brandishing anger) and the afterlives of these works as they are read outside of their original context.

To this end, I believe that the "readings" performed by sentiment classifiers on this corpus of revolutionary poetry tie directly into contemporary conversations on the power of art—the "affective comportment" of a literary text included—to exist diachronically. Wai Chee Dimock's "theory of resonance," for example, seeks to examine cultural formations as "diachronic objects" that resonate beyond their moment of production, "causing unexpected vibrations in unexpected places" (Dimock 1060-68). Such a perspective allows us to take seriously the interpretive and contextual noise that literary objects accrue over time—like the shifting connotations and denotations of poetic diction—considering such interference and reverberation as "the condition for the enduring resonance of texts, not a nuisance that endangers

[58] For more details on the use of Amazon Mechanical Turk in the creation of VADER's sentiment lexicon, see Hutto and Gilbert (2014).

them" (1063). In the context of radical art more specifically, Rita Felski, citing Dimock, argues in *Uses of Literature* that discussions of "the aesthetics of shock" have been "hampered by a sequential and progressive view of history," a view that overlook literary texts' "potential to resonate across time and the power of past art to disorient or disturb … long after the moment of their manufacture" (Felski *Uses of Literature*, 115). In other words: in the same way that art itself persists through time in complex, even unpredictable ways, so do rhetorical strategies of shock and disruption. This insight is particularly relevant, I would argue, for thinking through questions of tone—that web of affective relationships between writer, reader, and subject matter.

Tone, drawing as it does from text as well as context, is particularly prone to interpretive noisiness over time. In this final section, I propose that the use of sentiment classifiers to analyze tone in my corpus of BAM poetry allows us to differently attune ourselves to such works with an ear for how they might resonate in new or unanticipated contexts. As other scholars have previously argued,[59] computational methods offer a different "ontology" of poetic texts: they construct poems not according to literary or generic norms, nor socio-historical contexts, but as the accumulation of representable features in statistical patterns. Adopting this uniquely computational perspective, I believe, highlights the gap between surface sentiment and social purpose that poems of measured protest tend to employ—in particular, it highlights the significance of diction: the tension between a word's rich connotative meaning and its denotation; between its meaning in a poem, in a dictionary, and in everyday use; perhaps most importantly, the sophisticated rhetorical measures taken by poets to use these tensions between and within words for the purpose of political protest.

[59] Long and So describe this as the "new ontology" of text that computational methods offer, one that "we frame today through the language of data and algorithms, and which earlier generations framed through the language of frequency, formula, and imitation" (237, 267).

We can see this most clearly in a final example. Gwendolyn Brooks's *In the Mecca* is, in certain ways, different from the many other books in my corpus. Brooks was of an earlier generation than Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, and Amiri Baraka—unlike the younger poets energizing the movement, Brooks was already a titan of American letters by the time the BAM gained momentum. She had won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1950, the first African American woman to do so, and would go on to receive a number of institutional accolades in the coming decades. In terms of form and tone, the poetry on which she first established her reputation does not resemble that of Nikki Giovanni's "The True Import"; rather, it was characterized as having a "high literary idiom" that scholars today continue to discuss in relation to modernist poets like T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound (Phillips).[60] In some ways, Brooks represented the establishment—and its poetic conventions—that many BAM poets sought to disrupt.

However, after attending the Second Fisk Writers' Conference in 1967—at which she met many of the younger BAM poets, making what would become lasting friendships with some (like Madhubuti)—Brooks began to rethink her relationship with the movement. Scholars mark this as a serious turning point in Brooks's career.[61] As she describes in a 1983 interview: "In 1967 I met some 'new black people' who seemed very different … [t]hey seemed proud and so committed to their own people. … The poets among them felt that black poets should write as blacks, about blacks, and address themselves *to* blacks. I had never thought deliberately in such terms" (Brooks 1983, 40).

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[60] Also see Maria K. Mootry, "'Down the Whirlwind of Good Rage': An Introduction to Gwendolyn Brooks" in *A Life Distilled: Gwendolyn Brooks, Her Poetry and Fiction* edited by Maria K. Mootry and Gary Smith (1987); Gertrude Reif Hughes, "Making It *Really* New: Hilda Doolittle, Gwendolyn Brooks, and the Feminist Potential of Modern Poetry" and George E. Kent, "The Poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks," both in *On Gwendolyn Brooks: Reliant Contemplation*, edited by Stephen Caldwell Wright.

[61] As one example among many, consider this from her entry in academic reference series *Contemporary Literary Criticism:* "*In the Mecca* marks a transition in Brooks's poetry, reflecting a turn away from the humor and irony of earlier volumes toward the overt political tone and subjects of her subsequent work." (Hunter 43).

During this period, Brooks's formulations of what poetry could be and what it could do began to change. From the same interview, she describes experimenting with different venues for poetic address and the shifts in poetic tone that accompanied this:

> We would go into a tavern and just start reciting our poetry. Haki [Madhubuti] usually led us in, and he would say, 'Look, folks, we're gonna lay some poetry on you.' Then he would start reciting his poems—which were relevant. Relevant poetry was the only kind you could take into that kind of situation. Those people weren't there to listen to "Poetry," spelled with a capital P. The kind of poem I could recite in that atmosphere would be my short poem, 'We Real Cool.' Later on, once the atmosphere had been set … the audience would be 'softened' and *ready* to listen to something of my own with more length… (Brooks 1983, 41).

In this attentiveness to both the constraints and opportunities of atmosphere, situation, and audience, we see Brooks experimenting with how her poems connected to different communities of readers or listeners and what it meant for a poem to be "relevant" (recall Richards's definition of tone as a writer's "*attitude to his listener*" and simultaneous "*recognition of his relation to them*"). Brooks thought seriously about the relationship between poet, poem, and reader: "I don't want people running around saying Gwen Brooks's work is intellectual," she claims in an interview—"That makes people think instantly about obscurity. It shouldn't have to mean that, but it often seems to" (Brooks 1983, 47).

Published in 1968, *In the Mecca* registered this shift in Brooks's writing.[62] The book is widely acknowledged to be "a turning point" in her relationship with "a black aesthetic" (Clark

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[62] Consider the following examples: from Kent's *A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks*, "Listening to the younger poets at readings, she marveled at how well they could speak out of themselves, as the poetry became merely the script for a total attempt at communication through various inflections of speech, song, and sometimes dance. It was the communal quality of the experience and the very deep level of acceptance that persisted in her memory. / *In the Mecca*, in both form and content, registers the impact" (Kent 1990, 211); from Haki R. Madhubuti's "Gwendolyn Brooks: Beyond the Wordmkaer—The Making of an African Poet," in Stephen Caldwell Wright's *On Gwendolyn Brooks: Reliant Contemplation* (1996), Madhubuti writes that "Gwendolyn Brooks's post-1967 poetry is fatless. Her new work resembles a man getting off meat, turning to a vegetarian diet. What one immediately notices is that all the excess weight is quickly lost. Her work becomes extremely streamlined and to the point. There are still a few excesses with language in *In the Mecca*, but she begins to experiment with more free and blank verse, yet her hand still controlled and timed. *In the Mecca* is about black life [89] in an old Chicago landmark. This was to be her epic of black humanity" (Madhubuti "Gwendolyn Brooks" 88-89); from Arthur P. Davis's "Gwendolyn Brooks," also in *On Gwendolyn Brooks: Reliant Contemplation*, he writes that "With the publication of *In the Mecca* (1968),

84); LeRoi Jones features in the original dedication of the book; Don L. Lee (Haki Madhubuti) features in the lines of one of the poems ("Don Lee wants / a new nation / under nothing"). According to her biographer, Brooks's publishers at Harper & Row were originally "startled by the *Mecca* manuscript" (Kent 1990, 212)—though scholars and Brooks herself argue, I believe rightly, for a stronger sense of continuity between this shift in register and her previous work.[63]

Even this more politically committed poetry by Brooks, however, feels different from a poem like "The True Import." Brooks says as much herself: when asked by an interviewer about "the blatant, assertive, militant posture" of some poetry from the period and if "any of your early works assume this posture, this tone," Brooks first replies in the affirmative: "I believe it takes a little patience to sit down and find out that in 1945 I was saying what many of the young folks said in the sixties"; she then qualifies this affirmation, however, by claiming that "I certainly wrote no poem that sounds like Haki's 'Don't Cry, scream,' or anything like Nikki's 'The True Import of Present Dialogue, Black vs. Negro'" (Brooks 1983, 42).

In many ways, Brooks's claims invite us to reconsider what it means for two poems to share "posture" and "tone." On the one hand, viewing a poem like "In the Mecca" and "The True Import" as having a shared tone goes against the grain of how readers have approached these

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Gwendolyn Brooks begins a new period in her literary career. Like many young and middle-aged writers, she has come under the influence of the Black Aesthetics Movement, a movement which began about 1960, and her commitment to blackness is very evident in her last two publcations. We note that the dedication for *In the Mecca* is 'to the memory of Langston Hughes; and to James Baldwin, LeRoi Jones, and Mike Alexandroff, educators extraordinaire'; and the title poem itself is inscribed 'In Tribute—' to, among others, Don Lee. With Don Lee and LeRoi Jones as 'educators,' she has had significant teachers for her new commitment" (Davis 100).

[63] As Raymond Malewitz argues, though *In the Mecca* was her "first poetic engagement with the 'shrill spelling' of blackness," she did so on terms in keeping with her previous work, "employ[ing] a rhetoric of ambivalence in her representation of the nascent Black Aesthetic" (Malewitz 533, 532). In an interview, Brooks herself has argued for this sense of continuity, while still acknowledging the changes the work represented (Brooks 1983, 42). She concludes her point by saying "I don't want people running around saying Gwen Brooks's work is intellectual. That makes people think instantly about obscurity. It shouldn't have to mean that, but it often seems to" (Brooks 1983, 47).

poems: though both deal with economic and racial injustice, the former poem does so through an epic, narrative portraiture of everyday life that Hortense J. Spillers calls a "commitment to life in its unextraordinary aspects" that makes Brooks "probably the democratic poet of our time," while the latter through direct "expressions of militant nationalist sensibilities" and an "aggressive approach to liberation" (Spillers 243; Rambsy 2011, 10). Though the poems have a great deal in common, it is something exactly like a difference in posture and tone that has traditionally distinguished them.

Viewing these texts not as poems but as statistical patterns of certain sets of features, however, Pattern and VADER highlight continuities along dimensions less accessible to human readers. According to my results, Pattern considers *In the Mecca* to be the work with the most negative sentiment in my entire corpus, and VADER considers it to be squarely in the middle. Both, however, consider "The Second Sermon on the Warpland" to be one of the most negative poems in the book. But this poem—the final poem of *In the Mecca*—is generally viewed by critics as a positive, life-affirming exhortation in the face of "the whirlwind of racial oppression" (Phillips 250). For example, consider the imperative with which it concludes:

> It is lonesome, yes. For we are the last of the loud.
> Nevertheless, live.
>
> Conduct your blooming in the noise and whip of the whirlwind. (Brooks 1968, 54)

Brooks's biographer describes this poem and the first sermon preceding it as "draw[ing] the book to an effective conclusion by moving beyond victimization, rebellion, and celebration, by urging a rich solidarity" within this whirlwind (Kent 1990, 218); another scholar calls these lines "a final triumph for the human imagination" in the face of life's chaos and warped landscapes (Miller 171).

Within the poem, both sentiment classifiers highlight to varying degrees what are perhaps its most famous lines as being some of the most negatively charged:

> The time
> cracks into furious flower. Lifts its face
> all unashamed. And sways in wicked grace. (Brooks 1968, 54)

These lines—which begin the poem's final sequence—have inspired a great deal of scholarly reflection and poetic creativity. They have been viewed as "a striking metaphor for defining and understanding African American poetry," particularly "the beautiful and rageful struggle of African Americans toward repression," inspiring the 1994 Furious Flower Poetry Conference at James Madison University and 2005 collection *Furious Flower: African American Poetry from the Black Arts Movement to the Present* (Gabbin xvii). Haki Madhubuti cites these lines along with the rest of "The Second Sermon" as evidence of Brooks's "post-1967 poetry" being "fat-less … extremely streamlined and to the point" (Madhubuti 1996, 88-9). In a 2017 essay in *Poetry* magazine, poet Carl Phillips notes that the rhymed pentameter in these lines, when viewed alongside with the prosodic simplicity and/or irregularity of the surrounding lines, marks "less a dismantling of English prosody than a rejection of its supremacy. There will have to be room made, the *prosody* tells us, for otherness, and on an equal footing" (Phillips 250).

Pattern and VADER, however, see a statistically significant presence of negative words, mostly modifiers. As in the case of Giovanni's "The True Import," they take the surface negativity of this diction at face value; to return to Richards, they scan only for the "normal separate feeling" of words, rather than "the feeling actually aroused by the word in the poem," shaped accordingly by "the pull exerted by context" (Richards 201-203). In viewing the poems this way, however, Pattern and VADER highlight a juxtaposition of surface sentiment with poetic meaning that feels of a piece with "The True Import," though used to different ends.

Where we might see in “The True Import” what Carolyn Rodgers describes as a speaking of “the truth that hurts” that is ultimately a form of “constructive deconstruction”—angry rhetoric brandished in a way to rebuke, chastise, and convert its readers—in “The Second Sermon” scholars negotiate the sharp juxtaposition of Brooks’s diction, in which she flips connotative and denotative associations on their heads by placing adjacent words into direct tension with one another: the “flower” that blooms is a “furious” one; the “grace” with which it blooms is “wicked”; the “blooming” itself is conducted in “the noise and whip of the whirlwind.” Such clashes contribute to complex meanings like what Gabbin calls the “beautiful and rageful struggle” of African American protest. While not identical to the militant voice of “The True Import,” it could be argued that they have more in common with regards to “posture” and “tone”—the aesthetically immanent, affective comportment of these texts—than originally imagined. This commonality, I believe, is one of measured protest: an emphatic objection and vivid expression of feeling carefully calculated to respond to its historical moment through sophisticated poetic rhetoric.

