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ABSTRACT

by

Robert Caleb Pendygraft

In this dissertation, *Animate Literacies*, I argue that conventional notions of literacy sponsorship (Brandt) fail to account for all the complexities of meaning making and power relations in queer lives, especially in othered places like Appalachia. I conduct queer literacy research in Appalachia in order to expand the scope of literacy sponsorship beyond a traditional focus on human individuals and institutions. By queering literacy methodologies and theories, I suggest that becoming literate involves a vast diversity of non-human agents, ranging from but not limited to the landscape, embodied technologies, mundane objects, and more, as well as the relations among these agents. Through a new materialist lens (Barad; Bennett; Chen), I theorize literacy as an active, participatory force—moving, shifting, flowing, perhaps even alive in its own way. My theory of animate literacies evolves from the literacy stories of five queer Appalachian participants.

By bringing together queer (Alexander; Chen; Pritchard), Appalachian (Bradshaw; Donehower & Webb-Sunderhaus; Snyder), and new materialist rhetorics (Barad; Gries), my theory of animate literacies offers a queer, new materialist approach for studying the immediate affects and materiality of literacy practices. In this way, *Animate Literacies* forges queerly forward in order to make room for the nonhuman world to enter into its study. Complicating our relationship with the environment and all its nonhuman actors — from the food we eat, the local landscapes, to our pets, the trees, even the trash we throw away — a theory of animate literacies brings into relief how literacy is about being-with the world in more meaningful ways. Ultimately, *Animate Literacies* seeks to present an explanation as to how we survive in the Anthropocene and the inevitable, queer futures ahead.

ANIMATE LITERACIES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

DEDICATION

For all the queer kinships that persist in the world, and also for the nonhumans who can teach us how to live kinder lives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In making room for matter, queer kinships, feelings and affects, place, and especially for the nonhumans, my acknowledgements here must break with the conventional genre. At the beginning of this dissertation, I erected an altar next to my desk, built as a reminder of the spiritual and physical labor I poured into these pages. It remains. On it sits images of my ancestors: my soulmate and first fur-baby, Mocah, a long hair calico who passed when I was 17; Papaw, my dad's dad who I write about in the prologue; my aunt Jadene, who whispered to me as she lay dying when I was 9 years old, "Stay in school, Caleb." *I've never left*, I tell her some days, looking at her smiling face when I feel discouraged. Papaw, Jadene, and Mocah have stayed with me during this entire project, and for that I'm grateful.

There is a vase on my altar full of small stones. I'd collect one rock for every job application while I was on the market. One pebble equaling one application; there are about 70 pebbles. I plan to set the jar full of stones on my desk once I take my position at Massachusetts Maritime Academy as a Tenure-Track Assistant Professor of Humanities come September 2019. I was able to land my job because of many people. Among them, Dr. Jason Palmeri. He has been a mentor in all the ways a mentor should be and more — what Jason has given me in 6 years of mentorship is much more than many graduate students ever receive. Over the many hours of meetings, conversations, and draft-after-draft-after-draft, we have laughed and he's listened to me cry. I was lucky to run Miami's Composition program with him, which taught me invaluable lessons about pedagogy, writing, and being a kind human in the academy. He has been an indispensable queer academic drag mother of sorts, but more than that, he has been a friend. I wouldn't be here, nor would have I landed a job without him. Thank you, Jason for seeing the best in me when I couldn't.

I want to give a big thanks to Dr. Sara Webb-Sunderhaus and her essential work on literacies and Appalachia has been indispensable in this project. She was able to join my committee as my co-chair in my last year at Miami and her first as Composition Director, and her feedback was incredibly insightful to this project. The same can be said for my other committee members who wrote recommendations on my behalf and have stayed with me through this dissertation. Dr. Michele Simmons guided me along my path of person-based research, and helped me pass my IRB. Dr. Emily Legg taught me the importance of story and being a storyteller. Dr. Roxanne Ornelas has always been welcoming as my outside reader, and I share her valuation of place. And my gratitude to these folks can't be fully expressed in words.

On my dissertation altar, I have three small, ceramic replicas of my other fur-babies, Kali, Zeus, and Oya. They have written this dissertation with me from start to finish. As I type this now, they are near. Zeus asleep, regal-like in the top of their kitty tower. Queen Kali in her oversized chair, and Oya, with her unrelenting devotion, is asleep next to my feet. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for my cats. They've offered companionship in some of my more dire, depressive states. They allow me to care for them, and in that kinship, I know that I have the opportunity to put love into this world. They've supported me in writing this project in so many ways.

I have collected pieces of Appalachian coal, too: glossy and fractured they sit on the altar. The coal reminds of me time, of how time works in the mountains — slow and powerful, the coal formed after years like the stories I collected from participants. This dissertation belongs to the coal and the participants' as much as it belongs to me. Justin, Lexi, Elizabeth, Macy, and

Lara — along with the other participants whose stories didn't get to make it in because of the constrained time I had in writing this project — I appreciate you and your words. In some ways, your stories taught me more about literacy, writing, and the power of language than any graduate education could. This dissertation was written with you and because of you.

Every time I sat down to write, I would light a candle on my altar. It's said our reverence for fire and smoke is in our DNA, inborn from our ability to cook. Fire is deeply connected with the human condition and I want to express thanks towards the fire that burned on my altar year-round. Its flame was a reminder of the passion I have for the work I do and am dedicated on continuing. Fire also represents the hearth and community; we gather around fire for warmth and communion. Celebrations are marked by pyres. In fact, when this dissertation will be sent in on Beltane, May 1st to my committee, I will surely build a Balefire in its honor like my ancestors burned ages ago. Fire provides for our families all these things.

My queer family has been like that flame, burning endlessly in their support of me and this project. Kyle, my queer brother, best friend, my Meredith-Grey-to-his-Cristina-Yang, listened to me on phone calls, Facetimed for hours while he chained smoke and I'd ramble on about literacy, posthumanist ideals, and new materialism. When I didn't know how I was going to make it to my job interviews, he told me, "Bitch, come on. We're gonna drive this car like we stole it." I got the job because Kyle shared the drive to the Cape Cod when I couldn't do it alone.

Travis my partner and family has been there for me as well. He once said that words could hardly express how I helped him in writing his dissertation, I'd like to echo his words here. Thank you Travis for helping me understand the benefits of compromise and how to stand up for myself when I needed to put myself first. Your notes and letters of encouragements sustained me. Even now I look around my desk and see them cheering me on.

My Mom, Twana, has been and always will be an immovable mountain of support in my life. I cannot name all the ways she has helped me in writing this dissertation. I would send her drafts to read, and she'd eagerly in her own way tell me feedback and her thoughts. It's rare to have a parent so willing to help their child as much as my mom has and continues to do today. My Mom has saved my life and there is no way to repay her for her kindness and understanding. Indubitably, Mom is a warrior, who taught me that when the world tells you can't, you make sure to do anything in your power to do it anyways. The reason I am able to write through pain and trauma, about the mountains and land, and see the power and agency that the world around us has is because of her. I owe her my life.

My other queer family members: I must say thank you a million-times over to Dr. Tonya Krouse. How can I repay the many nights of dancing to Prince, the bottles of wine, and spilling Tea? I can't. I thank you for helping me reaching this point. Corey, thank you for keeping me company during these last few months. Jimmy, thank you for always reminding me of my tenacity and perseverance. Also I'd like to thank Caitlin for sharing trips to the mountains to experience their magic.

I give gratitude to others as well: Emily, Chase, Mandy, Bridget, and Hua. This dissertation wouldn't have been possible either without the help of Miami University's English Department. I wouldn't have been able to travel Appalachia, collect stories and meet queer storytellers, or find a job in merely 4 years without the funding of the dissertation fellowship. In particular, I want to thank, Sarah, Denise, Rachel, Dr. Madelyn Detloff, Dr. Anita Mannur, Dr. Lu Ming Mao, and Dr. Stefanie Dunning.

Finally, I want to thank the Indiana squirrel who kept me company during the summer of 2018 as I read and researched and wrote. We fought each other around our backyard. You ate my

tanning lotion, stole my outdoor prayer flags, and chased me in the house many times. As I read book after book and uncountable articles under the summer sun, you always kept a watchful eye from above in your great maple tree. You sponsored this dissertation as much as anyone and anything.

Prologue: When Mountains Get Up and Leave

From his oversized recliner, after his morning insulin shot, my Papaw asked me, "Kay-lup" — he didn't have his dentures in — "do you really believe if you prayed hard enough and had faith the grain of a mustard seed, you could move that mountain out there?" He of course was talking about the hill and lake outside. The one he made after carving out humus and earth, leveling the side of the Kentucky knob enough to build my grandparents' house. Granny was in front of her well-seasoned cast iron skillets frying bacon and eggs, whisking gravy with a fork. The smell of biscuits rose up from the stove through her muumuu and met me sitting on the floor in front of my dad's dad. I knew Papaw was asking about Matthew 17:20.

"Yeah, Papaw. I believe. Jesus said we can do it."

"Then, I want you to pray and see if you can move that one." He pointed outside.

At the time I did pray. And each time I came to visit I'd look at the oversized wooden steps that led up to the lake my dad and my Papaw shaped with machine and sweat, and I'd pray again. I believed as much as my 10 year old body would allow. I prayed for another year, give or take a season, till I'd look at the hillside and my Papaw for the last time.

I quit praying. I quit visiting. I quit being straight. I quit allowing myself to be beat by my father. It wasn't till 8 years later when I was plagued by a series of night sweats and horrific dreams that I'd return. Every time I'd fall asleep, I was back in my Papaw and Granny's house, but the house wasn't the same. There wasn't a floor and a deep abyss was circling outside. Granny would acknowledge I was with her in this dreamscape but Papaw was missing. All I wanted was to get to my granddad. And the nightmares continued in various reels of sleep. In my waking life I hadn't spoken to that side of the family in years, but I was determined to travel, see Papaw and kill the dreams. I drove through a massive flood; a trailer floated alongside the road at some point as I made my way through the Kentucky knobs. When I arrived at my grandparents' home, Granny was sweeping the debris from the storm off the patio.

"Hey Granny!" Her eyes winced trying to make out who I was.

"Caleb? Oh my!"

We wept together, and within minutes I told her I came to see Papaw. "You didn't hear?" She asked. "We buried him yesterday." Later I'd tell her about how I'd came out and I couldn't come around them anymore because they didn't agree with that lifestyle. I looked around and

noticed that the lake and hill were excavated. The mountain got up and left for some reason I still don't know. Later the dreams stopped.

A literacy scholar may read my narrative above and claim my grandparents were literacy sponsors for me. "Literacy sponsor" is a common phrase in literacy studies, credited to Deborah Brandt's (2001) definition as "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (p. 19). My Papaw in particular fits well into this definition. He acted then as an agent in my immediate world who supported my reading of the bible. When he questions my faith, he alludes to a deeper connection he and I had as being part of the same religious context — and while he perhaps wouldn't agree, he did gain advantage by spreading his faith to his grandson, as did the religion. Outside of my story, I can tell you that he regulated what I could watch and see on TV, cautioned against reading Harry Potter. He even "read" my hair and clothes as inappropriate on church Sundays. In short, he was indeed a literacy sponsor. No question.

