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APOLOGY TERRITORY

The public apology eases the bite of a wrongdoing. It recurs in the media for reasons including consumer buy-in to emotional expression and the desire for the inside track on the private lives and vulnerabilities of public figures. Its proliferation fits with the mass popularity of self-improvement discourse and forms of autobiography and self-disclosure. The public apology can be a secular form of confession and a forum for forgiveness and redemption featuring political figures, religious leaders, corporate spokespeople, and sports and entertainment stars. Meanwhile the apology story helps to fill out an expanded news media and its increasing extremes and new territories of representation.

At the same time, many apologies are long overdue. Feminism, among other social justice movements, has played an important role in making rhetorical space for the healing victim, whether of sexual abuse, war crimes, or illness. Within these terms, an apology may be procedurally, if not morally, required and its delivery welcomed as a critical step in a healing process that has "closure" and justice for the victim as its goals.

For this series of prints I've selected, cropped, and enlarged images accompanying public apologies. By presenting this new print form on the Museum walls, throw-away news images are transformed into archival objects of contemporary cultural contemplation.

READING THE PUBLIC APOLOGY

Sometimes it seems like this flow of stories and images is little more than titillating tabloid fodder. If importance is measured by word count, the space occupied by Janet Jackson's apology for "wardrobe malfunction" is confusing. In this instance, it could be argued that there was no need for an apology, however it was effusive and incessantly reproduced. For perspective, compare this to West German Chancellor Willie Brandt on his knees at the site of the Warsaw Ghetto in a landmark apology to express the guilt, sorrow and responsibility of Germany for the Holocaust, an apology so important to millions of survivors of the Second World War. In Canada in the mid-1990s, a series of apologies from the

federal government and various churches was hard-won by Indian residential school survivors, and although seldom making headlines, these apologies opened the way to further acts of retribution. Sometimes it's difficult to recognize the significance of these groundbreaking apologies within the glut of those that are relatively inconsequential.

The apology's use in corporate contexts is relatively recent, and considered a "crisis communications" strategy. In the industry magazine *Sales and Marketing Management*, November 2000, Mark Schannon of the public relations giant Ketchum said: "Five years ago, it was almost unheard of for any company to apologize, because most often attorneys thought that it was a liability. Over the last few years, executives have realized that they can apologize without being sued--now it's a critical first step in rehabilitating a company."

JUST HOW BAD CAN YOU BE?

Some have argued that public apologies such as Mike Harris' for the Walkerton, Ontario tainted water tragedy was a way of creating an emotional spectacle that avoided confrontation with the root problem of providing funding for proper inspection of public water supplies. One of the questions this raises is whether the performance of apologizing enables an expansion of the boundaries for government, corporate, or personal misconduct.

I wonder about the peculiar media representational norms found in the apologies and how we embody our thoughts and feelings about remorse. How does this information impact on our values and expectations of what others "owe" us for their transgressions? In January 2005, Prince Harry apologized by letter for sporting a Nazi costume at a private party. Internationally, this was gauged insufficient, and there were calls for an in-person public apology. Ideas about remorse, retribution and the apology are in a period of deliberation, certainly publicly, and perhaps privately as well. *Sorry* marks this time.

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