Significantly, I was only able to hear and identify these resonances from the vantage of Pattern and VADER’s unique, computational ontology of poetic texts—one with profound limitations, but designed specifically to account for sentiment in natural language in the present moment. How these poems “resonate”—and how these reverberations may “disorient or disturb,” to cite Felski once more, “long after the moment of their manufacture” (Felski 2008, 115)—is a product of the multidirectional and ever-changing relationship between denotation, connotation, historical context, and poetic function described above. As one scholar notes of Brooks’s line “the time / cracks into furious flower,” the conclusion of the poem itself “points dramatically towards the interpretive possibilities for and of the future” and thus “presents a

challenge to those critics who would see the Black Arts movement as a calcified artifact of history" (Malewitz 537, 542). In this sense, "the time" that "cracks into furious flower" is not just the time in which the poem was written or published, but the time in which the poem continues to exist. In short: like literary meaning more generally, literary tone reverberates through time. This makes it subject to all the unpredictable modulations that the metaphor of resonance implies. But when entangled in a wealth of complex poetic forms, a poem's more pointed affective comportment can still ring powerfully in contemporary ears, even amidst the noise accumulated between then and now. In the case of analyzing what I've called *measured protest*, the use of digital methods and sentiment analysis in particular provided me with an occasion to explore these reverberations.

As this analysis has hopefully shown, determining which formal features contribute towards a poem's tone depends largely on which features you choose to look at and how you look at them: on the one hand, human readers might grapple with ambiguity, contemplate historical context, and disentangle various layers of grammatical and rhetorical meaning; they may also be shocked by a vivid image or inspired by a rich turn of phrase, recognize their own feelings in a poem's expression of frustration or outrage, or even read in such a way that understands the meaning of a poem's words while missing its point (perhaps taking words and phrases for their "normal separate feeling" rather than their feeling in the context of the poem). Even as a scholar rigorously analyzing a poem's tone more systematically, the process is an open and often messy one—as demonstrated with the dispute between Helen Vendler and Rita Dove, such discussions can inspire heated debate. A sentiment classifier, on the other hand, has extremely strict rules for evaluating language for sentiment. There is no debate, no ambiguity, no consideration of history or irony or poetic form—just the mechanical assignation of numerical

scores to individual words and phrases according to a pre-established dictionary of words and associated values. While extremely limited, the focus of Pattern and VADER's evaluative rubrics provide an excellent opportunity not only to interrogate the value and limits of computational approaches, but also to interrogate scholarly claims as to which factors contribute towards our understanding of a poem's tone—from denotation, connotation, and poetic form to history, humor, and intended audience—as well as how these factors come together in a given poetic context. In this sense, the use of digital methods combined with more detailed historical and poetic analysis may inspire the somewhat dormant critical conversation surrounding literary tone, and how a feeling like frustration may take hold not only in a poem's form, genre, or language, but in its affective relationship to a historical situation.

Chapter 3: Frustration, Resentment, and Revenge: The Reparation Plot in Novels by Louise Erdrich and Sherman Alexie

In this chapter I look at depictions of *frustrative situations* in contemporary Native American novels. By frustrative situations I mean a kind of *affective situation* governed by frustration as a structural and structuring force, in which actors are not so much "made to do" (to borrow a phrase from Bruno Latour) as they are "made *not* to do," or "made to do *otherwise*" by frustrating bureaucratic actors that use power to block, stymie, bewilder, disappoint, and prevent (Latour 1999, 25). The novels I will look at here are, most generally speaking, about failures of justice. Some of these failures are recent, discrete, and directed at individuals; others are extended over long periods of time, diffuse, and directed at entire communities. These failures are concomitant with bureaucratic institutions and their representatives, as well as individuals interacting with them. The desire for justice from the characters in these novels is strong—they seek reparations, retribution, or revenge, within and without the bounds of the law. But the nature of the *frustrative situations* in which they find themselves complicates these quests for justice: there is no familiar revenge plot with its cyclical, generational blood-feuding or violent communal payback, nor a straightforward legal thriller or detective story in which justice for spectacular crimes is carried off or stymied in the climactic space of the court room. These familiar generic worlds are replaced by a slow reckoning of accounts, intertwined deeply with the bureaucratic institutions that situate and structure them. It is the generic form of a certain kind of affective situation coupled with a certain kind of quest for justice; frustration shapes this form the way that grief shapes an elegy. It structures the conflict and the histories that provide the backdrop, the meaning of a given encounter, and the trajectory of the plot as a whole. I call

this resulting genre a *reparation plot*—stories of individuals facing injustice and being "made *not* to do" by bureaucratic institutions representing that failure of justice, and perhaps choosing instead to be "made to do *otherwise*."

I would argue that viewing affective experience situationally rather than as something potentially pre-discursive (Massumi, Deleuze), bound up in psycho-biological drives (Sedgwick, Tomkins), or as a discursive quality itself (Berlant, Ahmed) helps us to account for a different texture and more variable scale of affective experience—one that can incorporate our institutions as well as our day-to-day experiences with a temporal frame that can account for moments (i.e., micro-aggressions) as well as the lived experience of historical legacies (i.e., slavery, colonialism). With this in mind, three questions guide the inquiry in this chapter: (1) what do novels have to tell us about frustrative situations?, (2) what do frustrative situations as seen in contemporary Native American novels have to tell us about experiences of injustice in Native communities in the US?, and (3) what can this tell us about affect, justice, and literary genres more generally?

Lastly, an introductory note on the corpus to which this applies and from which I draw in my analyses. Two novels make up most of the close readings I offer in this chapter. But the larger set of novels through which my thinking has developed and to which these generic frames could apply include works by a number of contemporary Native American writers: Sherman Alexie, Louise Erdrich, LeAnne Howe, Louis Owens, Leslie Marmon Silko, James Welch, and potentially many more. In reading only two novels from this large, variegated corpus, I hope to offer a sense of how novels might be read for depictions of frustration and frustrative situations. These commonalities, seen through the lens of genre as well as colonialism/post-colonialism, tribal nationalism, or pan-indigenous transnationalism, might provide a fresh opportunity to

gather and connect these novels at a formal level as well as at a cultural historical level. That said, there is nothing essential linking the generic frames I am proposing to this body of writing exclusively. However, the shared histories, lived experiences, and intertextual networks out of which many of these novels have been written relates directly to many of the problems that a dissertation on *frustration* in American literary study might hope to explore: injustice in the present as well as legacies of the injustices on which the country was founded; anger and resistance, a desire to make things right, as well as discouragement or despair; the imbrication of lived, affective experience with institutions and bureaucratic process; the failure of the law and the felt experience of continuing to live without justice; and, of course, the insights on these issues unique to novels and novelistic depictions. In her book *Ugly Feelings,* Sianne Ngai follows a methodology in which, given the persistence and continued circulation of the feelings she analyzes, "each ugly feeling will thus be examined in a cultural context where it seems particularly charged or at stake" (Ngai 7). I hope to show that frustration is not only "particularly charged or at stake" in this corpus of contemporary Native American novels, but also linked crucially to a larger cultural-historical argument on what might be seen as a dominant literary affect in some strands of American literature after the 1930s.

Introduction: Affect, Bureaucracy, and Native American Literature

A few months after the publication of *The Round House* in 2012, Louise Erdrich contributed an op-ed to the New York Times titled "Rape on the Reservation." She wrote about the Senate reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act; the Justice Department reporting that one out of every three Native women is raped in her lifetime; and the fact that non-Indian men—responsible for over 80% of the sexual crimes committed on reservations—cannot be prosecuted by tribal courts (Erdrich 2013).

These facts give shape to the world of *The Round House*. A non-Indian man has raped an Indian woman and then exploited jurisdictional loopholes that remove any ground on which the prosecution could make a case. When the victim's husband, a tribal judge in a fictional North Dakotan reservation, explains to their son Joe the unjust history of Indian law that makes this possible, he includes cases like *Oliphant v. Suquamish*, the Supreme Court decision preventing the prosecution of Geraldine's attacker. In an afterword to the novel, Erdrich directs the reader to the Amnesty International report on sexual violence against indigenous women in the US, "Maze of Injustice," as well as to a number of other resources on sexual violence against Native women and the state of Indian law more generally (Amnesty International). "This book is set in 1988," she writes, "but the tangle of laws that hinder prosecution of rape cases on many reservations still exist" (Erdrich 2012a, 320).

The themes, conflicts, characters, and histories that give structure to *The Round House* are enmeshed with a "tangle of laws" that frustrates prosecution of non-Indians on tribal land. But this story is also enmeshed with other legal and bureaucratic tangles that have given shape to Native experience in the US for centuries.

The prosecution of Geraldine's rapist cannot begin because the exact location of the rape—whether on tribal, state, or federal land—is unknown. And because of court cases like *Oliphant v. Suquamish*, this means that the jurisdictional responsibility of the case is unclear—one tangle. As the novel unfolds, we learn that one of the two Native women assaulted by Linden Lark is trying to have her daughter officially enrolled in her tribe. This enrollment, it turns out, would reveal that the child's father is Lark's boss, a South Dakotan politician, and that the mother was underage at the time of their affair. Geraldine Coutts, the other woman assaulted by Lark, is the person in charge of helping the young mother through the requisite tribal enrollment

processes. As Joe explains, it is his mother's task "to parse the ever more complicated branching and interbranching tangle of each bloodline," as generation by generation they had "become an impenetrable undergrowth of names and liaisons" (Erdrich 2012a, 149). A second tangle.

And so the two tangles meet, complicating one another: the "legal enigma" (Erdrich 2012a, 306) of a stalled prosecution, the "impenetrable undergrowth" of an attempt at enrollment and all that it unearths, and a known criminal leveraging the messy, lopsided tangles of official power that give structure to this situation with an almost cannibalistic self-interestedness.

In this chapter, I want to look closely at the situations produced by tangles of official power. More specifically, I am interested in the *felt* reality and lived experience of those within these situations: the affective dimensions of tangles like these, the emotional costs of encountering or living within them, the way affect might even give structure to them—a wide methodological lens which I will call the examination of *affective situations*. As a scholar of literature looking at novels, this means not only examining the repertoire of affective responses available to individuals stuck in frustrating situations as depicted in novels, particularly those stymied within webs of bureaucratic institutions.[64] It also means the affective dimensions to those structuring forces themselves. In other words: what does frustration with bureaucracy look like, and what can it tell us about the relationship between peoples' feelings and their situation, as well as their responses to injustice in general?

From the larger standpoint of scholars of Native literature and Native American Studies, destructive structures of power, sexual violence, and colonial judicial precedents are not new issues. Classic texts like Paula Gunn Allen's *The Sacred Hoop*, or Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird's edited volume *Reinventing the Enemy's Language* explore many of these problems in the lives of

[64] For an informative example of literary scholars examining *settings* in particular, see Alworth's *Site Reading*.

contemporary Native women from institutional as well as cultural perspectives. In another more recent example, Andrea Smith discusses the legacy of sexual violence against Native Women as a long-standing weapon of conquest, with the state itself being a perpetrator of this violence against women (Smith 2005, 6). In a chapter discussing the role that medical institutions play in providing healthcare to many Natives, Smith reminds us that "on reservations, American Indians have a life expectancy of 47 years" (Smith 2005, 116). In addition to being one of the poorest demographics in the US, Natives "are often entangled by various bureaucratic requirements that prevents them from accessing healthcare," as offices bounce them from Indian Health Service (IHS) to Medicaid and back to IHS (Smith 2005, 116). In *Like a Loaded Weapon: The Rehnquist Court, Indian Rights, and the Legal History of Racism in America,* Robert A. Williams makes it clear that Supreme Court justices have relied and continue to rely on "racist nineteenth-century precedents and language in their Indian law opinions," precedents that make cases like *Oliphant v. Suquamish* possible (Williams xxxi). In the chapter of his book dedicated to this case, Smith describes it simply as "unembarrassedly perepetuat[ing] the … overarching principle of white racial supremacy contained in the European colonial-era doctrine of discovery"; in short, "*Oliphant* has to be regarded as one of the most racist Indian law opinions written by a justice of the Supreme Court in the post-*Brown* era" (Williams 97, 115).

This research intersects with much larger debates in Native American Studies concerning nationalism from a tribal perspective and the historical and methodological specificity needed to seriously consider Native American cultural production. Regarding the present state of a tradition that started with works like Robert Warrior's (Osage) *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* in 1995—a text Shari Huhndorf describes as "the first full-length work of nationalist criticism" (Huhndorf 10)—Padraig Kirwan puts it in his 2013

Sovereign Stories as follows: "Sovereignty. Self-determination. Autonomy. Nation. Native American studies is currently being shaped dramatically by this particular set of terms" (Kirwan 3). The scholarship working through these terms, questions, problems, and histories is rich, creative, and expansive.[65] Taking a different tack to a similar set of concerns, the work of scholars like Shari Huhndorf in *Mapping the Americas: The Transnational Politics of Contemporary Native Culture* (2009) explores what she calls a transnational perspective that marks "a shift away from the nationalist orientation" by looking at works concerned with "indigenous land claims, pan-tribal connections, and the critique of colonialism" (Huhndorf 2). Current scholarship oriented towards these transnational, hemispheric, and global connections is similarly productive.[66]

From these broader scholarly perspectives, however, a phenomenology of the felt, affective consequences of frustration with unjust bureaucratic institutions is a relatively unexamined issue, despite its importance to many of these debates and the lived experience to which they refer. Looking at the big picture, these situations—difficult enrollment processes, obfuscated access to healthcare services, the inability of tribal courts to prosecute non-Indians, land allotments checkerboarding as they change into and out of tribal hands, the afterlives of reneged land treaties, the repatriation of remains and sacred objects, contemporary battles against

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[65] For more on nationalist writing, see Lisa Brooks (Abenaki), "Digging at the Roots: Locating an Ethical, Native Criticism" in *Reasoning Together*. Also Craig Womack (Creek) *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999). Also for seeing this in terms of literary structures, see Sean Kicummah Teuton (Cherokee) and what he calls "tribal realism" in *Red Land, Red Power: Groudning Knowledge in the American Indian Novel* (2008) and Stuart Christie, *Plural Sovereignties and Contemporary Indigenous Literature* (2009).