Nevertheless, I find that conventional notions of literacy sponsorship fail to account for all the complexities of meaning making and power relations in queer lives. It's for this reason this dissertation works to expand the scope of literacy's agents, queering how we become literate and expanding literacy sponsorship to include nonhuman actors and pay attention to affects produced from literacy practices. Indebted to Mel Chen's (2012) *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*, wherein animacy is described as "a quality of agency, awareness, mobility, and liveness" (p. 2), I suggest there are nonhuman, underexplored elements of literacy and literacy sponsors that animate us. By us I'm not simply speaking of individuals and the literacy they possess. Instead, to invoke Haraway's (2016) point that "human beings are with and of the earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of this earth are the main story" (p. 55), literacy involves an amalgam of the human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic, stretching across a spectrum from concrete materiality to the abstraction of belief. What would happen if we were to reconsider literacy as acting outside the human-to-human interactions? What if affects, beliefs, and the inanimate actually do animate our literacy practices? *Animate Literacies* puts forward that the nonhuman has agency and queerly so; words typed on a screen, read aloud, or written down are not the only markers of literacy.

For instance, in my story above, the land possesses agency. I argue that the hill and lake my grandfather had built, had asked me to pray away, and that had eventually been drained and bulldozed was as much a literacy sponsor as my grandfather. In a model of animate literacies, the *who* of literacy sponsorship expands to include the *what* and *where*. Do I believe I prayed away the mountain? No. My prayers for the mountain, though, were still significant because they taught me how to read and write myself into my grandfather's world. The taught me how my faith was different from my grandfather's, in turn how different my Papaw and I were. Another matter here is what is missing. I literally removed myself from dealing with my grandparents because I was beat by my dad for my queerness. Pain and trauma taught me absence, made me literate in ways that others who haven't shared similar grief aren't. I knew what triggered my dad, whether the words I spoke, music I listened to, or my bodily disposition. Every spanking and bruise wrote on my body new ways to navigate and read the world around me.

I'd like to also highlight the dreaming of my grandfather in my narrative that propelled me to act in the waking world around me. Am I suggesting that omens and prophecy are legitimate modes of understanding the world? Perhaps. What matters here isn't the validity of dreams or prognostications, but that these literacy practices exist and should be considered significant places to study literacy, if not literacy sponsors altogether. If I didn't interpret my barrage of nightmares as significant agents, I don't know how I'd come to find out my paternal grandfather had passed.

I begin with a story for a couple reasons. First, my prelude resembles the beginnings of a literacy narrative, a common method of understanding how literacy is obtained by individuals. The Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (www.thedaln.org) housing over 6,000 audio, multimodal, and textual narratives that trace the many ways people become literate, is testament to the diffusion of the literacy narrative as a critical method in the field (See also: Bryson, 2012; Brandt , 2001, 2015; Selfe and Hawisher, 2004). Throughout *Animate Literacies* I engage with stories, both my own and of 5 participants. Notice how my story above doesn't focus primarily on texts. In this case, I'm referring to the bible and the biblical verse that allowed me to understand my relationship with my grandfather. The text is still in my story, yet it's merely shifted from the center of the storytelling, a deviation from typical literacy narratives. This will be true of the participants' storytelling as well. Texts and writing are still in their stories – they are simply not *the* only focus. *Animate Literacies* makes this analytic shift in order to explore

what other ways of studying literacy may exist, as well as, to seek out what other actors and affects participate in our literacy practices.

I want to be clear that my intention is not to forego studying text-based literacy. Nor, is it my goal to dismiss the years of studying reading and writing in one clean swipe with this dissertation. By shifting focus away from soley writers and readers, writing and reading, I seek to reveal that literacy is caught up in an ongoing, emergent assemblage of various actors. Part of the reason I make this shift is because I noticed that literacy studies hasn't made the move that more recent theories of posthumanist rhetorics have. Rhetorical theories has been to making room for the nonhuman (e.g. Boyle, 2018; Gries, 2015) through a new materialist and posthumanist lens (see Barnett & Boyle, 2016; Latour, 2005; Micichie, 2002, 2016; Propen, 2018). I believe we have a whole world to gain if we did the same in literacy scholarship.

What would posthumanist literacy look? How could we apply tenets of new materialism to literacy studies? Candace R. Kuby, Karen Spector, and Jaye Johnson Thiel (2018) ask these questions and more in their collection, *Posthumanism and Literacy Education: Knowing/Becoming/Doing Literacies.* They take up the task of engaging how a posthumanist perspective of literacy may begin to take shape:

> This book wrestles with the epistemological, ontological, and ethical limitations of [humanisms], and the chapters herein aim to open spaces for the reader to consider the possibilities of posthuman literacies, particularly more-than-just-human, or just Man's, ways of knowling/becoming/doing literacies. […] We too wonder what is left out of the "field of knowers" in literacy education when we rely solely on humanist orientations to research and pedagogy. (p. 2).

The authors see the value of shifting our emphasis on human-based epistemology because they recognize, as does this project, how literacy involves nonhumans as well. Yet, the authors are not apt to remove the human from literacy studies, because "[w]e couldn't get rid of the human even if we wanted to, which we don't, as we are always a part of interpreting, writing, and representing literacy research" (p. 2). The authors and I agree, and that's precisely one of the reasons why I turn to storytelling and participant-based research. As you will read, I detail

further how a new matierialist and posthumanist approach can help us in literacy studies in places like Appalachia in chapter 2.

A posthumanist approach, as the authors see it, "questions humanist orientations and assumptions to interpret the ways in which they are problematic" (p. 2). Perhaps, most important to their aims and to my own, the authors see posthumanism as a way to explore literacy differently:

> Simply, most theories in literacy education are human centered, even if they discuss materials and texts (nonhumans). The way the human is centered in these dominant theories conceptualizes subjectivity, agency and ways of knowing/becoming/doing in philosophically different ways than posthumanism does. (p. 4)

Kuby, Spector, and Thiel focus on posthumanist approaches in literacy education, whereas overall *Animate Literacies* aims to showcase how nonhumans have been present in our stories of our literacies and of literacy study all along. I also would add that I treat place as an agential actor, with its own capacity to affect literacy in this project as well.

I detail in chapter 2 why I choose Appalachia as my site of research, but would like to acknowledge up front that I realize the risks that accompany writing about nonhuman and non-print based literacy practices in an area that is already stereotyped with being illiterate in the more traditional sense of the term. In no way am I trying to justify the stereotypes of Appalachians being unable to read and write. Scholars elsewhere have disproven these claims already (e.g. Catte, 2017; Donehower, Hogg, & Schell, 2007; Hayes, 2018; Webb-Sunderhaus & Donehower, 2015). While I call attention to non-textual literacies in Appalachia, I do so to show how my participants reading and writing and other forms of meaning making has been shaped by a range of actors. It is my amicable goal to show that place—and especially Appalachian places—has an active role to play in our study of literacy if we are to include nonhumans in our field and methodologies; it isn't merely where you are reading and writing, but how place shapes your reading and writing. In fact, I figure through expanding literacy practices to include nonhumans, to reveal the many configurations that develop through embodied lives with literacy, our definitions, studies, and methodologies of literacy are enriched with possibility not shut

down because of limiting ourselves to text-based or alphabetic literacy practices alone. I am with literacy scholars Leander and Boldt (2013) in thinking there is more to literacy than *only* reading and writing, and I'm willing to explore those possibilities with an open mind. Before outlining my chapters, I want to leave my reader with a quote to take with them that may help animate their reading of *Animate Literacies*:

> Unless as researchers we begin traveling in the unbounded circles that literacy travels in, we will miss literacy's ability to participate in unruly ways because we only see its properties. We can hold literacy at the center of the world only as long as we keep it in place at the center of our world. What might we make of the invitation to consider literacy in "and … and … and …" relations? (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 21)

I'd like to imagine the following pages as exploring these "and … and … and" relations in literacy. *Animate Literacies* is invested in seeing literacy as relational, and takes up Leander and Boldt's question as thinking of literacy outside of our own scholarly bound view of literacy. I hope my reader keeps this in mind as you move through these pages.

Chapter Overviews

In chapter 1, "Literacy, Animacy, Queer Agency," I consider the past of literacy studies in order to arrive at a theory of animate literacies. First I examine critical junctures in the field of literacy studies—the turn from the autonomous model (see: Street, 1993; Miller, 2018), the literacy myth (Graff, 1979), and the ideological violence of literacy (Stuckey, 1991). Next I explore the development of literacy sponsorship (Brandt, 1998, 2001) as a pivotal shift in literacy studies' theories, wherein the "literacy sponsor" is "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (2001, p. 19). I critique the anthropocentric elements of the social turn and theories of literacy sponsorship in the field in order to propose we've ignored the agency of nonhuman participants in literacy practices. Through queering literacy sponsorship and engaging new materialist thought (e.g. Barnett & Boyle, 2016; Coole & Frost, 2010; DeLanda, 2016; Gries, 2015; Latour, 2005, 2007), I conclude

by making an offer to its readers to entertain a new definition of literacy at its end, proffering literacy as an energetic exchange rather than an ability or resource.

Chapter 2, "Queer Appalachia, the Anthropocene, and Magical Thinking," starts off examining what can make Appalachia a region, identity, and culture—refusing any one stable marker besides the mountains themselves. I am interested not only in what could make Appalachia queer, but also how we can treat the mountains as queer agents. To do this, I look to perspectives in literacy studies that pay close attention to place, such as rural literacies (Donehower, Hogg, & Schell, 2007) and explore how rural literacies may not always be the solution in theorizing places like Appalachia (Webb-Sunderhaus, 2015). Complicating current approaches to Appalachian literacies, I explore how the Anthropocene has influenced literacy. Finally, by turning more directly to posthumanism and new materialism, I suggest that we can begin telling a different story of literacy studies: a story that requires a framework of interconnectedness, what I'm calling *magical thinking*, to see how the land and mountains and landscapes are alive, and how places like Appalachia are agential as literacy sponsors.

Drawing on theories of queer ethnography, I argue for queer storytelling as a methodology in chapter 3, "Queer Stories and the Mess They Make." I argue that the *being-with* or relationality, of animate literacies can best be analyzed through queer metaphors. Offering an alternative to the methodology of literacy sponsorship, I conclude this chapter with a new analytic: *metaphoric tracking*, a method of listening and searching for metaphors in queer storytelling. It shifts the methodological questions of literacy studies from, *Who taught us to read and write?* And, *What or how do we read and write?* to a question of *How do we use literacy to read and write the world around us?* There are two forms of metaphor tracking that I'm interested in: literacy matters and literacy affects.

Chapter 4, "Matters of the Closet," takes up the former mode of metaphoric tracking, using the metaphor of coming out of the closet to illustrate how nonhumans can have agency in queer storytelling. I take the closet to be a literal actor in the literacy practice of coming out narratives, which have been theorized at length by scholars (e.g. Alexander, 2008; Banks, 2003, 2009; Cummings, 2009; Hudson, 2014; Kinder, 1998; Malinowitz, 1995). I spend time with a single story that belongs to Justin. It is in Justin's closet that I theorize his closet as being full of human and nonhuman literacy sponsors that dissuade and enable his coming out. I think through

Justin's story as an example of how metaphors are representative of our relationship with the world, and how they expose how being-with others is central to a theory of animate literacies.

In the final chapter, "Queer Affinties," I suggest that literacy and its multitudinous practices have lasting effects that linger past reading and writing. In other words, this chapter explores how affinities with and for others form through literacy practices, and can affect us even after reading and writing is over. This chapter also deals with literacy in a more traditional manner. I begin with writing, reading, and other literacy practices of 4 participants, Lexi, Elizabeth, Macy, and Lara. I then engage with their stories and how their literacy affects linger past more conventional models of studying literacies.