[66] See Leuthold, *Indigenous Aesthetics: Native Art, Media and Identity* (1998), but also Ines Hernandez-Avila and Stefano Varese, "Indigenous Intellectual Sovereignties: A Hemispheric Convocation" *Wicazo Sa Review* 14, 2: 77 (1999). For a South American historical perspective, see Irene Silverblatt "Becoming Indian in the Central Andes of Seventeenth-Century Peru" in *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements* ed. Gyan Prakash (1995). Even consider Melanie Taylor's *Reconstructing the Native South: American Indian Literature and the Lost Cause* (2012) in which she combines a regional field like the New Southern Studies and combines it with Native American Studies in order to, as she describes it, "instantiate a new field of literary study – the Native South" (Taylor 3).

uranium mining, dam building, and nuclear waste dumping—are one tangle of laws, offices, and bureaucratic structures after another.[67] And while the cultures and national histories vary distinctly from one tribe to another, I would argue that by focusing on bureaucratic procedure *as* an iterable, transposable structure of exploitation and domination in Native American political life in the US, we might account more fully for the affective dimensions of something like Rob Nixon's "slow violence" (Nixon). This lens also works to connect the *felt* realities of these situations with the larger colonial structures that a frame like Patrick Wolfe's "settler colonialism" helps to make visible, wherein "invasion is a structure not an event," making use of a "logic of elimination" in addition to practices like chattel slavery as extractive economies are inflicted on indigenous land and indigenous communities over the course of centuries.[68] More recent scholars like Eve Tuck (Aleut) help to remind us that as much as we have done to "decolonize" these settler colonialist institutions, "decolonization is not a metaphor" and is in fact still a fully concrete reality in North America (Tuck). And as can be imagined, bureaucratic procedure has been and continues to be a crucial component in the colonial settler's "clamor for government protection" while these structures of invasion and extraction are established, maintained, and passed into the hands of future generations (Moses 34).

Bureaucracy and the *frustrative situation*

All that said, to describe the tangles in *The Round House* as "bureaucratic," or to focus on bureaucracy as the ultimate instance of what Horkheimer and Adorno described as a fully

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[67] See Scott Richard Lyons *X-Marks,* Winona LaDuke's *All Our Relations* and *The Militarization of Indian Country*, as well as Amy Lonetree's *Decolonizing Museums* and Rose Powhatan on "Document Genocide" in *The People Who Stayed: Southeastern Indian Writing After Removal*. "the deliberate extermination of a race of people through changing information about them in an official paper."For representations in fiction, see Gerald Vizenor's *Heirs of Columbus* and Erdrich's *The Painted Drum*.

[68] See also Moses, *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History* (2004); Wolfe, "The Limits of Native Title"; Wolfe, "Against the Intenitonal Fallacy: Logocentrism and Continuity in the Rhetoric of Indian Dispossession". For a south American context, see Irene Silverblatt, "Becoming Indian in the Central Andes of Seventeenth-Century Peru."

administered society—this feels redundant. As David Graeber recently put it, "bureaucracy has become the water in which we swim … we no longer like to think about [it], yet it informs every aspect of our existence" (Graeber 4-5). As an object of study it has received swathes of attention: from Weber to Foucault, the project of rationally organized administrations—whether or not they are capable of exerting the disciplinary power that "structure[s] the possible field of action of others" (Foucault 790)—has been advanced and/or critiqued in any number of cultural and historical contexts, and from any number of methodological standpoints.[69] Why focus on it again here?

When Foucault talks about power—how it has come mostly under state control, has been governmentalized—he describes it as a set of possible meta-actions, actions that govern other actions: power "incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely" (Foucault 789). The links between institutions equipped with this power and potential injustice are evident. Thus bureaucratic process is bound up with 'big-picture' Native issues at almost every level: the procedures, hierarchies, careers, records, buildings, categories, positions, and documents that have built up around these institutions are a form of bureaucracy that must be navigated by many Natives in the US as a normal part of life. Bureaucracy isn't filling Yucca Mountain with irradiated waste, but it is certainly structuring the

[69] In many ways, bureaucracy like this is Foucauldian power at work: "It is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easer or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions. … The exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome. Basically power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of government. This word must be allowed the very broad meaning [790] which it had in the sixteenth century. 'Government' did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather, it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sic. … To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others" (Foucault 789-90).

process by which it is decided that spent nuclear fuel should be deposited underground in traditional Paiute and Shoshone land.[70]

So when I say that 'bureaucracy is frustrating,' I mean to describe a specific kind of relationship between bureaucratic institutions and the affective situations in which they entangle individuals. As explained in the beginning of this chapter, in these situations actors are "made *not* to do," or "made to do *otherwise*" by the frustrating systems in which they are situated. When affective situations point to a slippage between *feeling* ("I'm so frustrated right now") and *status* ("The lawyers have frustrated every appeal they've made"), we make visible the ways that affect is both situationally structured and structur*ing*. Those situations I intend to look at here I call *frustrative situations*, using the word "frustrative" (in Samuel Johnson's 1755 *Dictionary of the English Language* "that which frustrates") to key in on the ongoing, situational, status-like aspects of felt experience when tangled up with institutional structures: the "–ive" suffix implying "a permanent or habitual quality or tendency" (think the difference between 'attracting' and 'attractive').

Of course, feeling giving structure to literary texts has a rich history—to refer to Philip Fisher's examples again, think grief and elegy, fear and the gothic, or, I would add, pity and sentimentalism (Fisher 9). And as Martha Nussbaum claimed with the example of Aristotelian tragedy, these feelings (in this instance pity and fear) don't just fill in the content of a genre, they "inform the genre itself, its sense of what has importance, what a suitable plot is, what needs recognition as a salient part of human life" (Nussbaum 1995, 53). Put this way, feeling appears to have a role in a very familiar philosophical—and aesthetic—problem, that of *organizing reality*. In this sense an affective structure might help to "world" the world, to use Heidegger's

[70] See LaDuke, *All Our Relations*; also Danielle Endres, "The Rhetoric of Nuclear Colonialism: Rhetorical Exclusion of American Indian Arguments in the Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Siting Decision" (2009).

phrase, or produce a given "distribution of the sensible," in the much more recent terminology from Jacques Rancière.

In sum: much of the current scholarship on contemporary Native American literature is working through problems of identity and appropriation, sovereignty and the legacies of colonialism, indigeneity from a global perspective, as well as methodology and scholarly practice. With this chapter, I hope to contribute to these conversations by continuing work on the role that feeling can play in those issues. One final and very important note: there is a long history of non-Native academics writing on Native cultural production without taking proper account of their own positionality as an outsider in a long history of potentially appropriative outsiders. Robert Warrior (Osage), Jace Weaver (Cherokee), and Craig Womack (Creek) in *American Indian Literary Nationalism* put it best:

> Too often, non-Native critics have no real knowledge of, let alone commitment to, Native communities. They simply want to read Native texts without ever engaging, let alone encountering, Native peoples. In this they are little different than early anthropologists who exploited their indigenous 'informants,' and saw themselves as adding the value for increase in the 'universal' body of knowledge, even as they burnished the luster of their own careers. If one is to study and write about Native Americans and their literatures, one must be prepared to listen to and respect Native voices and, in keeping with the traditional Native ethic of reciprocity, not take without giving something back. (Weaver et al. 12)

In keeping with Warrior, Weaver, and Womack's criticism, I have tried to emulate other non-Native critics like Arnold Krupat in *Red Matters*, and James H. Cox in *Muting White Noise* who have done well in listening and responding to Native voices. Following their example, in my writing that focuses on Native authors and texts I think through my ideas most with Native scholarship—as Cox explains after citing Warrior on this exact issue, "I use this strategy out of respect for Native voices and in an effort to avoid perpetuating, implicitly or explicitly, an academic version of colonialism: the presumption that non-Natives know more about or what is

most important to Native people" (Cox 4). I have done my best to take these arguments to heart as I move forward with my own thinking on the novels I read in this chapter and the real-world situations to which they speak.

Frustrative Situations and the Reparation Plot

I want begin with a pair of questions and an exemplary scene from a novel. The questions are: (1) what is bureaucracy? and (2) what does it mean to be frustrated by or with it? The scene is from Linda Hogan's Pulitzer-nominated *Mean Spirit*, a 1991 novel in which white criminals—from corrupt police, to interloping oilmen, to white husbands of Native women—defraud, terrorize, and murder Native members of an Osage community in 1920s Oklahoma to acquire their oil-rich land.

The scene begins as Moses Graycloud, an Osage man, comes to the tribal council building for a quarterly pay period on land leases. He leases his land to cattle grazers on an allotment we assume to be a remainder of the Dawes Act, which at the turn of the 20th century broke up tribal land into a checkerboard of allotments distributed to tribal members and then to non-tribal members, effectively disintegrating the contiguity of tribal land and also defrauding Native individuals too poor to hold onto their allotments. He first checks his name on the "posted list of royalty recipients" to confirm how much he should receive ($2000), a document listing surnames, tribal enrollment numbers, and the dollar amount of each individual to receive a payment (Hogan 58-9). After having his name called by one of the clerks, Moses approaches the pay table, presents his Certificate of Competency (a document indicating he is responsible enough not to need a non-Indian legal guardian), signs his name on "a dotted line", and extends his hand as the clerk "counted two hundred dollars into his open palm, turned a page in his book of accounts, looked over Moses's head," and called out for the next leaser (60). Moses knows he

should have received $2,000 instead of $200—he just checked it on the posted list—so instead of turning away he asks for "the full amount due to me" (60). The clerk (named Smith) explains that there's been a change in the regulation: full-blood Indians like Moses now only get part of their money, in this case ten percent. At this news Moses's face becomes "full of resentment," and the room goes "cold" with fear as all of those watching realize what's going on (61).

Moses, a man known to be "of good sense," is aware that he is being watched by his community—mostly Osages, but also Creeks, Seminoles, and Chickasaws—and that his actions will set a precedent for everyone called up after him (61). He decides to stand his ground and ask who made the changes. The clerk replies simply that "We don't have any say in the matter … The Indian Commission changed the rules. … There's nothing we can do here. I'm sorry" (61). Hiding his anger, Moses makes one last attempt at reasoning with the clerk: "In the spring you told us our people with white blood only received part of their money since they are part white. And not entitled. Now you are saying that we full-bloods get only part of our money since someone we never see believes that we mismanage it? The government is doing this, right?" (61). But at this inquiry the clerk becomes "alarmed," responding in a way that could have been "offering advice out of fear" or simply a threat: "If you carry on that way, Mr. Graycloud, the judge will declare you an incompetent" (62). If declared as such, Moses would lose all rights to manage his own land leases, forfeiting those rights to an outside non-Indian legal guardian who may have no interest whatsoever in Moses's well-being.

How does Moses respond to this frustrating bureaucratic encounter? He "became silent and turned away, even though his heart was racing in his angry chest and he wanted to scream at them" (62). A friend who witnesses the encounter—and who will soon be arrested and held without arraignment until his murder in a county jail cell, all because of the previously discussed

conflicts between federal, state, and tribal jurisdictions[71]—makes an angry outburst, "close to tears" and "frustrated"—"They're stealing our lives! We've got to fight them. Why do you just take it?" (62). But once outside with Moses, he too "had to walk way … had to take his anger to a silent place and study it so he wouldn't turn it back on his own people"—all while the people in question moved forward to collect their own payments with eyes downcast, "ashamed of something they couldn't even name" (62).

Frustration is not the only affective structure involved in this ground-level encounter with bureaucracy: Moses shows his resentment openly; the room feels a chill in fearful anticipation; anger is subdued, expressed freely, drawn away and handled with care; a nameless shame casts itself over those who remain. All of these things are built into the architecture of this encounter: the long empty tables separating clerks and their piles of cash from Native leasers; paperwork brought from home inside jacket pockets and fresh documents brought by clerks to be signed on the table; the now hushed room witnessing one by one the exploitation of their peers and the ineffectualness of what appear to be reasonable petitions; all leading up to the clerk's simultaneous refusal of any further questioning, threat of official sanctions, and disavowal of responsibility. The scene, and the set of feelings involved in it, is a familiar one.

It is also, I would argue, a *frustrative situation* par excellence. "Frustration" is certainly not the only affective structure at work in this scene, but it gives structure to the entire *situation*, including affective dimensions as well as aspects that might feel outside the purview of something like "affect." Consider, for example, each of the many mediating steps standing between Moses and the money owed to him: the failure to meet any one of these requirements

[71] Regarding Benoit's situation in the novel: "Federal court did not want to try the case, though they claimed that Indian country as federal jurisdiction. County court couldn't try Benoit even though they held the young man in jail. And the tribal court wanted him released for lack of evidence. It was argued from place to place who had jurisdiction and who didn't" (Hogan 191)

stops the process in its tracks, potentially preventing Moses from receiving his lawful portion of an already completed financial transaction. Without a Certificate of Competency he would be denied; without the paperwork proving his tribal membership and awarding him a tribal registration number, he would be denied; without signing the documents presented to him, he would denied; even with his Certificate of Competency, if he were to interrogate the clerk and be declared incompetent, he would be denied; and so on.[72]

This process is, in quite a literal sense, a frustrating one: these barriers are in place to frustrate certain kinds of activity that ostensibly might take advantage of others or of the system. These barriers act on others so they are made *not* to do what they otherwise would. Although not as dystopic as Horkheimer and Adorno's vision of a fully administered society, these bureaucratic checkpoints exert a Foucauldian disciplinary power that determines the possible actions of others through a negative capacity, the capacity to frustrate. This kind of frustration is built in to our expectations of bureaucratic process. And while frustrating *in the moment*, these barriers often prove critical in the bigger picture, sometimes playing critical roles in how our government operates. In Herbert Kaufman's classic text on bureaucratic red tape, he explains that "one person's red tape may be another's treasured safeguard" (Kaufman 1). Another scholar takes this idea further, distinguishing between red tape that is a 'bug' (accidental, a problem to be fixed) and those that are 'features' (purposeful, performing a useful function): "some of the rules we find frustrating, wasteful, or inefficient," he writes, "are nonetheless beneficial because they either ensure accountability, preserve rights of procedure, or provide protections from abuses of

[72] This is without even mentioning the unofficial barriers faced by someone like Moses in this situation: means of getting to and from the tribal council building; the hours spent traveling there, waiting for a name to be called, and traveling back; needing to read English to confirm what one is owed, and to speak English in order to understand the clerk; racist remarks and potential physical threats from guards and clerks themselves; the cultural and material trappings of bureaucratic processes that are not usually part of official documentation; the list goes on.

power" (Bozeman 11).[73] In short, frustration isn't always a bad thing, and neither is bureaucracy. But the latter can be—and has been—exploited systematically. With the case of U.S.-Native American relations, this exploitation has gone on for hundreds of years. And when this happens, the frustration experienced, both at an organizational and at a bodily level, reflects these structuring forces in its affective dimensions.