In my epilogue, "Animate Monsters," I propose and offer a model example of a writing assignment based off my theory of animate literacies. Put simply, I demonstrate what it may mean to put a theory of animate literacies into pedagogical practice. Weaving together storytelling and my own literacy practice of developing and writing the theory of this dissertation, I hope to leave my reader with an example of how literacy practices are reading and writing and researching *and and and* so much more.

Chapter 1: Animacy, Literacy, Queer Agency

Animacy as a linguistic construct deals with the liveliness or sentience of words (nouns most often) and how language, grammar, and meaning is constructed in hierarchies of agency (Chen, 2012; Silverstein, 1976). In these animacy hierarchies, using the English language as an example, humans have more agency than, let's say, an animal. The animal is imbued with more agency than perhaps a plant. A plant more so than mineral. For this reason, we wouldn't say *The ball throws the child*. Instead: The child throws the ball. The ball, in this sentence, doesn't have equal agency of a child. Ad infinitum, animacy organizes agency.

Mel Chen's (2012) *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* works to decenter and disrupt animacy hierarchies, where Chen questions the hierarchization of language and meaning, demonstrating how common orderings spill over, fail, and even collapse (p. 24, 78). Chen "draws upon recent debates about sexuality, race, environment, and affect to consider how matter that is consider insensate, immobile, deathly or otherwise 'wrong' animates cultural life in important ways" (p. 2). The linguistic term "animacy," Chen notes, isn't considered a word by conventional dictionaries while the related word "animate" is:

> […] having the following Latin etymology: "ad. L. animātus filled with life, also, disposed, inclined, f. animāre to breathe, to quick; f. anima air, breath, life, soul, mind" […] Animus, on the other hand, derives from the Latin, meaning "(1) soul, (2) mind, (3) mental impulse, disposition, passion," and is defined as "actuating feeling, disposition in a particular direction, animating spirit or temper, usually of a hostile character; hence, animosity." (p. 3)

Chen argues "animacy is much more than the state of being animate, and it is precisely the absence of a consensus around its meaning that leaves it open to both inquiry and resignification" (p. 4). Chen digs "into animacy as a specific kind of affective and material construct that is not only nonneutral in relation to animals, humans, and live and dead things, but is shaped by race and sexuality, mapping various biopolitical realizations of animacy in the contemporary culture of the United States" (p. 5). Extending Chen's work, this project turns its focus away from biopolitics and looks instead to more immediate ways affective and material

conditions of literacy reveal that literacy is, like animacies, nonneutral. I am seeking to animate literacy and its field of study by focusing on nonhuman actors, blurring the role of literacy between the living and nonliving, placing value on the affective and material dimensions of literacy in order to ultimately queer the hierarchies of literacy altogether.

It is precisely these binaries of the animate and inanimate, the living and dead that propel Chen's argument: "[Animacies] seeks to trouble this binary of life and nonlife as it offers a different way to conceive of relationality and intersubjective exchange" (p. 11). If applied to literacy, animacies may cause us to reconsider what it means to be literate in terms of relationality and inter-being with the nonhuman. Perhaps, most importantly Chen's animacies' flexible, fluid, not-yet-alive, but-not-yet-dead nature relies upon queerness and queer theory: Chen's sense of

> 'queer' refers as might be expected to challenges to the conventional order of sex, reproduction, and intimacy, though it at times also refers to animacy's veering-away from dominant ontologies and the normativities they promulgate […] queering is immanent to animate transgressions, violating proper intimacies (including between humans and nonhuman things). (p. 11).

Similarly, it could be said my theorizing of animate literacies is violating agreed upon ideas about literacy by reconsidering its constituents through a queer lens. Socio-cognitive or ability-based definitions of literacy are intimately bound to the subject as this introduction will argue; animate literacies violate that bond of subjectivity in order to reassess the value of what it means to exist with and be affected by objects, matter, and the nonhuman.

Chen's work on animacies does not focus "on the politics of a monolithic queer," such as the institutionalized "Queer" of Queer Studies, but instead on its linguistic qualities and possibilities (p. 58). As if to save queer from the solidified meaning it's beginning to gain in academe, Chen examines "the politics of polyvalence that are instituted in part by the 'bleeding' of queer into diffuse parts of speech" (p. 58). My project takes a similar approach to queer, queerness, and queers. When I use the word queer I am drawing from a conglomeration of queer scholars (e.g. Halberstam, 2005, 2011; Jagose, 1996; Ahmed, 2004, 2006) next to the lived experiences of both myself and those of whom I interview in later chapters. I take queer/ing to be

disruptive, disorienting, wrought with failures (Halberstam, 2001) — embracing mess (e.g. Manalansan, 2014; Dadas, 2016), the profane and the ugly (e.g. Love, 2007), all the while knowing that queering can undo selfhood (Butler, 2005, p. 19) and imagine possibilities not yet actualized (Munoz, 2009; Waite, 2017). At some level, I'd say, I never truly lose sight of queer's initial relationship with desire, sex as act, and bodies that are nonnormative, all factors that are woven throughout this project.

Because this project is about literacy, Chen's queering of animacy theory acts as a parallel with my intentions of queering literacy studies as a discipline. By borrowing from *Animacies* framework, I hope to honor Chen's influence in linguistic and queer theory and carry over their work into the field of literacy. Chen takes "a rather uncommon linguistic approach of studying" the failings of the conceptual dominant hierarchy of animacy (2012, p. 30). I ask: What are the dominant concepts of literacy and its study? And furthermore, how does our understandings and studying of literacy work to reinscribe its own hierarchies? *Animate Literacies* draws on Chen's theory of animacies to ask these questions and more, proposing we rethink the human-centric model of literacy altogether.

I return to Chen many times in the remainder of my project; however, before I can arrive at a theory of animate literacies, I have to consider the past of literacy studies first. This introduction will offer a brief scholarly history of literacy studies, beginning in the 60s ending up with more current research with a focus on critiquing the anthropocentric elements of the social turn and theories of literacy sponsorship in the field. Through queering literacy sponsorship and engaging new materialist thought (e.g. Barnett & Boyle, 2016; Coole & Frost, 2010; DeLanda, 2016; Gries, 2015; Latour, 2005, 2007), this introduction concludes by making an offer to its readers to entertain a new definition of literacy at its end, proffering literacy as an energetic exchange rather than an ability or resource.

Finding Literacy

Oftentimes, I believe when we talk about literacy we take for granted its meaning. What exactly is literacy? How can we define it? And, if literacy proves difficult to define, how then can we study it? It could be said literacy is colloquially understood to be the ability to read and write. Looking around my desk: I see notes I've taken, written as reminders to myself; birthday cards from friends; encouraging notes left by my partner; my daily affirmations; and I write to

you, my dear reader, under the presupposition that you can extrapolate meaning from the words I type here. Both the reader and the writer, at least to some degree, function under the pretense of being literate, of possessing literacy. Even Merriam-Webster tautologically defines literacy as "the quality or state of being literate", wherein literate has two definitions:

> a : educated; b : able to read and write
> a : versed in literature or creative writing; b : lucid; c : having knowledge or competence (2017, n.p.)

Literacy is at the same time easy to understand as the ability to read and write, but then complicated enough to have various definitions, such as the one above. I'm not satisfied with literacy being narrowly defined an ability to write and read alone.

Certainly literacy involves words. But, literacy is much more, as Jacqueline Royster (2000) argues. Engaging with the comments of Sojourner Truth in order to argue for literacy as "emanating from lived experience", Royster rethinks the term:

> In 1867, in an informal response to literacy requirement for the right to vote, Truth said: 'You know, children, I don't read such small stuff as letters, I read men and nations' (Loewenberg and Bogin 1976:239). This comment suggests that literacy is a sociocultural phenomenon, a use of language, a component of a complex system of understanding and intents from which decoding and encoding text must inevitably get their shape, direction, and momentum. (p. 45)

Language. Understanding. Decoding and encoding. These words in particular standout in Royster's passage above. Continuing on, she spells out that literacy is "a sociocognitive ability", an ability to "identify, think through, refine, and solve problems" (p. 45). By using the compound socio-cognitive, she intends to highlight literacy as including "ways of knowing and believing" as well as "ways of doing" pressing the "boundaries between orality and literacy to be question from an even broader range of language practices" (p. 46). Royster's framing of literacy gets us closer to the literacy that I am using herein. Animate literacies, however, will complicate two

elements of Royster's literacy: the framing of literacy as a cognitive ability and the focus on solely human exchange (i.e. the *socio-* of socio-cognitive).

Royster's definition sets up my project by revealing that there are many ways to be literate. Perhaps most importantly, though, her expansion of literacy as a social praxis is a telling marker of a historic shift in literacy studies, which I'd like to spend time unpacking. Prior to the 1960's, literacy was usually theorized in terms of autonomy. Literacy was "independent of social context, an autonomous variable" (Street, 1993, p. 432). The individual was responsible for their own literacy; society, culture, and/or ideology supposedly had no influence or role to play. Brain Street, a leading voice in what came to be known as the New Literacy Studies, points to Ong, Havelock, and Goody and Watt as main contributors for perpetuating the autonomous model of literacy (Miller, 2018, p. 496).

Shortly thereafter, in the 1980s the autonomous model was debunked by Harvey Graff's *The Literacy Myth*, a text that could arguably be one of the foundational text in theories of literacies. The "literacy myth" assumes that literacy is key to a progressive, "modern," society. By collecting data in Hamilton, London, and Ontario, Canada in various forms (e.g. criminal records, marriage and birth certificates, to even person based observations), Graff presents one of the first examples of widespread, place-based literacy research. While we must account for the dated evidence Graff collects, he established many key elements of what literacy does and how to study it. Tracking literacy back to the Enlightenment and Reformation periods, Graff hypothesizes that literacy became a primary catalyst for the invention of the modern subject; in other words, literacy has an intimate relationship with the modern era, where "[l]iteracy, then as a measure of modernity, on either the individual or the societal level, becomes a symbol—and just as its benefits are located in the areas of abstraction and symbolism, so are its functions" (p. 8). Graff was one of the first to discuss the implications of the constructed relationship between literacy and modern citizenship: the literate individual was a 'civilized' individual.

According to Graff, the literacy education model served, via The Enlightenment and Reformation eras, "as a source of order, cohesion, and hegemony in a society stratified by social class than rank" (p. 26), wherein "education would produce discipline and aid in the inculcation of the values required for an urban and industrial society" (p. 27). In this way, we can see that, if the literacy myth correlates with the urban and industrial, then illiteracy could be incorrectly considered analogous to the non-urban and rural. This critique has been made by Appalachian

literacy scholars. Take for instance, when Krista Bryson (2015) argues, "These pervasive beliefs about the mythic power of literacy to fundamentally and positively alter the identity of the literate have become inextricably intertwine with myths about Appalachian identity, ultimately equating Appalachianness with illiteracy" (p. 36). Graff doesn't explicitly draw this connection himself but it is a crucial intervention to make for the scope of my project, which takes up place as a critical factor with regards to literacy, especially challenging conventional positioning of rural places as homes of illiteracy.

The social turn of literacy studies also brought with it a consideration of violence, which is the premise of J. Elspeth Stuckey's *The Violence of Literacy* (1991). Extending Graff's argument, Stuckey elevates the urgency of literacy's social impact, emphasizing how literacy's economic value stratifies classes of people. Stuckey proposes that the violence of literacy stems from "a system of ownership built on the ownership of literacy" where "[t]o be literate is to be legitimate" (p. 18). Put simply, Stuckey holds literacy accountable as a social technology which recognizes literate subjects as legitimate. This observation has been made, too, by Mignolo (1995) but in terms of colonization, where he says "writing came into the picture when the consolidation of vernacular languages […] needed the letter to tame the voice and grammar to control the mobility of the flow of speech. Writing was the end result of an evolutionary process, one of the highest achievements of human intelligence" (p. 45). Mignolo is extending Stuckey's point that literacy is a social and economic apparatus of control, echoing Graff's claim that literacy establishes norms of morality — literacy is, then, also always linked to ideology.

Stuckey's major critique of literacy ideology is concerned with how ethnographic literacy research methods impose an ideology that takes literacy to be self-evident up to that point. Stuckey calls for a radical re-understanding of how to study literacy, or as she puts it: "The chief argument of the present analysis, however, is that literacy and economy are interdependent and that the basis of the economy is changing", and our methods should change as well (p. 57). I am not taking for granted that this may not hold true in the same ways, at least insofar as methodologies are concerned, as it did when Stuckey made this claim in 1991. I believe methodologies for studying literacy have developed to be more ethical in recent years (see: Street & Heath, 2008); however, the notion that economics, social status, and ideologies still play a crucial role in studying and defining literacy today rings true. Moreover, as I detail in chapter 3, I point to how I aim to complicate the power dynamics of studying literacy via queer storytelling.

Perhaps Stuckey's argument can best be summarized when she writes, "Literacy neither imprisons nor frees people; it merely embodies the enormous complexities for how and why some people live comfortably and others do not" (p. 63). Stuckey and Graff together here act as backdrop to the historic shift still felt in the tectonics of current literacy scholarship: literacy isn't inert or a unadulterated tool an individual possesses. Literacy is complex, social, and wrought with power.

This social shift in literacy studies was truly felt in ground breaking ethnographic work of Shirley Brice Heath's (1983), *Ways With Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. Heath was novel for innumerable reasons. Among them, she was one of the first in literacy scholarship to examine how literacy functions in non-urban, rural places. Conducting a longitudinal study that spans two decades and focuses on the townspeople of the two rural sites of Trackton and Roadville in the Piedmont hills of the Carolinas, Heath establishes the grounds for what will later be theorized as rural literacies (Donehower, Hogg, & Schell, 2007). Heath at the time of publication in 1983 came to understand that orality and literacy are inseparable, a key factor of literacy we accept today in current literacy scholarship. What we say and how we say it are as essential to literacy as being able to read and write. For instance, country folk have a different vernacular and dialect than that of city dwellers, a fact most of us from the countryside can attest to when our speech is called out when we enter into urban spaces. Heath deemed these moments where orality and literacy met as "literacy events."

Lauding Heath's innovation, Deborah Brandt (2018) in a recent symposium explains in detail how

> [w]ith her anthropological concept of "literacy events," [Heath] brought attention to the flow of reading and writing within larger, patterned social activities. Meaning making, she showed us, was going on all the time. It involved more people, more considerations, more conventions than any text or simple writer-reader dyad might imply […] . After Heath, we understood how people talk each other into literacy: how orientations to reading, writing, and texts are maintained in daily, mouth-to-mouth interactions and how these orientations function in the larger efforts for group survival. (p. 505)

Without Heath's work, as Brandt points out, the interconnection between reading and writing to lived practice and the way we speak wouldn't play such a crucial role in the current trajectory of literacy studies.

Heath's *Ways With Words* offered another innovation in its focus on desegregation and race in her literacy analysis. The majority of Tracktonians were working class Black Americans, while Roadville residents were primarily a working class white community; both towns employed literacy in various ways to navigate their rural communities. A primary objective of *Ways With Words* was to

> show that educational equality could not merely be a matter of court order or good intentions. It required overcoming the communication problems that segregation breeds. That meant cross-cultural analysis of language and knowledge-making practices in order to heighten communicative competence among students and teachers alike. (Brandt, 2018, p. 504)

Alongside the various literacy differences between the two towns on racial lines, Heath highlights, how gender played a role in literacy events, especially among the rearing of children (e.g. Heath, p. 81- 83; 144 - 148).

Deborah Brandt has also made significant changes to the field of literacy scholarship furthering and unpacking social dimensions of literacy. Her coining of the concept of "literacy sponsorship" is perhaps one of her greatest achievements, a term that influences my work. Brandt's contributions to literacy research include her person-based work in regards to literacy's economic influence in America at the turn of the twentieth century. Her book, *Literacy in American Lives* (2001) draws from "the social conditions of ordinary lives" (p.10) and documents "multiple perspectives on public events" (p. 10) from 80 interviews conducted in the 1990s. Brandt's aim was to "study […] about how people across [the twentieth century] learned to read and write, actively, passively, willingly, resistantly, and, always, persistently, over a lifetime" (p. 9). Drawing from methods of oral histories and biographical sociology, Brandt acknowledges her work "maintains a primary focus on the acquisition and use of alphabetic script" (p. 9).

In many ways, Brandt's ultimate takeaway treats literacy as a resource, especially insofar as having economic value. She puts it plainly:

> Literacy is a resource in the way that electricity is a resource: Its circulation keeps lights on. Literacy is also a productive resource, a means of production and reproduction, including a means by which legacies of human experience move from past to future and by which, for many, identities are made and sustained. (p. 6)

Brandt shows us that literacy certainly does have economic value, and it's an economically stratifying resource, to boot. The idea that literacy is a resource, skill, and tool with economic capital is prevalent throughout the entirety of the Brandt's argument. At the turn of the century, Brandt posits multiple times in *American Lives*, the aftermath of WWII made an impact on the economic value of literacy (p. 84 - 87) especially through the rise of new jobs (p. 58 - 62, 98, 199) along with the new demands and access of technological advancement (p. 48, 86, 175 - 181, 201) — all of which require workers to be literate.

In many ways, Brandt's notion that the economic value of literacy boomed after the industrialization of WWII (2001, p. 26) echoes Stuckey's arguments on the dangers of literacy. Being a "valued commodity in the U.S. economy, a key resource in gaining profit and edge" (Brandt 2001, p.21) literacy functions to parse out class, wealth, and (possible) social advancement. In this way Brandt's work reinscribes Heath's focus on the everyday pervasive import of literacy; however, the underlying assumption of most, if not all, of Brandt's oeuvre on literacy scholarship takes alphabetic-based sign-systems to be the necessary conditions of literacy; I'd add this isn't the end-all of literacy. Literacy is much more than words written, read, or spoken.

This isn't a total refutation of Brandt's work, though. Her work brought me here, for which I'm grateful. And I am not entirely divorced from text-, print-, alphabet-centric studies of literacy. Literacy, I argue, is still is tethered to Brandt's core principles on the importance of literacy in everyday lives. The oral histories, daily tasks, and ordinariness examined in *American Lives* linger behind the pages here and are constantly in the back of my mind. I appreciate and look to the same mundane sites of literacies as Brandt does in collecting the stories and

narratives of my participants. The difference lies in our opinions of what constitutes literacy, or, even, what conditions are necessary for literacy altogether. It's my aim in this project to illustrate how literacy not only drives social and economic systems in our lives but, also, animates us on the most physical and affective levels of our embodied experiences.

Deborah Brandt's legacy arguably began farther back in 1998, when she initially advanced the concept of literacy sponsor in her article, "Sponsors of Literacy". If you recall from the prologue, literacy sponsors are "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy — and gain advantage of it in some way" (Brandt, 1998, p. 166). Literacy sponsorship gained more traction in her publication of *Literacy in American Lives* wherein she uses literacy sponsorship as her primary analytic tool. Brandt's article has been cited over 460 times, while *Literacy in American Lives* has been referenced over 1,000 according to Google Scholar[1] — a result, I believe, that is in part due to her coining of literacy sponsorship. Literacy sponsorship, whenever engaged is always linked to the human whether the sponsor is an individual, organization, or larger institution, such as government agencies, churches/religious groups, or schools (Alexander, 2017, p. 21 - 22).

I realize that one could read Brandt's articulation that sponsors could be "concrete or abstract" as making space for the inclusion I'm calling for here. Yet, I do not believe that Brandt intended an "abstract" agent could include objects or affects due to her last condition of said agent gaining advantage of extending literacy to another subject. For example, if I am arguing that affects can have agency — an argument central to animacies theory — and even be thought of as literacy sponsors, we have to consider how affects can sometimes fail or serve no purpose and thus cannot gain any sort of advantage.

In fact, Brandt makes it clear that when she speaks of literacy sponsors she is discussing individuals that "set the terms for access to literacy and wield powerful incentives for compliance and loyalty" (1998, p. 166 - 167). Sponsors help explain "a range of human relationships and ideological pressures that turn up at the scenes of literacy learning" and while she mentions that sponsorship "is a concept useful for tracking literacy's material" aspects, the material is always a result of the literacy sponsor imparting literacy in some way (1998, p. 168).

[1] To reach this metric I searched for "Deborah Brandt" in GoogleScholar.

She gives the instance of office documents that may result from a literacy sponsor sponsoring an individual: when someone applies for a loan, for instance, the loan officer has the sponsored individual sign a contract, use a pen, on a desk, and so on. My point, though, is that for Brandt the material is never the source of literacy, only its result.

In my research I've failed to uncover few scholars who fully question the human-centric nature of literacy sponsors in Brandt's definition. It's a given in most work in literacy studies that an agent is a human or a group of humans under the guise of an organization or institution[2]. Among my search for scholars who extend Brandt's concept of sponsorship, some more interesting findings include Lisa Mastrangelo's argument that community cookbooks act as literacy sponsors, representing the communities that write them (2015); Galbreath's exploration of how food literacy is sponsored by land-grant universities, their extension services to local communities and the 4-H (2015); Trace's suggestion that boys' and girls' agricultural clubs are sponsors of early the American twentieth century Progressive Era (2014); and Cook & Ryle's suggestion that comic book superheroes are acting as literacy sponsors (2017).

Scholars are already seeking to expand and complicate literacy sponsorship. Two examples standout in particular. First, acknowledging that sponsorship "is a messy process" (p. 6), Sara Webb-Sunderhaus (2007) posits that "contradictory messages about literacy could come from the same person, such that the same person could be both a sponsor and an inhibitor" (p.7). In other words, agents can either foster literacy or inhibit it, and even at times do both. The understanding that literacy sponsorship doesn't have to work in only one direction shows that sponsorship is more complex than the original definition offers. I'd like to think *Animate Literacies* can show that sponsorship can work in lines between nonhumans and humans as well. The second example comes from Kara Poe Alexander (2017), who argues that an individual can function "both as sponsor and sponsored" (p. 22), arriving at the conclusion that sponsorship can be reciprocal.

One exception in terms of pressing literacy sponsorship's agents to the boundaries of the human realm is Ann Lawrence's article, "Literacy narrative as sponsors of literacy: Past contributions and new directions for literacy sponsorship" (2015). Primarily informed by

[2] Sometimes a text can be seen as a sponsor but the agency is still usually attributed to the people who wrote it. See Kuby, Spector, & Theil's (2019) introduction to *Posthuamnism and Literacy Education* for more on this.