As we see with Moses and Benoit, an attempt to address unjust procedures or protocols at the level at which individuals experience them results in frustrating failure: feelings of rage, helplessness, and shame mixed with the inability to act effectually. When Moses points out that the new set of rules preventing him from receiving 90% of his payments operates under a seemingly self-contradictory rationale that is exploitative of Indians who have no legal recourse in the situation, he receives only threats of official penalties in return. For Benoit, and perhaps Moses, this is a potential moment for what bell hooks calls "killing rage"—one of the massive flares of feeling that can spike out of an encounter with systemic in justice, in her case racism, that can make one want to strike out (hooks). Just as hooks, shocked at how quickly and completely the feeling once came over her, reflects on the need to channel this intensity into writing instead of physical violence, Audre Lorde explains that anger is "loaded with information and energy" (Lorde 1997, 280)—and as Benoit seems to understand as he takes his anger away to "a silent place to study it" until it is safe, Lorde argues that when "focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change" (Lorde 1997, 280).[74] The

[73] These discussions necessarily respond to a Weberian understanding of bureaucracy, which can be surmised roughly with the term's first entry in the OED: "Government by officials; a system of government or (in later use) administration by a hierarchy of professional administrators following clearly defined procedures in a routine and organized manner" ("bureaucracy, n." OED Online). Weber's model has been critiqued for his insistence on it being a "normative model … a prerequisite to economic development" and "the cornerstone of organized rationality" (Bozeman 18).

[74] It is clear that anger like this is for people who care about something, who are invested with the workings of the world and their attachments to it. As Adam Phillips puts it in a more literary context, anger is for "those for whom

addition of yet another exploitative, mediating barrier—requiring that Moses acquire a non-Indian guardian to manage the remainder of his money on his behalf—to an already oppressively frustrating system is almost too much for those characters, both of whom extricate themselves from the entire situation.

Revenge and the reparation plot

Turning back to the literary nature of my examples, I ask: what story does the relationship between bureaucracy and frustration in Native American texts tell? The *frustrative situation*—which incorporates both frustration's sense as a structured *status* and its sense as something *felt*—provides a useful lens through which to look at recent novels grappling with the institutional legacies of colonialism in an American context. Moreover, when looked at from this perspective, we find that these texts share a constellation of features that can be usefully identified as a genre—that of the *reparation plot*.

In arguing that these novels may be grouped and read through this generic frame, I am by no means suggesting that they represent a closed set of texts with fixed features—as Derrida has shown us genres open themselves radically to other iterations and interpretative contexts in the very act of creating their taxonomic enclosures (Derrida).[75] Rather, I follow the thinking of John Frow in working past what he calls Derrida's "familiar post-Romantic resistance to genre," and looking to the work of Tzvetan Todorov and Hans Robert Jauss: "Just as genres form a horizon of expectations against which any text is read, so are they themselves subsumed in a broader horizon formed by a period's system of genres," he writes (Frow 1629). This means that genres "are neither self-identical nor self-contained" but are a model that allows us to "bring together

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something has gone wrong but who 'know,' in their rage, that it could be otherwise." Phillips, *The Beast in the Nursery: On Curiosity and Other Appetites*, Adam Phillips (1999). 125.

[75] See also Hayden V. White "Commentary: Good of Their Kind" – "this was Derrida's point in 'The Law of Genre' – genre summons into being a kind of impurity against which it seeks to guard" (375).

the categories of a poetics with those of a historical event"—in short, providing "the beginnings of an account of the social life of forms" (Frow 1629). These forms are open to change and highly dependent on their place in the larger set of genres at a given time, but identify a group of texts that, as Alistair Fowler has argued, are highly related "without necessarily having any feature shared in common by all" (Fowler 41) Ralph Cohen has argued similarly, claiming that genres arise "to compete or to contrast with other genres, to complement, augment, interrelate with other genres," and that members of such a genre do not need to have every trait in common—or even one trait common to all—to still relate to one another generically (Cohen 1986, 207, 210). Rather their relations are "multiple" and revealed only as these relations change—for example, as new texts are included (Cohen 1986, 210).

Building on these insights, my own thinking pairs with two more recent writers, Wai Chee Dimock's introduction to a recent *PMLA* special issue on genre, and Peter Seitel's contribution to an *NLH* special issue with the same theme. Dimock, capturing (and updating) the more Derridian elements of genre as a conceptual frame, describes a genre as something *virtual*: "the sum of the not yet realized, with no actualized shape, a kind of general solvent out of which particular entities can acquire particular features" (Dimock 2007, 1379). Seitel, on the other hand, represents a thread of historical, materialist genre theory that takes a page from Fredric Jameson's classic formulation in *The Political Unconscious*: while Jameson argues that genres are "literary *institutions,* or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact," (Jameson 1981, 106) Seitel argues that generic structures provide for the audience "rules of thumb about plot, style, and theme, even if the expectations are addressed by ironically overturning them. Generic

expectations attune the audience's imagination and prepare its response" (Seitel 290). His concept of *attunement* is one I will return to.

In the context of Native American studies, I look to Krupat's recent *That The People Might Live: Loss and Renewal in Native American Elegy* in addressing the problem of "mak[ing] comparisons among European or Euramerican genres and the traditional genres of Native nations" (Krupat 2012, 2), some of the more familiar Native genres being what he calls "Trickster stories" (81) and "Indian autobiography" (109). Krupat's theory for "Native American elegiac expression" echoes Cohen and Fowler: "it is not, that is to say, an abstract logical deduction, but rather a set of generalizations that arose from a wide sampling of specific examples. This is *theory* of a social-scientific and humanist kind; it is not *law* of the kind posited by the hard sciences. The theory makes the strong descriptive claim that *most* Native oral performances concerned with death and loss function to console and sustain the community. It in no way claims that *all* Native elegiac oral performances [or writing] does so" (Krupat 2012, 9-10). In short, in proposing this new genre to describe a group of recent novels, I aim to describe a particular way in which a number of texts might be read, given their shared features (plot, themes, formal elements, and so on), their positioning in the larger field of extant genres, and their orientation to the historical material (content) they depict and contend with. I have come to this model, much like Krupat, Fowler, and Cohen, empirically rather than logically in the emergent qualities of many significant textual examples.

At its most basic form, the reparation plot is a transformation of the revenge plot. Revenge has a long history in literary study, one bound up with feeling, affect, and various understandings of justice. In first coining the term "revenge play" or "revenge tragedy" in 1902, A. H. Thorndike described it as "a distinct species of the tragedy of blood … a tragedy whose

leading motive is revenge and whose main action deals with the progress of this revenge, leading to the deaths of the murderers and often the death of the avenger himself" (Thorndike 125, qtd in Bowers 62). Citing Thorndike in his 1940 monograph simply titled *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, Fredson Bowers described revenge for personal injury as "the first manifestation of a consciousness of justice" (Bowers 3). But the revenge plot as a generic feature has traveled far, becoming central to the development of other more recent genres: detective fiction, the legal thriller, and the western, to name a few.[76] A concept central to this kind of story that seems to travel best, whether at the level of plot, theme, character, and so on, is the question of commensurability: payback, an eye for an eye, getting even or settling one's accounts—justice, in short.

In her work on law, literature, and the limits of justice, Wai Chee Dimock claims that it is this dream of a "commensurate order" *as* the "natural order"—wherein *taking* an eye could be made to somehow equal *losing* an eye—that "makes the concept of justice intelligible in the first place" (Dimock 1996, 6). In her view, it is "the oldest, most ambitious, and most comprehensive translation project in human history" (7). And literature, she argues, is uniquely poised to explore the "unredressed, unrecovered, noncorresponding" remains within this supposed commensurability, looking more closely at the ways in which it is "haunted always by what it fails to encompass" (7, 9). For example, David Daiches explores this failure in the plays of Shakespeare, describing *Hamlet* as a "tragedy of moral frustration" in which "justice demands appropriate action where a crime has been committed, but in fact *no action is ever appropriate*" because "the punishment can never fit the crime"—in short, nothing can bring the dead back to

[76] In "Traveling Genres," Margaret Cohen writes: "Genres that travel across space, like genres that endure across time, must be able to address social and/or literary questions that are transportable, that can speak to divergent publics or a public defined in its diversity, dispersion, and heterogeneity" (Cohen 2003, 482).

life (quoted in Kertzer, Daiches 6-7). This is justice, frustrated—not just in terms of justice that seeks punishments for crimes, but also justice seeking a "redress equal to the injury" and a "benefit equal to the desert" (Dimock 1996, 6).

The role revenge plays in literary works, then, is one of exploring these "residues of justice" from the position of lived, felt experience—the limits to the kinds of satisfactions that legal systems can afford. As we have seen in our example from *Mean Spirit*, there is no way to revenge oneself against a frustrative situation or the bureaucracies that structure them. They are the lived manifestations of sustained, institutionalized injustice rather than individual malfeasance—there is no evil sheriff, tyrant, or mob boss to throw off a cliff. One might argue, as a recent scholar on "the new revenge novel" has observed, that many contemporary novels "replace classical revenge tragedy's convention of interpersonal bloodfeud with a trope of symbolic transfers" in which "getting even with political systems entails attacking their most redolent characters" (Wiggins 2013, 676). But in the frustrative situations I have described, even if there is a representative of an unjust system—like Linden Lark in *The Round House*—removing this individual does little, or in many cases, nothing, to diminish the structuring power and persistence of institutionalized injustice. The trope is a familiar one: cut off one head, two more grow in its place. It has roots in Native American fiction as well: by the end of James Welch's 1986 novel *Fools Crow*, a story written from the perspective of a young Blackfoot man as he grows into adulthood in the 19th century, the titular character reflects that when it comes to seeking justice for the crimes committed by whites against the Blackfoot community, "even revenge had been slaughtered." (Welch 384)

Rather than frame these novels in terms of a trope—what Wiggins identifies as the metonymic transfer of bad systems onto bad individuals (Wiggins 2012)—and the kind of justice

it implies, I take here a more holistic approach, examining the entire situation that results in and from the frustration of justice as well as the frustration of those seeking justice. It is this combination of structural process and individual experience that frustration, as a lens, allows us to see and examine. It is here that I find Seitel's concept of *attunement* to be a particularly useful one when thinking of genre, revenge, and frustration, particularly as it relates to the affective universe a given genre might create and the ways in which it might call upon its audience's participation, perhaps even its attachment. In Jonathan Kertzer's *Poetic Justice and Legal Fictions*, he describes 'poetic justice' as a process by which a genre invites its readers into its "field of influence" or moral and aesthetic universe, after which "it assures readers that we can know exactly what characters deserve, because secure knowledge of motives, actions, and responsibilities, as well as faith in the moral standards by which to assess them, are readily available to us" (Kertzer 11). In Kertzer's thinking, the two necessary steps for reading 'with the grain' of a text's moral universe requires "recognizing a work's genre," then "accepting those terms" (Kertzer 11). Thus justice itself isn't so much about truth as it is about satisfaction—one that ignores the "residues" Dimock observes in her work. For Shoshana Felman, whom Kertzer cites, there are crucial differences between the different kinds of 'satisfaction' that a trial and a literary text can provide. A trial, she argues, does not search so much for truth as for a "decision," for "finality: a force of resolution." (qtd in Kerzter 15). Literary texts, on the other hand, "search for meaning, for expression, for heightened significance and for symbolic understanding" (Felman 55). For Kertzer, then, "satisfaction is therefore a function of genre", and "genres are characterized by the kind of satisfaction they define and provide" (Kertzer 14). When we attune ourselves to the reparation plot—a genre greatly concerned with justice, meaning, and closure—we find that is no real satisfaction, even after the bad guy is shot dead,

put in jail. There is only the continued struggle to keep living inside a situation designed to stymie one's efforts.

General features of reparation plot

The features of a reparation plot should feel familiar to readers—this familiarity is what makes the lens of genre a useful means of examining them. Borrowing Wai Chee Dimock's language again, my goal in identifying these features is to describe and examine a "general solvent" from which individual texts emerge. It helps us to see how these texts communicate with one another and—most importantly for my purposes—the affective dimensions of these structures and relationships. Looking at novelistic depictions of the lived experience of injustice from the perspective of *frustration* makes visible an entire affective structure to these situations that was previously invisible. In this sense, in describing the virtual features of this genre, I do *not* mean to offer in a proscriptive argument for what genre these texts "*really* are". Rather, we seek to *attune* ourselves (to revisit Seitel's term) to the fresh interpretive possibilities that this genre's perspective provides.

Consider again the technical sense of frustration: a desire, attempt, movement, or vector of some kind being prevented, balked, disappointed, or stymied. Frustration itself comes with built-in narrative structure: an actor tries to do something; a second actor frustrates the first, preventing them from realizing their goal; the first actor responds to this failure, either with anger, or determination, silence, despair, rote repetition, inaction, and so on. At its most basic level, this structure is also that of the reparation plot, except that the reparation plot also takes into account the lived, experiential sense of frustration, the affective dimensions of the situations the more technical sense describes—a set of forms I have called *affective situations*.

In a reparation plot an actor or group of actors seeks justice. This can be an individual, a group, a community, or an assortment of strangers. In the novels I look at here, individual characters are frequently—though not always—made to bear collective weight: a white person representing and answering for the historical entity "white people" in *Indian Killer*, for example. Whether or not this is the case for those actors seeking justice, they usually seek justice both for wrongs committed in the present as well as the lived present of historically systematized exploitation. These seekers of justice, however, are frustrated. Their quest works within the bounds of a *frustrative situation* in which the official channels of justice are or have been—in some cases repeatedly for a very, very long time—unavailable or inoperable. Because today most crucial official channels are almost always bureaucratic channels, this often takes the shape of failures of bureaucracy and the kinds of justice it can administer (though the unlawful breaking of formal legal contracts goes back to the very beginning of official governmental interaction between Native American tribes and the United States and has its own historically contingent affective textures—see James Welch's *Fools Crow*[77]). When these official bureaucratic channels fail, the now-frustrated seekers of justice are *made to do otherwise*. Here, responses vary. This crucial juncture—how characters respond to frustration in the face of injustice—is one of the most distinguishing features of the reparation plot. The narrative

[77]. In Welch's historical novel *Fools Crow*, a survivor describes a slaughter in which American soldiers massacre a village of sleeping Blackfoot women and children—the Marias Massacre—he notes that the treaties, signed notes, and formal bureaucratic agreements made with the Americans meant nothing at all. "Heavy Runner was among the first to fall," he says. "He had a piece of paper that was signed by a seizer chief. It said that he and his people were friends to the Napikwans [Americans]. But they shot him many times." (Welch 385). Obviously this kind of slaughter is not a frustrating situation—it is a horrifying one. But the crime was also structured bureaucratically: the approved orders allowing a group of soldiers to go forward with a plan like this. In a scene previous to this one, a group of Natives charged with trying to prevent such violence from occurring find themselves caught in a frustrative situation controlled by a group of dismissive Army officials. When asked finally to give these peaceful tribes some proof of their "cooperation" with the U.S., those officials knowingly go through the motions of a bureaucratic procedure that has no power: "scratched out a few words that would signal to all that these men had cooperated with the United States and were therefore not to be considered hostiles. The pieces of paper were signed by General Alfred H. Sully and dated 1 January 1870" (Welch 287). Heavy Runner holds this document while being shot to death.

roadblock becomes a narrative crossroads, opening into a constellation of potential paths. Most conspicuous is the quest for vengeance. Once embedded in this frustrative situation, actors seek revenge in many forms: extralegal violence against strangers seen to be representative of a system (white people in *Indian Killer*, white people in *Flight*, the white man at the end of *The Business of Fancy Dancing*, and, it could argued, the albino in *House Made of Dawn*) as well as extralegal violence against a criminal directly taking advantage of unjust systems (Linden Lark in *The Round House*, and indirectly Redford McAlester's corrupt tribal governance in LeAnne Howe's 2001 novel *Shell Shaker*). Others choose non- (or less-) violent alternatives: letting antagonists live (Tayo not giving in to attacking Emo in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*), pursuing non-Euro-American forms of justice (offering a child for adoption after killing a child in Erdrich's most recent novel *LaRose*), or, on a completely different scale, the mass reclamation of tribal lands (the peaceful-until-provoking army marching north at the conclusion of Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*). Some characters, however, give up on justice altogether: they fall into despair (the unnamed narrator's slow removal from the world in *Winter in the Blood*), commit suicide (Jim Loney's police-assisted suicide in Welch's *The Death of Jim Loney*), or live on knowing that injustice will triumph (Fools Crow's position at the end of *Fools Crow* having had his visions of the future, or a group of Osages removing themselves entirely from a deadly situation of white Americans exploiting tribal resources in Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit*).

Certain features are shared throughout this constellation of responses. Whether sought out and achieved or criticized harshly, revenge as well as the idea of its possibility as a satisfying kind of justice is explored and, usually, critiqued. Moreover, the idea of reparations for longstanding historical injustice—and the quest to imagine a future in which historical wrongs are righted—is also shared, even if never realized. Characters, narrators, and sometimes

narratives themselves reflect on how to go about making justice possible even when it feels impossible, when the present system seems untouchable and the future looks just as frustrating. Actions taken with regard to this theme frequently address one of the most difficult and complex strands of the reparation plot: the reality of living without justice. From Benoit in *Mean Spirit* shouting "They're stealing our lives! We've got to fight them. Why do you just take it?" as he is hustled out of the tribal council building, to *The Round House*'s conclusion in which characters struggle on without hope—"We just kept going," the novel concludes (Erdrich 2012a, 317)—these novels ask questions like: what does it mean to live within systems that structurally frustrate justice? How are people expected to continue living, raising children, etc., knowing that justice might not be possible? How do individuals process this kind of frustration? And what might it mean to be frustrated indefinitely?

We must also consider, however, that in these stories injustice does not occur once, discretely—it comes together as a motley fabric of ontologically distinct forces that acts at different levels and in different ways on the groups and individuals subject to its power. In this sense when reading these texts we must become attuned to the larger scale types of "cumulative and collective" trauma that Nancy Van Styvendale finds relevant to *Indian Killer*, a novel we will examine shortly: "the intergenerational trauma of Native peoples raises serious questions about the assumption of trauma as rooted in event, where 'event' is understood to refer to a distinct experience that happens in one specific location and time" (Styvendale 207). As we translate this into the structural features of a certain kind of story, it becomes clear again that these features are flexible. The arc of a reparation plot isn't a so much a Proppian progression from point A to point B as it is a "general solvent," to cite Dimock again, out of which a number of stories emerge. Sometimes the injustices are old and longstanding but the frustrations with

them are quickened and fresh (*Flight*, *Indian Killer*, *Riding the Trail of Tears*), or legal systems dilapidated with racist colonial legacies are exploited again in new, horrible ways (*The Round House*), or unpunished crimes and past frustrations live in the memory of a story and characters live in their wake (*The Plague of Doves*), or a frustration that is dispersed overtime and situated structurally, sometimes conspicuously but frequently almost invisibly (*The Death of Jim Loney*, *Winter in the Blood*, *Ceremony*), or sometimes all of these and many more (*Almanac of the Dead*). Sherman Alexie's *Flight*, for example, is a novel about an angry Native adolescent deciding to try to kill as many white people as possible because he's so frustrated with the world. It features no scenes in which characters witness or experience the failure of bureaucratic justice. What I'm saying is that, given what we know from legal scholars like Robert A. Williams on how the U.S. legal system has failed Native American nations and cultural communities, we don't need to see these scenes rehearsed to feel this reality in the lived, experiential, and affective textures of this novel. The situation the novel provides is an affective one, and by pursuing this affective dimension we arrive at the historical present of the novel with a perspective that more directly takes into account the role that feeling plays in our entanglements with larger structures and systems, as well as the distinct vantage that novelistic depictions give us of these entanglements.

"All the anger in the world has come to my house": Alexie's *Indian Killer*

Let us start by looking at Sherman Alexie's 1997 *Indian Killer*, a novel famous for its rage, generic experimentations, and unchecked vigilante violence. In the novel a serial killer is loose in Seattle and scalping white men. The killer steals nothing from the victims, offers no demands, and leaves an owl feather at the scene of each crime. Despite this calling card, neither the police nor vigilantes can find the killer. Submerged racial tensions explode all over Seattle—

white college boys drive around beating up and hospitalizing random homeless Natives; a group of Natives beats up a random white backpacker, practically gouging out his eyes. Rage and an almost anarchic desire for revenge suffuse the world depicted in the text.

Frustration, meanwhile, gives shape to the novel's complicated web of actors, processes, and institutions (frustrated police, stymied testimonials, violent vigilantes, etc.). Consider, for example, the original disappointment and frustration that surrounds the Killer's first murder:

> The blood was beautiful but not enough. One dead man was not enough. The killer was disappointed. Disappointment grew quickly into anger, then rage, and the killer brought the knife down into the white man's chest again and again. (Alexie 1996, 54).

The novel establishes this affective arithmetic early on: for the Killer justice is a quantity to be satisfied or frustrated, an amount of which there can be "enough" or not enough. Blood and death count towards this satisfaction. Any frustration of this satisfaction transforms into anger and then into a rage capable of cutting through the commensurability that makes legal punishment possible, by which a damage is made to equal a punishment: the killer stabs and stabs and stabs the corpse—it does not matter that, as Dimock, Daiches, Kertzer, Felman and others note, the taking of one life can never really be made to equal the taking of another. In this world, the Killer uses violence to argue that the historical legacy of American colonialism is a debt that can be paid with blood. The thought alone of this transaction being frustrated results in rage—another moment in which frustration reveals to us the structuring exchange between affect as a felt experience and as a situated status or condition.

In short, this is a world in which historical injustice and its legacies begin to play themselves out in a wide spectrum of possibilities and with unpredictable energy. On one hand is the killer. But on the other are characters like Marie Polatkin, who fight against these histories as she offers aid to the homeless Native Americans population of Seattle, and by struggling against

racist professors in the college classroom—or, as she describes it, finding "an emotional outlet in the opportunity to harass a white professor who thought he knew what it meant to be Indian" (61). But there are also characters like her cousin, Reggie Polatkin. When asked by a white man whether or not a *real* Indian could possibly commit these murders, Reggie replies that "Maybe the question should be something different. Maybe you should be wondering which Indian wouldn't do it." (184) Reggie echoes what a homeless Native man says later on:

> Every Indian is keeping score. What? This Killer's got himself two white guys? And that little white boy, enit? That makes the score about ten million to three, in favor of the white guys, enit? This Killer's got a long way to go. Man, he's the underdog. (220)

It would seem as though this is, simply put, a revenge story: official bureaucratic legal channels have failed to deliver justice, and so lives are being taken as a kind of massive historical reckoning unfolds in present-day Seattle. The many narratives in the story trace the social and legal ramifications of this violent settling of accounts. I would argue, however, that rather than looking at this novel through lenses of anger and revenge, as many have, we would benefit from viewing it through the larger frame of *frustration*, the many frustrative situations in which these characters find themselves entangled, through which we might begin to consider *Indian Killer* a *reparation plot*—one concerned with the lived experiences of injustice and alternatives to simply continuing living with it..

The novel itself has been advertised and presented as a work of genre or genre-adjacent fiction. Reviews call it a "mesmerizing thriller," and a "serialkiller tale in which there is no detective and no investigation. Instead, there is fear and anger." The back of one edition describes itself as "a riveting, gritty, racially charged literary thriller."[78] One scholar notes that while "*Indian Killer* makes it difficult to tell which conventions of the revenge novel Alexie

[78] Back cover of 1996 Grove Press edition.

holds sacred and which profane … Alexie understands the axioms of revenge tragedy and showcases that genre awareness early" (Wiggins 2012). In a 1996 interview Alexie explains that with *Indian Killer* he "abandoned [his] trademark humor and went for the full thriller, murder mystery" (quoted in Wiggins 2012, 152). But a little over a decade later, he claimed that

> … I didn't go far enough. And I didn't complete it as a mystery novel. I was trying to write an actual mystery novel, and I ended up getting too fucking literary and didn't solve the mystery. That's really what bothers me. I think all the other stuff is really just a way of talking about the fact that I wrote a genre novel that I didn't complete as a genre novel. If I had, it would be a far superior book. If I'd kept that in mind instead of turning it into some pretentious murder literary piece of shit. (Alexie 2007)

By looking more carefully at this novel's features and themes, I hope the generic frame I offer might help to explain how this "pretentious murder literary piece of shit" operates and what insights its generic explorations—what Alexie calls its incompleteness—might show us.

Simply put, *Indian Killer* is all about people seeking justice through revenge. The novel is almost completely submerged in the logic of this concept and the possibility of pursuing it as a means of both historical reparations as well as affective, extralegal satisfaction. It is, to revisit Welch's *Fools Crow*, both an "emotional issue" as well as a "practical one."[79] Characters talk about it; they dream about it and flee from it; they take it gratifyingly, and calculatingly, and sometimes not at all. In an interview with the police, an Indian man who has just been beaten by three white college boys (seeking revenge for the supposed murder of their friend by an Indian) says simply that "something crazy is starting to happen. … Indians are organizing. They're looking to get revenge" (188). At that critical juncture where actors respond to their frustration in the face of injustice, this novel explores a model of revenge-as-reparations embedded in the lived

[79] From *Fools Crow*: "But now he realized that that was not even true—the people of Montana Territory wanted not peace but punishment. They wanted to run these red Indians right off the face of the map, push them into Canada, or, failing that, kill them like wild animals. It was an emotional issue for the people, a practical one for the politicians and bankers. They wanted to open up the Blackfeet land for settlement." (Welch 279).

present of systemic injustice—what it means to be a living, feeling being caught up in frustrating structures and situations. The characters understand most of this; when the homeless man quoted above ("Every Indian is keeping score") is asked by police whether or not he provoked the attack, he replies "You mean, aside from being Indian, did I provoke the attack? No way" (188).

This revenge, of course, does not exist in a vacuum. It gathers its momentum and explosive narrative force in a world where the preexisting legal structures that administer justice through bureaucratic institutions have failed Native communities, both at a national scale and in the city of Seattle. One example: the sheer number of Indian homeless vulnerable to race-based assault and lacking legal representation—like the man speaking in the above paragraph—with whom Marie works in her sandwich truck. Another example: the cultural and psychological alienation that can come from being adopted out of a Native community and into a white one. In an interview Alexie acknowledges that this second issue—what he calls being a "lost bird"—was "the germ of the novel" (Highway 28-29). The "lost bird" in question is one of the main characters, John Smith, a man adopted out of "any reservation, a particular reservation," (Alexie 1996, 3) and raised by a white man and woman, all before the Indian Child Welfare Act in 1978 which began regulating the removal of Indian children from Native communities. Throughout the novel John Smith is in serious psychic distress: as Marie puts it to a police official, "John Smith was screwed up. He was hurting. He didn't know up from down. He got screwed at birth. He had no chance. I don't care how nice his white parents were. John was dead from the start" (Alexie *Indian Killer* 417). Alexie explicitly links his "lost bird" with other frustrated and alienated characters from Native American novels of the preceding decades. When Smith's father starts asking a group of homeless Indian men if they have seen John, they reply:

> "Yeah, there's that Blackfeet guy, Loney."
> "Oh, yeah, enit? And that Laguna guy, what's his name? Tayo?"

"And Abel, that Kiowa." (220)

Jim Loney, of James Welch's *The Death of Jim Loney* (1979), Tayo of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), and Abel of N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968)—though from different tribal backgrounds, all find themselves in similarly frustrating situations as they struggle with the lived present of centuries of setter colonialism. Near the end of the novel John comes to the conclusion that he needs to kill a white person—"John needed to be saved and John knew exactly which white man had to die for him" (380). He kidnaps and threatens the life of mystery novelist Jack Wilson—a man falsely claiming to be of Native descent (taking advantage of the lack of membership records in the Shilshomish [67]). In many ways, Wilson represents the systemic cultural appropriation of Natives by whites: a professor who refuses to make public his discovery of anthropological recordings of sacred stories by a number of Native American elders teaches a Native American literature course in which he assigns books by Wilson instead of books by actual Natives. "It's like his books are killing Indian books," Marie says (68). In this novel even the logic of cultural appropriation translates into one of violence, death, and potential vengeance. Before killing Wilson, however, Smith walks off of an under-construction high-rise to his death. With Wilson's testimony, police officials confirm that Smith was the Indian Killer and that the case is closed. The real killer is never found.

This situation, however, represents one of the novel's generic innovations as a failed or "incomplete" murder mystery. What Alexie calls a failing on his part (in that he "didn't solve the mystery") I would call a glimpse into exactly the kinds of failed investigations and frustrating official bureaucratic structures that contribute toward the frustrative situations in which the novel places its most vulnerable characters. We see this most conspicuously at the novel's conclusion in the scapegoating of an already-deceased John Smith, where justice has definitively not been

delivered but the case is closed anyways. Echoing Felman's distinction again, here a firm, official closure of the case prevents the possibility of a serious investigation into the real killer and the disturbing questions this killer poses to the existing legal order: can personal revenge be made commensurate to historical reparations? Are reparations even possible within our current system? These questions are central to the novel; they are, more or less, why the killer kills. But they do not "count" from the perspective of legal and bureaucratic discourse in the world of *Indian Killer*. For them the problem is a serial killer, not centuries of lies, violence, and oppression.