Brandt's arguments and other scholars who rely on Brant's literacy sponsor construct, Lawrence makes an observation I'm inclined to agree with: "Accordingly, these researchers have generally considered only people mentioned in their study participants' accounts as sponsors of literacy, an analytical decision that seems to have been influenced by their work with personal narratives as major evidence sources" (p. 308). By arguing that "researchers have not given serious attention to the rhetorical practices of literacy narratives (autobiographical or otherwise) as sponsors of literacy" (p. 306), Lawrence reaches the conclusion there has yet to be "given rigorous attention to narrative genres or to the sponsoring influence of narrative rhetoric in general, even as contributors have increasingly relied on personal narratives as evidence sources" (p. 318). Genres can be literacy sponsors, in other words.

Lawrence's argument is closer to the agential queering animate literacies is calling for but not a complete shift to a non-human model of literacy sponsorship. The genre of the literacy narrative is still written; someone was behind the page. Furthermore, the only materiality to glean from this refutation of sponsorship is still text-based. My point here is that literacy sponsorship is so widely dispersed in literacy scholarship I worry that too often literacy scholars have taken Brandt's literacy sponsor as convention without fully questioning the implications of the term.

Along these lines, Brandt (in a later article) with Clinton, explored this idea of moving away from human-only agents of literacy sponsorship, but shied away from the queer, radical shift that underlines animate literacies. Brandt and Clinton attempt to "show what new questions can be asked and perspectives gleaned once the door between people and things is opened and things are given the status of social actors" (2002, p. 348). In their essay, "Limits of the Local" (2002), the authors engage Latour in order

> to dissolve [dichotomies of global and local] by treating literacy not as an outcome or accomplishment of local practices but as a participant in them, as an actor or what Latour coins an "actant" in its own right. Literacy is neither a deterministic force nor a creation of local agents. Rather it participates in social practices in the form of objects and technologies, whose meanings are not usually created nor exhausted by the locales in which they are taken up. (p. 338)

I agree with Brandt and Clinton's use of Latour's idea that objects "are active mediators – imbuing, resisting, recrafting" within literacy (p. 346). Animate literacies attempt to pick up where Brandt and Clinton leave off in their essay. Animate literacies agrees with Brandt and Clinton that "[f]iguring out what things are doing with people in a setting becomes as important as figuring out what people are doing with things in a setting" (p. 348). I'd like to add that we must approach matter and objects on their own terms. The means of doing so becomes clearer in the two next chapters wherein paying attention to affects, places, and other nonhuman agents in queer storytelling is crucial.

This is precisely why the incorporation of animacies can help queer our knowledge of literacy and literacy sponsorship. While Chen queers the linguistic function of animacy, I, instead, focus on the movement of language, meaning, and interpretation between queers and the worlds they write and read. In some ways this project is both about queering literacy and about demonstrating the literacies that queers possess. Chen looks to the bleeding of queerness in speech, affects, and mattering; I seek to understand how queerness can permeate literacy, and how literacy can queerly permeate the living and nonliving.

As I consider models of how literacy sponsorship can be queered, I turn to Eric Pritchard's recent book, *Fashioning Lives: Black Queers and the Politics of Literacy* (2017). Pritchard's work is the best example of queer literacy scholarship that *Animate Literacies* models. I'd like to be explicit, though, *Fashioning Lives* isn't about rural queer lives: most of Pritchard's participants come from urban areas and he doesn't interrogate the role of rural places in Black Queer lives; however *Fashioning Lives* is the clearest example of how queer literacies can work with more nuanced aspects of identity, such as intersections of race, gender, and sexuality.

Pritchard draws on and expands from Brandt's theory of literacy sponsorship (p. 31-32; 82-84; 98). Pritchard firmly establishes his work within literacy, composition, and rhetorical studies — LCR for short. Through his extensive person-based research, Pritchard develops an alternative theory of literacy that provides "a framework through which [LCR] may see Black queerness" (p. 13), and asks his reader to reconsider:

> The relationship between literacy and normativity; the ways this relationship works analogously to racialized sexualities and normativity; the role literacy

> normativity in creating and maintaining a dominant culture that renders the Black queer an invisible subject in [LCR]; and ultimately how Black LGBTQ people are seizing upon such moments to give meaning to literacy that escapes the constraining force of incidents in their lives where literacy is used to do damage or inflict harm. (p. 15)

Literacy as Pritchard understands it, "is understood as the myriad ways of meaning-making that are contextualized by sociocultural condition" (p. 19) to which he includes literacy practices such as "sense-making, discernment," "encoding and decoding" (p.19), "singing, dancing, and style of dress" (p. 24). By interviewing his participants through a set of life history questions (p. 253-258), Pritchard establishes two subsets of literacy: 1) "normative literacies, which consists of literacy practices that inflict harm" to Black LGBTQ people and other marginalized communities (p. 24-26); and 2) "restorative literacies, which consists of literacy practices that Black queers employ as a means of self-definition, self-care, and self-determination" (p. 24). Restorative literacy threads throughout *Fashioning Lives*, a literacy tactic his Black queer participants use to foster self- and communal love.

As Pritchard explains, "By 'love,' I am referring to a radical praxis of freedom and self-care in the face of a social, political, and cultural circumstance in which you and your people are targeted for debasement, degradation and in many cases, death" (p. 37). It should be noted he does not tie love "exclusively, and thus reductively, to romance, sex, and desire" (p. 37). "Love," in other words,

> is witnessed whenever research participants "break through" negative effects of literacy normativity to take moments that induce fear, enact literal and metaphorical violence, abjection, disavowal, and degradation, and pronounce their humanity, their liberation, and their right to live a life on their own terms. (p. 38)

Pritchard is making a radical move by declaring love as a catalyst of literacy for Black queers, a move I am intrigued by. Restorative literacies via love as praxis "of freedom and self-care in the

face of a social, political, and cultural circumstances" (Pritchard, 2017, p. 37) demonstrates one form queer literacy can take.

Although I see value in Pritchard's articulation of restorative literacy, I seek to complicate the tendency to cast normative literacy in opposition to restorative literacy. On a surface level, one reason the restorative and normative dyad gives me pause comes from my understanding that queerness resists binarization. By framing normative literacies as inherently damning — saying it "steals emotional resources from people, wounding people through texts" (p. 24) — whereas restorative literacies functions in contrast to "[remake] those emotional resources people need for living, especially love, and returns them to work in the best interest of the individual and others" (p. 24), Pritchard seems to rely on good/bad dichotomies. Dichotomies aren't stable in queerness (see Cohen, 1997 for an excellent example on queer refusal of binaries

Admittedly, I recognize Pritchard resists this binarization as "often an amalgam of oppression and liberation" exists at once for his participants (p. 88 - 89). Furthermore, literacy normativity and restorative literacy are helpful in thinking through the oppressive systems — heteronormativity, patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, femmephobia — all working to keep down and suppress self-empowerment, especially with regards to the multiplicitous intersections of identity with Blackness and queerness (p. 20). It makes sense that normative literacy then "problematically shapes literacy as a personal, institutional, and interactional experience in Black LGBTQ people's everyday lives" and, as Pritchard writes, "reveals what [Black LGBTQ people] do to navigate to survive" (p. 241). While I find Pritchard's theory of restorative literacy valuable, my critique lies in his overemphasis on love as strategy of survival in ways that limit considerations of other affective forces.

Animate Literacies looks to other affects as sites of literacies, where some affects may fail or are traumatic, and ultimately may not offer such restoration. More importantly, a theory of animate literacies treats the *force* of affect as a site of literacy (Ahmed, 2004). Love can be radical. Yes. My argument isn't against love in particular, but against love being privileged as the primary mode of restoration — or even why restoration is the desired outcome. Heather Love's perspective clarifies my point here, that engaging "a genealogy of queer affect [[…]] does not overlook the negative, shameful, and difficult feelings that have been so central to queer existence in the last century" (2007, p. 138). I'm thinking more in lines with Kathryn Stockton's (2006) when she asks of queerness, shame, and debasement, "How does debasement foster

attractions? How is it used for aesthetic delight? What does it offer for projects of sorrow and ways of creative historical knowing?" (p. 24). Ultimately, I add to questions like these and ask: Can't we queers be fractured and contradictory and still live lives worth living?

Pritchard's praxis of love is oftentimes framed as being owned by his participants. That is to say, "love is witnessed whenever research participants 'break through' negative effects of literacy normativity" declaring "their right to live a life on their own terms" (Pritchard, 2017, p. 38). What would happen, though, if we approached love on its own terms? How does love function as a queer affect and as a site of literacy? In other words, I believe Pritchard fails to critique why love is a desired outcome in terms of literacy, and perhaps takes for granted that love isn't stable nor necessarily something one can always possess. Couldn't love be a normalizing literacy too? I agree with Buddhist and activist, Thich Nhat Hanh: "I wouldn't want to be in a world without any suffering, because then there would be no compassion and understanding either" (2017, p. 29). Love by itself isn't enough; pain, debasement, anger, hunger, confusion, mourning, and more are necessary as love.

In many ways, Pritchard uses love in restorative literacies to drive home the aspect of reclaiming Black queer agency within literacy — a facet of his definition I celebrate and embrace. It is necessary that queers love and accept themselves and their queerness, and even more so for those multiply marginalized through racism, heteronormativity, and sexism. Pritchard's work is valuable precisely for this reason, especially since *Fashioning* brings many aspects of identity and power relations together in one place. In doing so, it critiques ways to resist normalizing systems and institutions of power. *Fashioning Lives* demonstrates how the many intersections and contradictions of racism, sexism, and nonnormative sexuality are more nuanced and more complicated than previous literacy scholarship has acknowledged, offering a framework that scholars like myself can use to engage with question of literacy and identity.

Fashioning Lives lives throughout my project, though, and I'll revisit it many times. Overall, the value of the works I've engaged cannot go unstated. The historic shift away from the autonomous model of literacy has come with many benefits for the study of literacy. The socio-cognitive understanding of literacy helps us understand that literacy can be, indeed, an ability, fostering community and individual self-worth. Furthermore, I believe that literacy sponsorship has provided us with a tool to assess how literacy can be a resource in culture and society; however, *Animate Literacies* proposes that literacy studies can broaden its scope to include more

critical actors in regards to what makes up literacy and who can participate in it — it's time to turn our attention to the nonhuman. The reorientation I'm proposing calls for a queerer perspective.

The many examples of sponsorship that I pointed to above place either the person or the text, or both central as literacy sponsor. As much as animate literacies is about rethinking the scope of literacy itself, it also is deeply concerned with the lasting effects of the literacy sponsor. Where Brandt sees literacy sponsors as agents who influence literacy in a number of ways, I urge us, in the spirit of *Animacies* (Chen, 2012), to complicate agents of literacy sponsorship to include the *what* and *where*. The boundaries of literacies should not stop at who affects the literacy in our lives, but become porous, complicating the relationships between material and affective dimensions in the many places we find ourselves. In a number of ways, I see an expansion of literacy sponsorship addresses the point that Kuby, Spector, and Thiel (2019) make explicit in *Posthumanism and Literacy Education* for why we need a new materialist and posthuman approach to literacy studies:

> We need theories to think with that don't try to isolate, extract, dessicate, and ossify according [to] the logics of neoliberalism and late capitalism, which will, we believe, not stop until there is no vitality left to extact. We need an ethics of interdisciplinary, interspecies doings at the heart of our work with student/materials, always seen as immersed with complex interconnections that fan out. (p. 14)

Animating literacy sponsorship, to understand that literacy involves a web of actors, is one step that can be taken to build such ethics.