At the heart of this failure Alexie makes a formal intervention. The majority of the novel is in a standard third-person perspective that frequently ventures into the thoughts and feelings of individuals, offering at times a style akin to free-indirect discourse. Certain sections, however, come from the perspective of the Indian Killer. These sections shift significantly in tone, feel, and content: they depict the killer's movements and actions, but also feature extended meditations on people, the killer's purpose, the killer's knife, and so on.[80] The sentences are shorter, usually more direct, and while the narrative does include more standard narrative it is

[80] For example: "At night, the killer dreamed of the knife. Of the search for a perfect knife. It had not been easy. There were many choices. Paring, chef's, boning knives. Bread, utility, carving knives. Wooden handles, plastic handles. So beautiful, the parts of a knife. Blade, bolster, tang, handle. Indestructible. Lifetime guarantees. Large sets. One knife at a time. Knife blocks with blade sharpeners included. Demonstration videos. County fairs. Mail order. Department stores and discount chains. Garage sales and secondhand stores. *A Short Guide to Cutlery*. In a large kitchen, the meat carver decided which piece of meat each guest received. The neck for the journalist, the breast for royalty. The killer had touched so many knives, studied their blades, tested their heft. The knife is the earliest tool used by humans, over two million years old. Knife, knifing, knives, to knife, to be knifed, knifelike. The killer sliced open test fruits and vegetables, ran fingers over the deep groves cut into carving boards. Four thousand years ago, humans learned to separate elements, and discovered the power of iron. The killer shifted a knife from left to right hand, and then back again. How to hold a carving knife: last three fingers behind the bolster point, index finger on one side of the blade, thumb on the other side. The paring knife is an extension of the hand. The bread knife is perfect for cutting through objects with hard exteriors and soft interiors. Ancient and elemental, the knife. *The Illustrated History of Swords*. Blade against blade against blade. A knife must be sharp, clean, and stored properly. A blade should be sharpened before and after each use. The mirror of a polished blade. The mirrors in a depart-[51]ment store. The mirror of the sky visible between department stores. The Rockwell scale measured the hardness of steel. The higher the number, the sharper the blade. Steel tends to shrink back into itself after long periods of disuse." (Alexie 1996, 50-51)

always prone to fits and starts, omitting certain passages of time as we find ourselves suddenly elsewhere, or seemingly nowhere, suspended in memory, or perhaps just reflection. The overall effect is haunting, simultaneously giving us a window into the killer's mind as well as leaving even a careful reader unsure of who or what the killer is. Certain other sections of the novel, however, come from the perspective of police investigators. These sections consist entirely of two-person dialogues between a police official and a witness, victim, or person related to recent crimes. They represent our window into the official take on the killer and adjacent crimes, a world of neutral declarative language, repetition without reflection, the occasional joke or digression, and little progress towards completing the investigation.

For example, one of the first testimonials is with a college student who, on a night out, walked past the Killer carrying a body. When asked what the "so-called shadow" looked like, the boy repeats over and over again the same refrain: "I don't remember, Officer. I mean, I just don't remember. … I don't remember. … I don't think any of my friends remember much" (71). At the end of the interview he finally admits to something he finds strange: "there was this fog that night. Not like a real fog. But something else was happening, you know? It's like when you get real drunk and nothing seems real …. I think I don't remember anything about that night because somebody wants me not to remember" (72). The section ends here, as though the interview itself ended when the nature of the evidence provided ceased to fit within official expectations. Simply put, there is no place for this kind of thinking in the standard bureaucratic procedure associated with a criminal investigation, so the scene ends.

Another testimonial, however, explores these kinds of blockages even further, the effect of which takes full advantage of the formal features at work. This testimonial is provided by a

white child who was kidnapped and then returned safely by the killer. The boy, Mark, gives a mystifying series of responses which I transcribe here for its full effect:

> "Mark? Mark, can we talk to you?"
> "Do I have to?"
> "You could really help us. We need you to talk, okay?"
> "Okay."
> "Can you tell us about the man who kidnapped you?"
> "It wasn't a man."
> "Was it a woman?"
> "No."
> "We don't understand, Mark. Was it a man or a woman?"
> "It was dark there."
> "Yes, we know it was dark, but did you anything? Did you see the person who took you? Did he talk to you? Did you see his house? Anything?"
> "I saw what it shone with the light. Hair on the wall."
> "Yes, Mark, and anything else? Maybe feathers?"
> "Yes, feathers."
> "Owl feathers?"
> "I don't know. Lots of feathers."
> "And where did you see the feathers, Mark?"
> "On the wings."
> "What wings? Was there an owl there? Did the kidnapper have a bird?"
> "No, it was a bird."
> "I don't understand, Mark. What was a bird?"
> "It."
> "Mark…"
> "It was the bird that was there."
> "And where was the man who kidnapped you?"
> "It could fly, I bet."
> "The bird could fly?"
> "No, no. It could."
> "Mark, I know this is difficult. But I need to know what you're trying to tell me."
> "I think it could fly because it had wings." (323-324)

The interaction has been pared down to its barest structures. Stripped of action or description, the solid block of dialogue presents a sketch or skeleton detailing only what might prove useful from the standpoint of the investigation. There is no accounting for the lived reality of events. Instead, we have the "facts," and the investigators attempts to generate these facts by translating the raw, unprocessed account of an institutionally uninitiated witness into officially viable information—

in this case, clues. Their failure in this regard is almost complete. Although what Mark says is, for the most part, unambiguous ("it was a bird"), the investigator seems to have great difficulty understanding ("I don't understand, Mark. What was a bird?"). The investigator asks a question for every line of dialogue they speak, but, try as they might, these questions tend to go nowhere ("Maybe feathers? … Owl feathers? … where did you see the feathers, Mark? … What wings?"). They repeat themselves frequently, trying to shape and guide the child's responses, but eventually fall into exasperated ellipses ("Mark…"), suggest that Mark is confused or failing to speak clearly ("Mark, I know this is difficult"), or simply admit that they don't understand what he's saying ("I need to know what you're trying to tell me"). This, from the perspective of the law, is a frustrating experience. Every attempt to turn the witness's experience into viable information is thwarted, disbelieved, or bewildered, as the ideas being offered cannot be made to fit, generically peaking, into what an investigator might classify as evidence. And we see the situational structure of this frustration surface through the testimony's bare formal features, a kind of situational wireframe in its stark edges and empty centers.

There is a powerful flattening effect at work in these sections, one that invites a kind of situational surface reading.[81] Once filtered into this bureaucratic process, all of these testimonials are rendered commensurate with one another as evidence objects. A college student who, on a night out, walked past the Indian Killer carrying a body, receives the same formal treatment as a racist, right-wing talk show host who imagines that someone—the killer, presumably—was "after him" in an alley (301). Both of whom receive the same treatment as a white child, Mark, taken by the killer from his bed in the middle of the night. This bureaucratic flattening effect, suggested by the bare, depthless form of the testimonial sections, makes it difficult to track the

[81] For more on surface reading, see Heather Love, "Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn" (2010) and Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction" (2009).

chains of violence and affective reality of these experiences to which the reader is privy: one testimonial features a white hiker who was jumped and beaten up by three young Native men; these men, in turn, were responding to a group of college boys beating up homeless Indians who themselves were retaliating against the local population when their friend David was taken by the Killer, although he was in fact robbed and murdered by common white thieves outside of a casino. None of this depth appears in a given testimonial. But this flattening effect which we see here represented formally is also, it can be argued, one of the reasons we have bureaucratic processes in the first place. As Bozeman proposed earlier in this chapter, many of the bureaucratic rules that act as "constraint[s]" on our behavior and "thwart our understandable desire to be treated as unique individuals" by standardizing their procedures do so in order to "ensure accountability, preserve rights of procedure, or provide protections from abuses of power" (Bozeman 11). He even links these processes and their frustrating slowness to our "larger democratic and constitutional values" and "system of governance" (Bozeman 9).

The point here is not just to recognize that bureaucratic process might flatten certain dimensions of what it takes in, but to look closely at the ways in which these processes fail in a literary context and how they relate to the genre of the work in question. Here the standard channels of legal justice register the frustration of their own investigation while being blind to the lethal affective dimensions of the larger situation. The murder mystery may be "incomplete," but the reparation plot is in full swing as the Indian Killer, in response to a frustrative situation and undaunted by a bureaucracy full of blindspots, enacts an alternative flattening effect on the world where a debt accrued over hundreds of years of systematic injustice can be reckoned through the taking of lives. As scholars have argued—and I would say the novel itself demonstrates—the results of this logic are disastrous. As Lydia R. Cooper explains, many

characters in the novel make "the same metarepresentational fallacy" in assuming that one or more white men "represent all racist white men," just as the white vigilante college boys (and others) assume that characters like John "represented all Indians" (Cooper 41). In this sense, when the associated "violent urges" are realized as actions, they fail to "achieve any measure of justice" (Cooper 41). Arnold Krupat argues that this novel is one of the first to express "a very particular sort of Indian rage, *murderous rage*," that has "an affinity to black rage" in African American fiction from the 40s to the 60s (Krupat 2002, 103). Moreover, in shifting to focus on rage, revenge, and reparations, Alexie's novel "breaks with the majority of Native American novels from the century's turn through the 1950s, '60s, '70s, and '80s in that it is not about its Indian characters' search for identity" (Krupat *Red Matters* 113). It is this kind of break, and the themes as well as plot elements it explores instead, that helps to distinguish this novel as one worth examining through a fresh generic lens.

In interviews Alexie himself acknowledges how easy it is to imagine using revenge as a means of reparations, temporarily adopting this same flattened perspective or "metarepresentational fallacy" as the killer. Echoing the first pages of bell hooks' *Killing Rage,* in which she is suddenly overcome with the desire to kill a white man after a racist encounter and reflects on how best to channel these dangerous kinds of energy, Alexie describes a personal, emotional inspiration for the novel: "With *Indian Killer* it was because I was sitting at Washington State with frat guys in the back row who I wanted to kill. And I would fantasize about murder. … Just being white. Just drunk on their privilege, essentially. Showing up late, disrupting the class in all sorts of small ways that all added up to my thinking, 'I want to kill them.'" (Fraser 69-70). When we find this anger in the novel, however, it frequently takes a

different shape. Consider the following passage in which John Smith has an impromptu confession with a Catholic priest:

> "All the anger in the world has come to my house. It's there in my closet. In my refrigerator. In the water. In the sheets. It's in my clothes. Can you smell it? I can never run away from it. It's in my hair. I can feel it between my teeth. Can you taste it? I hear it all the time. All the time the anger is talking to me." (Alexie 1996, 200)

This is a character who lives without justice. Here anger is not in the air—it *is* the air. John has lost the ability to distinguish feelings, external objects, and features of his own body. This is what I have referred to as an *affective situation*: affective energies being structured by and giving structure to one's entire environment. This one in particular is tempered by the kinds of flattenings discussed above, where distinctions that might matter under other circumstances begin to lose their explanatory purchase on the world. As noted in this chapter's introduction, we begin to see how viewing affective experience situationally rather through the predominant frames offered by Massumi, Sedgwick, or Ahmed and Berlant (affect as pre-discursive, psycho-biological, or discursive itself, respectively) helps us to account for what those "cumulative and collective" kinds of "intergenerational trauma" that Nancy Van Styvendale finds crucial to reading *Indian Killer* look and feel like, in which the understanding of trauma as an event that is "a distinct experience that happens in one specific location and time" is greatly troubled (Van Styvendale 207).

But John, who kidnaps a white man and then commits suicide, and many of the other characters who lash out, choose *not* to live with injustice—in fact the main conceit of the novel involves being frustrated for so long that refusal takes the most dramatically violent shape. I would argue, however, that viewing the novel as responding to this particular possibility—the violent refusal—from a *generic* perspective, as a text linked with other texts in a constellation of

possibilities but exploring similar problems, helps us to reconcile the challenges that this novel poses for even the most careful readers.[82] Take, for example, the novel's conclusion, which suggests that whatever the Indian Killer started has only just begun and will only grow in force. In the final testimony of the book, Marie Polatkin tells the questioner that "if some Indian is killing white guys, then it's a credit to us that it took over five hundred years for it to happen. And there's more. … Indians are dancing now, and I don't think they're going to stop" (Alexie 1996, 418). The final image of the novel is a "tree grow[ing] heavy with owls"—a symbol and calling card of the Killer.

If we look at the novel from a generic perspective, this otherwise ominous ending might be more fruitfully examined as one responding to certain kinds of tropes—mainly, the familiar theme of continuing to live with injustice and the emotional and political frustration it entails. The novel as a form has elements of fantasy (Alexie at Washington State: "I would fantasize about murder" [(Fraser 69-70)]). It indulges in the possible commensurability between revenge and reparations—it offers a daydream vision of what would happen if this were possible, presenting an alternative to *living without justice* and the sometimes hopeless frustration that that entails. In this regard, one of the racist white college boys gives an illuminating testimonial:

> "I don't know. I mean, uh, it's like this white-Indian thing has gotten out of control. And the thing with the blacks and Mexicans. Everybody blaming everybody. I mean, it's like white people get blamed for everything these days. I mean, I know we did some bad stuff. I know it. I know what me and Aaron and Barry did was wrong. *But it was anger. Frustration, you know?* David disappeared, and we, uh, just lost control. I mean, somebody had to pay for it. Somebody was to blame for it. I don't know what happened. I can't explain it all. Just look around at the world. Look at this country." (Alexie 1996, 387, emphasis mine)

[82] When Arnold Krupat, an experienced reader of Native American novels, reflects on the novel's final suggestion that there will be "no end short of the deaths of all or a great many more white people," he couches his claims in language like the following: "*If* (I want to be tentative here) Alexie's *Indian Killer* does indulge the fantasy of such a threat…" (Krupat *Red Matters* 102).

By including this kind of viewpoint, the novel, as another critic writes, presents "the difference between a racist anger that manifests itself in the form of discrimination and violence against a particular, less powerful group and the defensive, justified anger of that group in response" (Carpenter 2012, 134). But by indulging so imaginatively in the necessity of whites "paying for it" from the indigenous perspective, this novel plays out the horrors of an uninhibited revenge fantasy *in lieu* of the complicated struggle of living within a frustrative situation. And it does so on generic terms: it explores, inverts, and indulges in various responses to the kinds of frameworks that a genre allows; to use Seitel's language again, it *re-attunes* the audience with a familiar-but-different kind of literary world; it is a disturbing particularity that emerges from Dimock's genre-as-virtual, a "general solvent" the organizing principle of which is *frustration*.

"Being an Indian in some ways is a tangle of red tape": Erdrich's *The Round House*

The flattening logics at work in *Indian Killer*, both from the perspective of the killer as well as the official investigation, gives the novel an almost allegorical feel, despite being grounded in the lives of real people struggling in Seattle. Though this is most likely part of what Alexie means when says that the novel "feels to me like a big cartoon," (Alexie 2007) I believe this willingness to smash together the big picture with present day lends the novel much of its energy—an energy which, when viewed from a generic perspective, can be recognized as productive rather than reckless. But where Alexie's *Indian Killer* approaches the idea of revenge as a kind of broad-spectrum reparations for America's colonial history, Louise Erdrich's *The Round House* deals with justice in a more localized criminal situation. Here the seeker(s) of justice are individuals frustrated with specific legal blockages created by the present-day legacies of racism and colonialism; there is no abstract killer on the streets doling out transhistorical justice with a knife. With *The Round House* we turn to the new problem of contemporary legal

frustrative situations and their associated bureaucratic procedures: how to practice the law, change or question it, cope with it, and adapt it. Like *Indian Killer*, the novel explores the many contours of anger as well as where affective structures become entangled with power structures. It also repurposes other genres, dipping into the detective story, *bildungsroman*, and even the western. But unlike *Indian Killer*, Erdrich's novel presents an alternative path at that critical juncture where characters respond to their frustrative situations, exploring the sadness of revenge, the connectedness of a revenger to their community, and the possibility of incorporating traditional justice into the current legal order.

The novel, set in a North Dakotan reservation on which many of Erdrich's novels take place, follows a 13-year-old boy by the name of Joe Coutts. His mother has been raped by someone, but no one is being prosecuted and he doesn't understand why. When his mother begins to retreat from the world, almost never leaving her room, and his father, a tribal judge, becomes frustrated and at almost a complete loss, Joe decides to take it upon himself to figure out what's going on. The novel blends *bildungsroman* with detective story as we see Joe balance his everyday life on the reservation with his friends—playing video games, biking around, going to a church retreat so one of his friends can court a girl he likes—while also gathering clues about his mother's rapist. An indicative example: he and his friends bike up to the crime scene looking for clues. They are able to find a gasoline can in the lake nearby (the rapist poured gasoline on his mother) but end up finding a six-pack of beer in the woods too and getting drunk. As the novel progresses Joe learns more about the crime (detective story) at about the same time as learning how the "real world" works more generally (*bildungsroman*). He discovers that the authorities (his father included) have had powerful hunches as to the identity of the killer but that his mother was waiting to say something officially for fear of another woman's life. And that the

situation is much more complicated than he had imagined, entangled with the exploitation of racist federal laws, the long-standing colonialist requirements forced on tribes, and monied corruption.

At the conclusion of the novel, this is more or less what Joe has pieced together: a young Sioux woman named Mayla Wolfskin receives a scholarship to work under the governor of South Dakota, Curtis Yeltow, who begins having sexual relations with Mayla, who is both an employee and under the age of 18. Mayla becomes pregnant while working for Yeltow, who then gives her $40,000 as a kind of payoff money. After returning home, she starts the process of enrolling her daughter into her tribe. But in order to do so, she must list Yeltow as the father. Upon hearing this, Linden Lark, another self-serving person obsessed with Mayla who helped her get the job with Yeltow, kidnaps her and her infant daughter. He also kidnaps Geraldine Coutts—Joe's mother—who is in charge of Mayla's tribal application. Linden rapes Geraldine, probably having already raped Mayla, and dumps gasoline on both women, intending to burn them alive. Before he is able to do so Geraldine escapes into her vehicle and drives away. This is, more or less, were the novel begins.

The paths to justice, however, are frustrating, convoluted, and frequently feel hopeless. Because Geraldine fears for Mayla's life, she refuses to officially accuse Linden until she knows Mayla is safe (though Mayla may already be dead). On top of this, because she doesn't know exactly where she was raped (it could have been on a number of plots with different legal jurisdictions, which is itself the result of a breaking up of tribal land into dispersed allotments by the federal government), the rape is called a "legal enigma" and is unprosecutable (Erdrich 2012a, 306). Frustrated at the blockages preventing legal action, Joe, as we know, begins to take the search for justice into his own hands. After a long period of uncovering clues, motives, and

backstories Joe—at 13 years old—decides to shoot and kill Linden Lark on a golf course. Though the murderer is "never found," Joe's parents more or less tell Joe that they know exactly what's happened. His father, however, who has spent a good deal of the novel discussing tribal law, its history, and its present state, suggests that if he had to defend the individual who took Lark's life, he would argue that the killer, whoever it was, would have been justified on tribal precedent: of a wiindigo, a physical and spiritual cannibal that can be removed if consensus was reached.

Already we can see that the frustrative situation in many of these characters find themselves is a result of historical failures of bureaucratic justice resulting in a lived present of systemic injustice. First: issues of tribal sovereignty and the colonial legacy that prevents tribal courts from being able to try non-Natives for rape and second: the bureaucratic processes by which a Native is able to officially enroll in a tribe and be recognized by federal, state, local, and tribal governments. Scholars have begun to explore the issue along with Erdrich herself, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.[83] Likewise, there is a rich scholarly conversation surrounding enrollment processes, the cultural terms they produce (blood quantum, full-bloodedness, and so on), and the havoc they can wreak on Native communities—for one recent example, see Circe Sturm's *Blood Politics* (2012), an ethnographic text on race, bloodedness, and enrollment in the Cherokee Nation.

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[83] In "Rape on the Reservation" she offers a number of facts, such as that "more than 80 percent of sex crimes on reservations are committed by non-Indian men, who are immune from prosecution by tribal courts"—a fact we learn in the afterword to the book is finally starting to change—as well as descriptions of how:

> Here in Minneapolis, a growing number of Native American women wear red shawls to powwows to honor survivors of sexual violence. The shawls, a traditional symbol of nurturing, flow toward the earth. The women seem cloaked in blood. People hush. Everyone rises, not only in respect, for we are jolted into personal memories and griefs. Men and children hold hands, acknowledging the outward spiral of the violations women suffer. (Erdrich 2013)

We see this reflected in the cover of the book, a blood red shawl flowing over the body and face of a woman, an image illustrated by Erdrich's daughter, Aza Erdrich.

Joe's mother Geraldine deals personally with both of these histories. She works at a tribal office in which she helps applicants daunted by the application process enroll themselves and their children:

> It was my mother's task to parse the ever more complicated branching and interbranching tangle of each bloodline. Through the generations, we have become an impenetrable undergrowth of names and liaisons. At the tip of each branch of course the children are found, those newly enrolled by their parents, or often a single mother or father, with a named parent on the blank whose identity if known might shake the branches of the other trees. Children of incest, molestation, rape, adultery, fornication beyond reservation boundaries or within, children of white farmers, bankers, nuns, BIA superintendents, police, and priests. (Erdrich 2012a, 149)

As we know from many of Erdrich's other novels—like her earlier *Love Medicine*, or *Tracks*—the generational entanglement of these bloodlines can feel "impenetrable" for readers trying to keep a story straight inside a massive web of "names and liaisons." Many characters in *The Round House* have relatives or ancestors in Erdrich's 2008 novel *The Plague of Doves*, in which a group of white men deliver "rough justice" by lynching four Natives believed, mistakenly, to have murdered a white family. One of the lynching party is the great-uncle of Linden Lark. And many of the characters and their relatives appear as well in Erdrich's 2016 *LaRose*, a novel also concerned with alternative forms of justice, in which one family allows another family to informally adopt their son after accidentally killing one of their children in a hunting accident.

While enrollment systems play a crucial role in maintaining tribal sovereignty within the U.S., they are themselves the result of centuries of military, political, economic, cultural, and legal conquest. Even under normal circumstances, tribal enrollment can be an occasion for stress, frustration, and disappointment. Most tribes require a certificate of Indian blood (CDIB) for enrollment from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, a part of the U.S. Department of the Interior. As you can imagine, getting a CDIB is not simple. In her book on race and identity in the Cherokee

Nation of Oklahoma, Circe Sturm describes it as "a complicated process that requires a journey down a bureaucratic paper trail." (Sturm 87).[84] While not all tribes require genealogical paperwork as far-reaching as the Dawes Roll, some tribes have more complicated blood-quantum calculations, requiring a much higher percentage than many enrolled Cherokees, and frequently requiring that it all come from the same tribe.

On top of this, there is a long history of whites dressing like Indians, acting like Indians, and in some cases, trying to become Indians (Deloria). In the past century or so, there is also a history of whites trying to inherit an official kind of inner "Indianness" that would forgive the genocide on which our nation is founded and give the right kind of white people—i.e., Kevin Costner in *Dances With Wolves*—an authentic relationship with the land and, so the story goes, a new lease on life (Owens). Because of this, a sometimes damaging culture of bloodedness and authenticity develops in defense as Native communities respond to a branch of the most recent form of a centuries-old cultural assault.

With Geraldine as his mother and a tribal judge as his father, Joe himself is acutely aware of the ways in which Indian identity and Indian justice are tied up with white bureaucracy. Near the beginning of the novel, the thirteen-year-old describes how complicated it is to be an Indian:

> You can't tell if a person is an Indian from a set of fingerprints. You can't tell from a name. You can't even tell from a local police report. You can't tell from a picture. From a mug shot. From a phone number. From the government's point of view, the only way you can tell an Indian is an Indian is to look at that person's history. There must be ancestors from way back who signed some document or

[84] For an example from Sturm's text, a typical application in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma requires that "individuals must apply to the Cherokee Nation's registration department, which processes applications for the BIA. Then they have to procure legal documents, usually in the form of state-certified vital statistics records, which establish them as lineal descendants of Cherokee ancestors. … However, not just any Cherokee ancestors will do. They must be listed on the Cherokee Nation section of what is commonly referred to as the Dawes Rolls, the Final Rolls of the Citizens and Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes [made between 1899 and 1906] … If an individual can find a copy of the Dawes Rolls at a local library or federal repository, such as the National Archives, and his or her ancestor is listed with a roll number and a Cherokee blood degree, then he or she has the necessary information to apply for a CDIB. The Cherokee Nation will then calculate that person's Cherokee blood quantum according to the Indian blood degree of his or her nearest direct ancestor listed on the final rolls" (Sturm 87-88).

> were recorded as Indians by the U.S. government, some identified as a member of a tribe. And then after that you have to look at that person's blood quantum, how much Indian blood they've got that belongs to one tribe. In most cases, the government will call the person an Indian if their blood is one quarter—it usually has to be from one tribe. But that tribe has also got to be federally recognized. In other words, being an Indian is in some ways a tangle of red tape. (Erdrich 2012a, 29)

The procedures, hierarchies, careers, records, buildings, work cultures, and documents that have built up around these institution are a form of bureaucracy that must be navigated by many Native Americans as a part of their normal lives. And as we see in this novel and others like it, this process and all the blockages it implies can be frustrating. Two of the characters in *The Round House*—Joe and his good friend Cappy—decide to deal with the compound of frustrative situations that let Geraldine's attacker go free by taking the law into their own hands. In so doing, *The Round House* structures its story implicitly and explicitly in the manner of a revenge western, hybridizing this traditional form with its own themes and plot structures into a unique and particularly insightful form of reparation plot.

Crucial moments in the plot of this novel—in which individuals, frustrated by a lived present of systemic injustice brought about by a sustained period of misused bureaucratic power, seek out their own justice—mirror those from a famous John Ford film also concerned with failures of justice, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962). The parallels are overt. Like *The Round House*, Ford's film questions how individuals in a community decide when violence outside the law can be made to serve the law. Both feature a climax in which a second character secretly helps the main point-of-view character to kill a known criminal, then, in a sense, takes the fall.[85] At the core of both stories lies a question familiar to the western: when can vigilantism,

[85] In Ford's somewhat allegorical film, a lawyer from the east (James Stewart) disagrees with a local cowboy (John Wayne) as to how best to deal with the universally despised lawbreaker Liberty Valance (Lee Marvin) who almost beats Stewart's character to death upon arriving in town. Stewart thinks Valance should be arrested and face a trial; Wayne believes that brute extralegal force is all that can bring him in. When Stewart's lawyer miraculously beats

extra-legal action, be a good thing? As one scholar writing on Ford's *The Searchers* puts it, the problem is "the fact that the establishment of any legal order, of whatever doctrine, even liberal-democratic humanist, must be illegal, violent, unjust, and brutal, and a society must find a way to represent that fact to itself as a national memory" (Pippin 227).[86] This is the "unalloyed myth" that famous film critic André Bazin points to at the center of the Western in his first writings on the genre, as well as the founding mythologizing element at the core of Richard Slotkin's influential *Regeneration through Violence,* as well as its successors *The Fatal Environment* and *Gunfighter Nation*. And revenge is a common theme to these quests for a just society—as one scholar puts it, "tales of vengeance are the backbone of the western" (Ma 48).

The problem of "good extra-legal action" in the face of frustrated justice is a thread throughout *The Round House.* When Joe and his father encounter Lark at the grocery store, Joe's father is launched into the kind of "killing rage" discussed by Alexie and hooks, a traditional script of wrathful vengeance:

> There was a moment where all we did was stare. Then motion. My father threw the cream, surged forward, and grabbed Lark by the shoulders. He spun Lark, jamming him backward, then gripped Lark around the throat with both hands. As

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Valance in a shootout in self-defense, he is catapulted into local stardom and eventually becomes senator. Wayne's cowboy loses his marriage prospect to Stewart and fades into ignominy. We learn later on, however, that at the crucial moment Wayne's cowboy was waiting in the shadows and shot Valance on behalf of Stewart during the shootout, saving his life and getting none of the credit. In *The Round House*, Joe – a son of a lawyer – goes every day to a golf course trying to find the opportune moment to murder Lark, who, like Valance, is a flagrant lawbreaker despised by the local community (including his family). Unbeknownst to Joe, his best friend Cappy – who is much stronger, a much better shot, and a big hit with all the girls from school – has been waiting behind Joe in the shadows in order to give him help. When Joe starts firing at – and missing – Lark, Cappy runs down, takes the gun, and finishes the job. At the novel's conclusion, Cappy is killed in a car accident which Joe survives. Joe goes on to become a lawyer like his father.