Animate Literacies' Queer Agents

Ultimately, an ongoing premise of my project argues that by examining overlooked or under-acknowledged agents of literacy for queers (e.g. recall the mountain in my prologue) we can develop a richer understanding of particular places, matter, and affects, and also how queerness can bend, contort, and even break the boundaries of literacy. In this dissertation I use

the terms *agents, actors interchangeably* mainly as a stylistic choice, but also because actors have agency, which means they can be considered agencies, or agents. Many new materialist thinkers (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010) and posthumanists (Haraway, 2016; Latour, 2004) make a similar stylistic choice in the interchangeability between these terms.

If literacy sponsors are agents, it follows that they have the capacity for agency. Literacy scholars, it goes without stating then, accept agency as an integral part of literacy and have for sometime now (e.g. Street, 1993). Agency is "understood as our capacity to act or to affect others and be affected" (Walker, 2015, p. 2). It denotes how we do things (Burke, 1945). Notably, Cooper (2011) has argued that agency is embodied and emergent, and "based in individuals' lived knowledge that their actions are their own" (p. 421). In the case of democratic rhetorics, Arabella Lyon (2013) theorizes at length how agency can be understood as the "navigation, maintenance, and construction of useful norms as well as resistance and subordination" of such norms (p. 97). Agency and queerness have been linked a number of times, too (Blackburn, 2004, 2015; Goncalves, 2005; Malinowitz, 1995). More recently Pritchard (2017) highlights in his work with Black LGBTQ peoples' literacies that literacy agency is made up from "uses of literacy" by individuals and institutions (p. 34). In short, literacy scholars often tether agency to the individual—agency belongs to the literate subject.

Freire and Macedo (1987) may offer a minute deviation from this position, but nonetheless never fully shift perspectives. In their discussion on the role of individualism, society, and literacy, Freire makes this claim about human agency:

> It could appear that a position that is profoundly individualistic would end up stimulation and respecting the role of the human agency. In truth, it denies all dimensions of human agency. Why does the individualistic position end up working against the real role of human agency? Because the only real subjectivity is that which confronts its contradictory relationship to objectivity […] . Human agency makes sense and flourishes only when subjectivity is understood in it dialectical, contradictory, dynamic relationship objectivity, from which it derives (p. 58 -59).

By proxy of this dialogic relationship, Freire (1987) infamously argues, "Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (p. 35). I acquiesce to such a view of literacy; the world can be legible and our interaction with it enables us to become literate, and not once and for all, but through an ongoing interaction with it. Although, still, this doesn't imbue the world with anymore agency that it had before. That is to say: I am still the one reading the world. The onus of individual human agency has simply shifted from conventional texts to a rendering of the world-as-text. Freire's expansion of literacy to include the world as a text opens up a conversation, though, on how we may consider the impact of nonhuman actors in our theories and methodologies. I'd like to add to Freire's position, asking not *How do we read the world*? but, *How may the world read and write us*? In other words, what would happen if we considered non-human actors equally as animate as we are?

There's a tendency in the field to see nonhuman agency next to Latourian terms like actor, agent, actent, force, activity, action, and so on; however, it's my aim to give more page-time to queer, feminist, and/or crip theorists of nonhuman agency and less to straight, male voices (e.g. Ahmed, 2004, 2006; Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Kafer, 2013). Alas, at some point encountering Latour is inevitable if merely to point to the origins of such terms as agent or actant, especially when such literacy analytics as the literacy sponsor directly involve categories like *agents*. In his discussion of agency or agencies, Latour lists a few observations that may be helpful in comprehending nonhuman agents insofar as literacy sponsors. Referring to agents in the plural, Latour notes: 1) "agencies are always presented in an account as doing something, that is, making some difference to a state of affairs, transforming some As into Bs through trials with Cs […] . Either it does something or it does not" (2007, p. 52 - 53); 2) "if agency is one thing, its *figuration* is another. What is doing the action is always provided in the account with some flesh and features that make them have some form or shape, no matter how vague" (2007, p. 53). The first condition summarizes Latour's idea of agency — to cause change, to affect. And, in the second, he points to the figuration or what he deems an actant, The agent, as he mentions, can be a vague figuration lest we "not be intimidated by the type of figuration: *ideo*-, or *techno*-, or *bio*-morphisms are morphisms just as much as the incarnation of some actant into a single individual" (2007, p. 54). In other words, the something or someone that causes change must be represented, no matter what form (or morphism).

Recent scholarship on visual rhetoric and circulation theories by Laurie Gries I find to be more useful in terms of making sense of agents and agency. In attempts to call for a new materialist rhetorical approach, Gries defines agency as "an act of intervention" where it is "not some capacity that any single image has and carries with it just as it is not some capacity that any single person has" (2015, p. 57). Admittedly, Gries is making a new materialist intervention to theories of rhetoric and not literacy. However, her denoting agency as both an act and an intervention, which no single person can possess, begins to expand literacy past agents that have something to gain from sponsoring literacy.

One way the queering of agency here begins to take shape is to refigure the agents of literacy sponsorship as queer. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed offers insights that are helpful coming to grips with how queerness blurs boundaries between queers and queer nonhuman agents. Ahmed, by way of Merleau-Ponty, argues that bodies extend into space in relation to objects they are directed towards (2006, p. 25 - 28). Yet, when those bodies are oriented in ways that aren't apparent, or "straight", they are be understood as queer: since queer "is, after all, a spatial term, which then gets translated into a sexual term, a term for a twisted sexuality that does not follow a 'straight line,' a sexuality that is bent and crooked (Cleto 2002: 13)" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 67). While her talk of lines, orientations, and phenomenology offer rich critiques of space and bodies, I bring her into this conversation on animate literacies to complicate a queer approach to agency. Ahmed notes agency as "a matter […] of how bodies come into contact with objects, as a contact that is never simply between two entities […] as each entity is already shaped by contact with others" (p. 188). Carried over into literacy sponsorship we could say that the very dyad of the sponsor and sponsored is an idealistic construct from its inception then, not one based in reality generally speaking but especially for queers. Behind each agent, is a complex web of agential relations that cannot easily be reduced to a single sponsor or set of sponsors; agency cannot be drawn in a direct line.

Furthermore, what happens when such agents fail or don't support literacy in the ways they're intended to? What if they don't follow the straight path from sponsor-to-sponsored? Failure has long been thought of as queer. Halberstam has made this point very clear:

> Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative,

> more surprising ways of being in the world. Failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well […] (2011, p. 2 - 3)

To be queer and to queer both invoke a sense of failure and the same should be considered when we discuss agency. Harkening back to Adrienne Rich's notion of compulsory heterosexuality (1980), queerness also fails to reproduce straightness. To invoke Chen again, queer agents, we'd have to consider, also fail to recreate typified hierarchies of what counts as literacy and what doesn't. The human centric model, arguably has heiarchialized literacy research. A queer agential approach would dismantle this hierarchy and entertain other literacy sponsors that aren't human or textual. Not only would a queering of literacy sponsorship shift from human to non-human agents, but it would also value the ways to resist the urge to reproduce literacy from literacy sponsors who are human. That is to ask: What happens when a queer resists the literacy supposedly sponsored? Resisting literacy reproduction appears to become in a sense queer.

What would be the consequences of queering literacy sponsorship? Here are some foreseeable shifts, but certainly aren't limited to these alone: Queer agency rejects the premise that agents necessarily have some advantage to gain through literacy. Sex, sexuality, and desire emerge as contributing factors in literacy[3]. The fleshiness of our bodies come into play. Queer affect takes on a life of its own. Animality and mattering are turned into active participants in the complex performance of literacy. If queers have done one thing in abundance it is to subvert meaning and language. Alongside campiness and irony (Sontag, 1964), queer slang lexicon is wrought with queer agency, emphasizing mattering, affect, and animality: *fairy*; "*read you to filth"; fruit cake; "spill the tea"; bean flicker; faggot; carpet muncher; stone butch; pansy; fruit; fudge packer; twink; bear; wallflower; "the library is open"; otter; gym bunny; pillow bitter; pup; furry.*

Those are a few terms and pejoratives that come to mind. Notice how each turn of phrase, insult, and/or invective takes the animal and object to be queer, denoting a less-than-ness. I realize that by pointing to this taxonomy of pejoratives I'm ignoring many histories and contexts.

[3] Alexander's coining of sexual literacy is very close to my point here (2008). In his definition, however, he limits sexual literacy to a "knowledge complex that recognizes the significance of sexuality" (p.5). I am extending sexual literacy in such a way that it spills over into ontologies of literacy. In other words, queer literacy sponsorship can include the acts of *doing* sex, sexuality, and desire and not merely how we define and come to know them.

For instance, "*the library is open"* is a queer tradition of "reading" someone — glibly pointing out someone's flaw, oftentimes for an audience — passed down from the 80s drag ball scene in New York[4]. At first glance, *"the library is open"* seems an obvious example of human agency; however, I'd say that the idiom gives agency to the place rather than the individual. *I'm* not opening the library: agency rests in the place not the "reader" as it queers a location often associated with silence. The library is agential in creating a queer context to speak up and at someone.

Chen notes that *stone butch* is an inversion of animate hierarchies, imbuing the stone with queer agency, more so that common (read: hetero) vernacular would deem acceptable. In allusion to the stone butch of Eli Claire's analysis on the term, Chen points out, "'Being stone' is thus not merely a queer affect; it also tugs at and traverses the animacy hierarchy's affective economy with regard to both feeling and touch" (2012, p. 216). To be stone is to take on the agency of a stone with regards to queer sexual expression and identity, in other words.

Another term from my list that violates normative hierarchies of animacy is *furry*. Not only is this adjective indicative of touch and sensation most often in reference to animality, it has also evolved as a queer identity — not one limited to queer sex or sexuality (although often is), but in taking on an animal persona. Communities exist, as does a huge market of costume and special effects, where individuals become their *furry* selves, dressing up and performing an animal they identify as[5]. What plainer example could there be of queer agency crossing human/animal boundaries than individuals performing and identifying as an animal? Like *furry*, queer animality takes on meaning when men in the gay male community are referred to as *gym bunnies* — men who frequent the gym, obsessed with their physique; Or we might consider, *otters* and *bears*, both endearing terms that highlight someone's hairy body: the former usually being young, slender men and the latter usually older men with larger builds.

[4] I think it's important to point out queer, Black trans women coined much of the lexicon I mention here. The vernacular still circulated in queer discourse can be credited, at least in part, to the documentary *Paris in Burning* on the voguing and drag scene in New York. See: Ferguson, 2004; Johnson, 2005 for more on Black queer lexicon.

[5] One wouldn't have to look far to find this community; only google "furry" at your own risk, for the queerness of furry-dom easily crosses over into what could be consider pornography rather quickly. For less prurient insight to the communities of furries, there are documentaries I'd recommend: *Fursonas* (2016), *Furries*, and *Furries: An Inside Look.*

My goal isn't to offer histories and genealogies of these terms, at least here anyway. My point is that queer agency can invert the hierarchies of the inappropriate, the material, the animal in order to create new meaning. Queerness via animacies is "an operator that shiftily [navigates] gradations of matter, including things, actions, and sensibilities" (Chen, 2012, p. 233). In relation to literacy, then, we have to let go of sponsorship that clings desperately to the human at its apex, and turn instead to consider how queer agents can reshape literacy altogether. I'd like to make one last turn: If *Animate Literacies* arrives at literacy through queer agency, what do we then make of literacy?

Animating Literacy

It's been my goal throughout this chapter to turn back, to follow research on literacy in such a way that I highlight momentous permutations of the term and its study. Through engaging with scholars herein and their various arguments, I hope to have illustrated that literacy scholarship understands how literacy: is bound to subjectivity and citizenship; involves disciplining power of the individual; is tied to ideologies, culture, and societal practices; can be unique to place; can stratify along many social categories including but not limited to race and gender; and, entails literacy events in which orality and literacy intersect.

But what is literacy?

I'd like to entertain James Paul Gee's definition of literacy as "the mastery of or fluent control over a secondary Discourse" (1989, p.529) for a moment. Belonging to the New Literacy Studies movement, Gee was among the first to theoretically *define* literacy as separate from writing and reading alone, but as a social practice which he theorizes as Discourse:

> At any moment we are using language we must say or write the right thing in the right way while playing the right social role and (appearing) to hold the right values, beliefs, and attitudes. Thus, what is important is not language, and surely not grammar, but *saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations*. These combinations I call "Discourses," with a capital "D" ("discourse" with a little "d," to me, means connected stretches of language that make sense, so "discourse" is part of "Discourse"). Discourse are ways of being in the world;

> they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. (p. 526)

Gee draws the distinction between primary Discourses and secondary Discourses. The initial or primary Discourse is "the one we first use to make sense of the world and interact with others", our "primary socializing group" (p. 527). This initial Discourse carries us into other secondary Discourses throughout our lives (p. 527). Secondary Discourses can come in either the dominant or nondominant Discourses varieties, with the prior enabling the acquisition of goods while the latter, nondominant Discourses "brings solidarity with a particular social network" (p. 528). It is once Gee finds his way through this discursive lexical experiment, that he comes to define literacy as being fluent or adept at a secondary Discourse.

Gesturing back to Royster's framing of literacy as involving language as a doing, Gee here also points out that literacy is about language in action. That is to say, literacy for Gee deals with ontologies — literacy is about ways of doing and being, if only, albeit, within his framing of Discourses. Let's be careful here, though. Discourse and ontology can be, I realize, at odds with one another. The way we talk about reality and the semantics we use are not always compatible with living in that reality. I'm not sure that Gee would use the word ontological, but as I see it, he does emphasize ontological aspects of literacy in his definition of Discourse.

This shift to literacy as a *doing* indicates an added emphasis that literacy is about the practice of language both in writing and reading and beyond. Take notice that for Gee the social hasn't been eliminated from literacy. Instead the social is augmented, at least in his capital "D"-Discourse. Language alone isn't indicative of literacy, because literacy is much more than language. If literacy equals a mastery of a secondary Discourse, then language is only but one component of literacy. Literacy involves acting in social arenas in certain ways ("playing the right social role"), what we say, how we act, our value systems ("words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes), even how we position our bodies ("gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes").

Gee has been critiqued for this Discourse/discourse, primary/secondary formula. I'm thinking in particular of Alexander and Wallace's (2009) counter-arguments about how Gee's work deadens queer rhetorical agency. The authors resist Gee's suggestion that literacy can be acquired via secondary discourses so easily because it presents "a failure to account for sexual identity" and creates "theoretical and critical blindspots" in the "conceptualization of literacy and

agency" (Alexander & Wallace, 2009, p. 799). Gee's assumption that the primary discourse is "a place of safety and/or coherent identity is particularly difficult for queers who may not even have a visibly acknowledged position from which to articulate themselves", and furthermore, secondary discourses don't always enable queers to have agency in their predominant Discourse (Alexander & Wallace, 2009, p. 800). "Put most simply", Alexander and Wallace write, "our concern about the underlying notion of agency in New Literacy Studies [to which Gee belongs] is that it posits an understanding of agency that oversimplifies the relationship between identity and dominant ideologies" (2009, p. 800). I'm in agreement with Alexander and Wallace: literacy rests in part on the propagation of heteronormativity, which queer agency works to actively resist. Their critique is important to note because it makes clear that literacy cannot be as simple as Gee purports, especially for queers and queerness. Yet the authors' engagement with Gee is different than mine. Where they challenge Gee in order to retheorize queer agency, I look to bring into relief the doing-ness of Gee's literacy — a point that is, indeed, queer as far as how literacy has been studied and defined up until this point.

What's important — and I cannot stress this enough — from Gee's definition is its ontological perspective: literacy is bound to being. Gee's focus on ways of being, the list of *-ing* verbs he notes above, is a critical addition that animate literacies relies on and hopefully expands. This ontological perspective isn't, I argue, examined up close in current literacy scholarship. Up until this point, all these perspectives and tactics of researching literacy have one thing in common: the privileging of the social human. The social turn in literacy scholarship, especially as Gee points out with his definition here, understands literacy existing only between *people*. The anthropocentric sociality of literacy underscores most of literacy scholarship. These ways of being though are limited to human-to-human, or human-to-human-made institutions. Here's a radical question: What would happen to literacy if the human wasn't central to literacy's definition?

I'm not calling for a complete paradigm shift where literacy exists a priori to humanity or outside of society altogether. It's obvious, I recognize, that literacy is tethered to human interaction. What I am suggesting, however, is when we no longer confine ourselves by thinking that literacy lies only between humans, we can come to terms that literacy as an object of study has ignored the world of matter, animality, organic life, and otherwise, that which isn't human,

has yet to be acknowledged in literacy. Literacy involves the human, yes, but shouldn't be limited to just us.

I follow Stacey Waite's understanding of literacy being bound to notions of thinkability (2017, p. 126). According to Waite, literacy involves possibility, what can be imagined and what cannot. Waite, in many ways, picks up where Jonathan Alexander left off in *Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy*. For his intervention to include sex and sexuality as a "crucial component of any literacy education" (2008, p. 3), Alexander defines sexual literacy as "the knowledge complex that recognizes the significance of sexuality to self- and communal definition and that critically engages the stories we tell about sex and sexuality to probe them for controlling values and for ways to resist, when necessary, constraining norms" (2008, p. 5). Building on Alexander's use of sexual literacy, Waite points out "that what is thinkable, or imaginable, is part of the process of reading and writing" (p. 126) and thus, I argue, animate literacies should be equally concerned with what's thinkable or imaginable. Much like Royster, Waite suggests that literacy is about process, that when you are writing you are simultaneously offering a reading to an assumed audience as well as performing a reading in the writing. Reading and writing, coding and decoding are interactional. The doing is a process and exchange.

Elsewhere, Waite highlights that literacy "means that more must become thinkable, readable — including the idea that what is unthinkable is not there" (p. 131). Other scholars have broken down reading and writing in similar ways to broaden their meaning — where reading "refers to the ability to gather and process knowledge from a variety of 'texts'", and writing can mean "the ability to transform knowledge to achieve a particular purpose" (Donehower, Hogg, and Schell, 2007, p. 4).

Waite's definition doesn't put us completely back at square one, however, where literacy is *only* the act of reading and the act of writing. Waite's literacy is still ontologically tethered to the process of literacy, where to *do literacy* is a way of being. Put another way:

> It is common practice to think of literacy as resulting in a gaining of knowledge or forming new knowledge, but we must also consider the possibility […] that being literate in gendered cultural norms […] means learning how to *not know*, how to *not ask*. Or put another way, it means to practice a literacy that precludes other possibilities for knowing and being […] . It's that the literacy practices we have

> learned (however invisibility) which it comes to our bodies, when it comes to identity and gender and sex, are practices of *not knowing*, practices where to know *means* quite literally *to not notice, to accept without question the conditions* given to us, the conditions of our very possibility. (Waite, 2017, p. 132)

Waite articulates how social contractions' of gender identity, sex and sexuality are literacy forces can exclude possibility. Later on Waite points out that queer literacy, then, "involves understanding literacy as bound to seeing and articulating possibility, even when there seems little room to do so" (p. 137). What Waite offers with regards to literacy being concerned with possibility points *Animate Literacies* in a productive direction. If we free ourselves from the shackles that literacy works only one way we can begin engaging with the immediate world around us in new ways too. Our relationships with the land, animals, the air, objects all take on new meaning when we entertain the queer notion that we can listen to and "read" the world in ways that aren't limited to text.

Animate Literacies concerns itself with what is possible with literacy. What practices in our study of literacy have excluded possible worldviews and actors? What have we not noticed, or accepted without questioning the conditions given to us about literacy itself? Much like Waite, too, I think the way to get closer to these questions, indeed, to even engage with them in the first place is queer. If queer literacy is about what is possible, then *Animate Literacies* takes literacy to be queer. As such, I'd like to offer a working definition that explains how animate literacies treats literacy herein:

Literacy is an exchange of forces, emanating from a combination of sign-systems, performances, and the sensate, which flow between human and nonhuman agents, in and through particular places, in order to effect change, creating new ways of being-with and meaning-making.

My definition of literacy here resists quite a bit in terms of traditional literacy milieu, as I have hoped to demonstrate in the previous section and as you'll find throughout the entirety of *Animate Literacies*. First, keeping faith that literacy is a process, I define literacy in terms of both an exchange and of having a forcefulness, an energy. Literacy here isn't an ability. Literacy has a

life of its own, in other words. Although, certainly, I acknowledge that literacy can include abilities, being able, and/or possessing a capability.

As I am theorizing it, however, literacy isn't contingent upon ability. As I show in chapter 4, "Matters of the Closet," where I examine how the body can play a role in literacy, I find that ability is often times connected to what crip theory has come to term compulsory able-bodiedness (see McRuer, 2004). Ability carries baggage with it, which is debilitating for this project. Instead, I prefer the idea that literacy is an active, participatory force — moving, shifting, flowing, perhaps even alive in its own way. This is a point that's essential in understanding how literacies can be animate. The processual nature of literacy, often rendered as "reading and writing," has translated in my definition, to *an exchange*. Exchange here is both noun and verb, a slippage I find helpful. The action of an exchange highlights the literacy event. I'm not breaking away from conventional understanding of literacy events as having "interactional rules which regulate the type and amount of *talk* about what is written, and define ways in which *oral language* reinforces, denies, extends, or sets aside written material" (Heath, 1983, p. 386). Rather, I would like to suggest that through queer agentiality, literacy events can also include energetic exchange between non-textual actors. It is in the exchange itself that animate literacies is found. You could say that I'm indicating that literacy is shared among humans and nonhumans. At the same time an exchange also implies a doing. Note: the purpose of the exchange is not transactional in the way that you would exchange goods. The *exchange of forces* isn't product oriented but instead is caught up in a *flow*; a stark difference from understanding literacy as an economic resource or an ability alone.

Think of this flow as a current of factors and conditions that exist prior to the exchange, consisting as a *combination of sign-systems, performances, and the sensate*. I use the metaphor of *flow* because it performs the fluid nature of literacy. I agree with Waite that being literate is "coming to terms with the idea that nothing, even that which appears so convincingly solid […] is solid", and that worlds are a "kind of fluid" and "moving force" (2017, p. 133). With literacy the flow isn't made up of reading, writing, and language alone. Animate literacies acknowledges the permeability and porousness of literacy actants and their potential to affect one another.