[86] More from Pippin on specific Native American contexts to these problems: "And in *The Searchers* (dir. John Ford, 1956) there is a direct confrontation with the fact that the origin of the territorial U.S. rested on a virulent racism and genocidal war against aboriginal peoples, a war that would not have been possible and perhaps would not have been won without the racist hatred of characters like the John Wayne character. … the basis of our common belonging is the most powerful and explosive human passion – hatred, the other side of some putative natural blood kinship or common ethnicity" (Pippin 227). Also see "Western and Post-Western Mythologies of Law," Chiara Battisti (2014) in which she cites Pippin – "The Western mythology constitutes the attempt to come to terms with the fact that the establishment of that legal order 'must be illegal, violent, unjust, and brutal,' creating a story about the origin, which is unfortunately a lie." (Battisti 370) Also see "Circuitous Action – Revenge Cinema," Jean Ma (2015).

> I've said before, my dad was somewhat clumsy. But he attacked with such an instinct of sudden rage it looked slick as a movie stunt. Lark banged his head against the metal racks of the cooler. A carton of lard smashed down and Lark slipped in the burst cream, scraping the back of his head down the lower edge of the case, ringing the shelves. The glass doors flapped against my father's arms as he fell with Lark, still pressing. Dad kept his chin down. His hair had fallen in strings about his ears and his face was dark with blood. (Erdrich 2012a, 243-4)

As we can see in this passage, violent rage has a kind of glamor to it. The description has a cinematic edge, as though each clause were a frame in a choreographer's beat-board. The loaded pause before action, the visual pyrotechnics of blood and spattered foodstuffs, all physical cues of a filmic "slickness" Joe can't help but comment on. But the slickness rings false: moments later as Lark scrambles out of the store, Bazil has a heart attack. This "reality check," comes with a shift in Joe's narration from cinematic play-by-play to pragmatic paraphrase: "That was when my father had his first heart attack," Joe recollects—"it turned out to be a small one" (244). Earlier in the novel prior to this attack, Bazil is again nostalgic for the utopic possibility of angry vengeance. "I wish I could hang him," he says. "I imagine myself the hanging judge in an old western; I'd happily deliver the sentence." But, as we know, *The Round House* is not an old western. In this world, like in *The Plague of Doves*, the hanging judge's desire for "rough justice" can come all-too-easily: as a lynching party.

So how do we reconcile these criticisms of "rough justice" with the fact that, in *The Round House*, Joe does murder Lark? Joe—a 13 year old—does not kill Lark in a blind moment of "killing rage." The days leading up to the planned murder are filled with nausea, anxiety, and guilt. Afterward Joe is physically ill. He has nightmares of switching bodies with Lark, bullet-ridden, bleeding out and watching Lark's spirit walk off in his body with his friend. He fears becoming a wiindigoo himself, "infected" by Lark. Even at the moment of revenge, there is no satisfaction. The death is grisly, frightening, and filled with Lark's pleading screams. Again we

see the distinction between frustration as a feeling and as a condition or status: on the whole, Joe's revenge feels more like a practical decision driven by necessity than any satisfying, retributive justice. While Lark lives, Joe's mother and father cannot. So Joe chooses to kill the man who continues to threaten his family and resolve the "legal enigma" of his mother's rape.

Consider the tangle of feelings Joe experiences when his father asks him to stop searching for evidence against Lark:

> I had worked myself into a fury now, or planted myself into one with every puny hothouse plant that would not succeed in gaining my mother's attention. It seemed that anything my father did, or said, was calculated to drive me crazy. I was strangling there alone with my father in the quiet late afternoon. A rough cloud had boiled over me—I wanted all of a sudden nothing else but to escape from my father, and my mother too, rip away their web of guilt and protection and nameless sickening emotions. (Erdrich 2012a, 93)

Anger is part of this, but so are a number of other feelings—irritation and angst, the love of his parents, his desire for normalcy, the outrage of his community, his mother's depression, his father's shame at being unable to make things right—Joe is "strangling" with feeling. He is choking in the grips of a frustrative situation: unable to breath, unable to act. In this novel, anger as an energy "serving progress and change" (as Lorde put it) is replaced by something different. Joe's determination to kill, which builds up slowly throughout the novel, feels less like angry retribution for crimes against his mother than the removal of an obstacle to living. It is a response to both terrible acts of violence, as well as intersecting systems of bureaucracy that obstruct, strangle, and bewilder the lives of those they administer, representative of larger power structures at work in the United States. And yet, it is also murder—the old western hanging judge. As Erdrich said in an interview on *The Round House*, "Revenge is a sorrow for the person who has to take it on. And the person who is rash enough to think it's going to help a situation is always wrong" (Erdrich 2012b). At the end of a novel, when Cappy—the friend who helped Joe

shoot Lark the way Wayne helped Stewart in *Liberty Valance*—dies in a car crash, Joe writes that in this case "The sentence was to endure. Nobody shed tears and there was no anger" (Erdrich 2012a, 317). The paragraph, and the entire novel, concludes with a four word sentence that captures the sometimes stark reality of *living without justice*: "We just kept going."

Unlike *Indian Killer*, however, we do not see *revenge* equated with *reparations* in this novel. But the novel is concerned with how to incorporate the frustrated quest for justice on which Joe finds himself into both his larger community as well as the current legal order. In a final scene with Joe's parents, his father—knowing what Joe has done—explains to him how he views the whole situation:

> Lark's killing is a wrong thing which serves an ideal justice. It settles a legal enigma. It threads that unfair maze of land titlelaw by which Lark could not be prosecuted. His death was the exit. I would say nothing, do nothing, to muddy the resolution. Yet […] this too is an abandonment of my own responsibility. That person who killed ark will live with the human consequences of having taken a life. As I did not kill Lark, but wanted to, I must at least protect the person who took on that task. And I would, even to the extent of attempting to argue a legal precedent. […] Traditional precedent. It could be argued that Lark met the definition of a wiindigoo, and that with no other recourse, his killing fulfilled the requirements of a very old law. (Erdrich 2012a, 306)

Here, again, we find Dimock's "residues" of justice and the problem of Felman's distinction between closure—"settlement" in this case—and more complicated explorations of the historical truths behind what has happened. Joe has taken a life and will suffer for it. But his actions have not taken place in a vacuum. Many members of Joe's community other than Cappy—his father and mother, his uncle, Lark's sister, even a federal agent—all give clues that they suspect he has committed murder and taken revenge. This makes sense given that, traditionally speaking, community consensus of some kind would have to be reached before a wiindigo could be removed (Friedland). In this sense, Joe's actions and the support of his community shed light on the larger situation as well as its affective dimensions, and in the novel this insight makes new

certain kinds of action possible (the adaption of traditional tribal law to present legal systems). In this manner a seemingly inescapable frustrative situation might be opened to new channels and possibilities—those actors "made *not* to do" who are given an opportunity instead to be "made to do *otherwise*."

In conclusion, after hearing this from his father and looking at his parents, Joe offers a weak alibi against what is being insinuated—"Lots of people had it in for Lark"—and then looks past his parents into the next room. He sees books, shelves of them, "mellow in the dip of shadow at twilight" (Erdrich 2012a, 306-307). There is Shakespeare, Plato, Homer, Montaigne, but also Basil Johnston and Vine Deloria Jr., even a Great Books subscription and a "free Book of Mormon" (307). He looks to these texts as though she were on trial, and they his jurors. They span centuries, traditions, cultures, and genres, making up a kind of larger community into which his act of revenge and the situation out of which it emerged might be made to make sense. But after a few moments he decides that "we had moved way far past books now into the stories Mooshum [Joe's grandfather] told in his sleep," and that any attempt by his father to "think of Mooshum's sleeptalking as a reading of traditional case law" was "beyond" him (307). Joe knows that the world many of these objects inhabit and the institutions they represent contrast starkly with the world of Mooshum's traditional stories. One might see the connection of the two, however, as a means of generating new legal, cultural, and narrative possibilities in an otherwise closed, frustrative situation. In such a world, a cannibalistic *windigo* like Lark who takes advantage of longstanding inequalities in a legal system can be brought to justice *within* that system—there would be no slipping through loopholes, and, in this story, no angry, frustrated, and confused child burdened with the murder of another human being. As a reparation plot, *The Round House* begins to open up to these possibilities in its themes and formal plot

structures as it strives—though never fully succeeds—to move beyond the frustrative situation it depicts.

Conclusion

Affective situations show us the ways in which the affective dimensions of our lives are bound up with the structures in which we find ourselves situated. Certain affective formations—like frustration—do not simply indicate affective energies that have been processed and put into a certain prefabricated discursive box, as some scholars argue. Feeling, as we have seen in these novels, isn't just something to be felt—it is something we can *be*, that we can be *made* to be, that can give structure to an entire network of actors in which we find ourselves entangled.

When we look at novels like *Indian Killer, The Round House,* and many others in which actors seeking justice negotiate frustrative situations, we start to see more clearly the ways in which our affective lives and our institutional lives are bound up with one another. Despair can be shaped by the contours of an office; rage acquires new textures in a community throttled by colonial case law, or in one threatened by violent vigilantes. Likewise official procedures—like testimonials—can be shaped by fear, confusion, and affective flatness (Berlant 2015, 191); the purpose and organization of one's home, or even a grocery store, can be dismantled, submerged, or blurred together in anger. We see this in scene after scene of these novels. The struggle to grapple with these affective situations has led to the flourishing of a genre—one that reveals the kinds of insights discussed above and potentially many more. These insights, drawn from a number of recent novels by Native American authors, give us a window into frustration and literary study in America more generally—one capable of changing not only how we think about how something like affect can contribute to our understanding of literary representation, but also

the larger affective landscape of American literature from the second half of the twentieth century into the twenty-first.

Coda

I have long been interested in the theoretical and methodological aspects of literary study. This has often meant exploring those spaces where the study of literature intersects with other fields—philosophy, sociology, critical race theory, and so on. Much of my research has been driven by "big questions": what can literature do? How can its unique qualities—largely its aesthetic qualities—intersect with the larger world of politics, society, and peoples' lives? And, along these same lines, what can literary criticism do? How does it relate to these other, broader categories? In working on this dissertation, I found that addressing both sets of questions simultaneously leads to other, related questions: how, for example, do people—whether scholars, critics, poets, or novelists—go about connecting a poem, novel, or literary-critical essay with social issues or a social movement? And how has this process changed over time?

This dissertation, then, has sought to think through aesthetic and political categories at once, from both theoretical and historical perspectives. Theories of affect have provided a conceptually flexible lens through which to do this, one that has allowed me to think expansively and creatively while also grounding my inquiry in a wealth of exciting, pre-existing scholarship. Three main examples of this conceptual flexibility come to mind:

First, in this project I have adopted multiple methodological perspectives, each of which could very well form the basis for an entire project: genre studies, computational methods and the digital humanities, the intellectual history of literary criticism and its institutions, scholarly moods, poetic tone, and so on. Second, the cultural formations I have chosen to examine are also diverse in nature: a ten-year period of politically engaged literary criticism, a corpus of poetry directly associated with a political/social movement, as well as a genre of the novel with highly-politicized themes and features. And third, the historical moments out of which these cultural

formations emerge are also unique: a group of Marxist cultural/political/literary critics, mostly white men, committed to radical social change in the 1930s; poets associated with the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s committed to racial justice in America; and contemporary Native American novelists responding to injustices in Native American history. In short: I have analyzed multiple types of cultural formations in distinct historical moments with diverse critical methodologies—all combined within the scope of the same project.

Structuring my research in such an historically, theoretically, and methodologically expansive way presented a number of challenges—but also unique opportunities. For example, the conceptual expansiveness of this project made it difficult to present a coherent chronological narrative across my three chapters: the specific histories out of which each chapter emerges are, at the end of the day, unique. Historically speaking, the discontent expressed by white Marxist critics in the 1930s is not the same discontent expressed by Black Arts poets in the 1960s or Native American novelists in the contemporary moment. The conceptual expansiveness of this project has, however, allowed me to offer a compelling literary constellation across my chapters, one that draws connections and contemplates patterns of cultural response that might otherwise be difficult to recognize—all concerning the ways that cultural formations might be shaped by, and give shape to, a given kind of political and social unrest. Of particular importance in this regard is my emphasis on literary-critical *form*.

Though rhetorically unique, the three dimensions of literary-critical forms I have examined in this project—mood, tone, and genre—share important points of overlap that relate back to the "big" questions driving my investigation. Each, for example, represents a concrete aesthetic feature of a literary text with its own conceptual history in literary study. Each also, however, represents a special point of contact between formal literary features and the broader

social world in which texts are received, analyzed, and considered alongside one another. The study of *mood*, for example, involves those formal features that indicate how a writer relates to the object being written about; *tone*, likewise, encompasses those elements indicating how a writer relates to their audience; and *genre* includes features indicating how texts are positioned with regards to one another. Grounding my inquiry in three unique but interconnected literary-critical forms—as well as the affective dimensions of each—has provided my project with a more focused conceptual framework. This framework, in turn, opened the door for my broader analyses and reflections on three important moments in recent American literary history.

Frustration, in particular, has afforded a distinct vantage into these many intersecting issues. As my preceding analyses have shown, the term captures the intersection of the broader worlds of aesthetics and politics. Similar to my theoretical and methodological framing, however, the term itself is conceptually expansive: it can provide insight into both the act of literary criticism and the structure of a genre; the tone a poem might adopt and a vivid scene in a novel; a particularly charged poetic image and a particular line of literary-critical reasoning.

Moreover, in all these avenues, frustration has the potential to connect back to the social and political world. In fact, as I have argued, it provides special insight into the ways in which these literary-critical forms—and affect itself—might intersect with structural conditions and more systemic analysis. Looking closely at the way frustration works has allowed us to recognize a new genre of affective experience—the affective situation—as well as the role that such a feeling/condition has played in the relationship between aesthetics and politics in 20th- and 21st-century America.

In closing, then, this project has given me the chance to examine writing emerging from three periods of unrest, unfulfillment, and discontent in recent American history, as well as to

reflect on how this social and political discontent might be transformed into literary production. I hope the insights I have offered here might contribute to our understanding of the scholarly fields on which my research builds—whether historical, theoretical, or methodological—as well as those broader questions that initially sparked my interest in such fields: what, exactly, can literature and literary criticism do?

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