Moreover, literacy as caught up *in a flow* makes room for queer blockages, spillage and leakage, which Chen has pointed out, are important to animacies, and thus, also to my animation of literacy.). I invoke water for its transmutative qualities, which in many ways are queer —

water can shapeshift under necessary conditions, having in it at any given time the qualities of all states of matter, resisting any single form. Yet, it is the basis of all life on earth. Framing literacy as flowing then subverts conventional ideas of literacy (as opposed to literacy being a tool or a resource or a technology) while also highlighting that it's a necessary component of life, and not just of human life alone.

There are also particular ways of doing literacy that involve our bodies, even if often times the body isn't present (e.g. my body is behind this screen typing these words, but my body will be missing when you read this), hence my addition of the *sensate* in the definition above. Literacy is felt, seen, heard, arguably even tasted. In short, literacy is sensational, as much as is it involved with language. I resist using embodied sensation, in lieu of the sensate, because I want to avoid my human reader thinking of their own body first . On the contrary, the sensate warrants pause to reconsider *what, not who*, can feel and sense. In this turn of phrase, the sensate can belong to the cycles of insects emerging, sensing, and singing from the earth or a plant that wilts from too little water. It could be that I'm wrong to include the sensate for other life forms. I realize that we can never truly know the Other outside our own subjective experience. At the very least, though, turning away from sensation insofar as embodiment is concerned puts us in a space to think about how matterings and even sensations have a life of their own.

I do acknowledge, however, that where there is a body — when the sensate *is embodied*, the body always is in some place. Literacy is an exchange of forces *in and through particular places* (a topic I expand upon in the next chapter, especially in reference to Appalachia). One way I animate literacies is to treat place as actively shaping the flow of literacy. If I am treating literacy almost akin to water in that it's fluid, place acts much like a container for the exchange of forces to occur; literacy fills up certain places in different ways. Notice too, that bodies are not the only actors participating in my definition. In the conventional perspectives of literacy as I've hoped to show, the exchange of literacy (i.e. "reading" and "writing") occurs between individuals. I've included with the human, the nonhuman to decenter humanistic models of literacy and emphasize that by paying attention to other entities in literacy, literacy pushes its ontological perspectives even further.

Animate Literacies offers a model of literacy that responds to Brandt and Clinton's suggestion that "[w]e need perspectives that show the various hybrids, alliances, and multiple agents and agencies that simultaneously occupy acts of reading and writing" (2002, p. 347). If

literacy as I am defining it here, is *an exchange of forces*, *which flows* among many types of agents, then literacy, I argue, is involved with *effecting change* and *creating new ways of being-with and meaning-making*. Being-with and meaning-making are both concerned with living, being, even thriving amongst others in a myriad of matterings and affects — objects, sentient or not, bodies, animals, desire, and so on — but doing so meaningfully.

Herein, whenever I discuss "literacy" I'm drawing from this more nuanced interpretation. And when I mention "animate literacies," I am highlighting that in order to shift our definition of literacy to a model that takes the non-human seriously, queerness is key. The entities that cannot language through humanistic means must not be taken for granted. Animate literacies disrupts the harmony around the binary of reading and writing, which takes too seriously human exceptionalism as its bread and butter.

The play on animate as a modifier of literacies in my project's title is intentional: as adjective and verb, animate echoes animacies theory's play with meaning and at the same time simultaneously asks my reader to reconsider who has agency in the model of animate literacies. If we treat animate as solely descriptive then literacies is enlivened, suggestively more alive on its own than if it were the verb. In its second, verb-state meaning you could say I make a request of my reader. I'm asking you *to animate* literacies with me. The slippage of meaning here is meant to lurk behind the premise of animate literacies' that we do not write ourselves into the world alone; reading the world isn't privileged only to us bipedal ilk. The world also reads and writes us.

Chapter 2: Queer Appalachia, The Anthropocene, And Magical Thinking

The first time I saw Gran'ma she was wearing a threadbare dress. I'm guessing it was so shabby because of the many hand washings or lack of money to buy a new one. It was speckled with flowers, perhaps daisies or some relative of petunias. On her feet were house shoes, while she scuttled along the exposed floorboards of her cabin-like home. I sat next to my Mom in awe as my maternal great grandmother — my Mom's dad's mom — attempted to yell over the many other cousins, aunts and uncles huddled about a cast iron stove, which sat in the middle of the living room. *That's just how they talk, Caleb*, Mom explained once we left. Mom and I never yelled at each other. Yelling was left to my dad. Even then, he scolded under his breath before he struck me for listening to Prince or wearing Granny's dress to protest church on Sundays. No. Gran'ma Saylor and that side of Mom's family were simply just loud.

It was the first and last time I saw her. Yet, still, I remember what I asked her before we left. *Why do you have so many locks on your door, Gran'ma?* Being about 4 years old and looking up at the weathered door frame towering above me, there were at least 12 locks of all sorts — not just padlocks and deadbolts, but she had jimmy proof deadbolts, latches that locked, even the thin-sliding locks you'd maneuver through the maze of metal nooks to snap shut. In the corner next to the door sat a shotgun. I didn't ask about it. It was obvious she meant to keep people out. I still to this day never discovered why she had so many locks.

Tucked away near the Kentucky Cumberland's, this was the town where my Mom grew up: less than 850 people and rural. Like Gran'ma's door, that side of the family had always been locked away from me. I didn't have the lexical capacity to know why it was important for the family to keep outsiders out or why yelling was a way of talking. Or, why my Mom's moonshiner dad would prefer light by lamp oil, never go see a doctor, and would eventually die from blood clots in his leg because he refused a hospital visit. They were not me. But now, 24 years later, I realize they were more connected to me than I realized because we both are Appalachian.

We were divided amongst ourselves; my Mom and I were set apart from that side of the family. Mom moved away. She travelled around the country following my dad while he was in the military, and at some point lived in Italy for 3 years. Technically, you could consider me a Yankee if you take into consideration I was born a military brat in New York. I came back to

Kentucky when I was a few months old on my Mom's hip after my dad struck her with me in her arms. I wasn't born in Appalachia, but, still, I am Appalachian. My point isn't to belabor family origins. Nor, is it to say that Mom's side is Appalachian *only* because they were isolated, private people or yelled or made moonshine. My point is that I realize Appalachia is fraught with contradictions. Sometimes Appalachia doesn't make sense. There's a queerness in them Mountains.

This chapter begins there: Queer Appalachia. I look to what can make Appalachia a region, identity, and culture — refusing any one stable marker besides the mountains themselves. In particular and with regards to *Animate Literacies*, I am interested not only in what could make Appalachia queer, but also how we can treat the mountains as queer agents. To do this, next, I look to perspectives in literacy studies that pay close attention to place, such as rural literacies (Donehower, Hogg, & Schell, 2007) and explore how rural literacies may not always be the solution in theorizing places like Appalachia (Webb-Sunderhaus, 2015). Complicating current approaches to Appalachian literacies, I explore how the Anthropocene — the current geological period of time where humans have permanently changed the earth — has influenced literacy. Finally by turning more directly to posthumanism and new materialism, I suggest that we can begin telling a different story of literacy studies, one that requires a framework of interconnectedness, what I'm calling *magical thinking*, to see how the land and mountains and landscapes are alive, how places like Appalachia are agential as literacy sponsors.

Why Queer Appalachia?

The Appalachian Mountain range is one consistent factor in determining what is Appalachia. The mountains run from the bottom of New York, curving like a backwards *C* through Pennsylvania, southeast Ohio, the entire state of West Virginia, the western-border of Virginia, parts of the Carolinas, the east halves of Kentucky and Tennessee, ending at the tip of Alabama and Georgia. It's incredibly important to note: just because there is *the* Appalachian Mountains, it doesn't follow that there is such thing as *the* Appalachian culture and identity. There are, instead, Appalachia*s*.

Appalachia is a polymorphism anchored by geography. This becomes clear in most recent critical scholarship about the area: "Appalachia as a place has been so difficult to define that some have suggested that it is more akin to an idea than a geographic locale" (Straw, 2004,

p. 3). But is isn't simple enough to be rendered completely an idea, "Appalachia is both a real place to those who live there and a sometimes mythic land to outsiders", and for those who do live in Appalachia, "how they identify themselves varies from person to person" (Clark & Hayward, 2013, p. 1-2). One attempt to outline clearer edges of Appalachia that I found particularly interesting comes from Briggs, where he describes four stereotypical images of Appalachia as being

> *pristine Appalachia*, the unspoiled mountains and hills along the Appalachian trail […] *backwater Appalachia*, home of the "strange land and peculiar people" in thousands of stories, novels radio and TV programs and filmes […] *Anglo-Saxon Appalachia*, once defined by *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* as a mountain region of "white natives" […] *pitiful Appalachia*, the poster region of welfare and privation […] (2006, p. xii -xiii)

The last image of poverty being synonymous with Appalachia rings more authentic than any other definition, but not because it's wholly truthful. Appalachia was defined as a region, at least in terms of official policy, because of the federal government's "aide" of money and resources. The incorrect characterization of Appalachia as primarily white region is demonstrably false. The large Scots-Irish antebellum migration to the mountains is oftentimes the given explanation as to why Appalachia is predominately white, but this narrative has been critiqued a number of times by researchers. There were Scots-Irish immigrants, but there were also German, French, Welsh, Dutch, and Scots immigrants as well (Blethen, 2004, p. 18).

More important, however, in regards to race, the homogenized myth surrounding whiteness ignores the Indigenous Peoples who occupied the mountains for 10,000 years before pioneer settlement (Blethen, 2004, p. 17; Boyd, 2004). And while slavery was present in Appalachia during late 19th century, it was complicated in the Appalachian region, with both "slave and free" Blacks reaching a population of roughly 175,000 and growing post-Civil war (Inscoe, 2004, p. 34). Ultimately, the "Scots-Irish heritage [of Appalachia] is real […] but the exaggerated dominance of its influence in the region is often put into the service of a variety of outcomes" (Catte, 2018, p. 71), including racism and settler colonialism.

In exploring why Appalachia has been linked to stereotypical images of poverty, I have yet to find any Appalachian scholarship that doesn't reference, minimally in passing or through lengthy remonstration, the Appalachian Regional Commission — the ARC, established in 1965 during the Johnson administration's War on Poverty. It was the ARC that defined Appalachia as a distinct area of the United States in terms of legislation. I'd summarize the motivation for the ARC's formation as being ultimately driven by the exploitation of economic and political resources and labor. It concealed its true purpose behind the visage of a philanthropic mission to save an entire region from poverty (Whisnet 1994, especially p. 126 - 155). By ARC's design, "the region came to be defined by poverty, and subsequently poverty came to be defined by the region" (Catte, 2018, p. 11). Illiteracy configures into these stereotypes as well. Take for instance that the 2000 census comes to term illiteracy as a combination of poverty and degree of education ("Educational Attainment", 2003).

The relationship between poverty and Appalachia lingers still. You'll find it in the stories that follow. If I haven't made it clear, I grew up poor from Appalachia. Appalachia isn't *only* poor; the reason the region is cast this way is because it was, in part, defined by our national narrative as such. My point runs in tandem to Elizabeth Catte's in *What you are getting wrong about Appalachia* (2018):

> If I sound cagey about providing resolute and emphatic markers of "Appalachia-ness," it is because people woefully overuse the term "Appalachian culture." This is particularly true in our current moment that fetishsizes the presumed homogeneity and cohesiveness of the region and uses these characteristics to explain complex political and social realities. Appalachian scholars and activists often prefer to stress our interconnectedness to other regions and peoples rather than set ourselves apart as exceptions. (p. 14 - 15)

I'm not sure if I would be blacklisted among Appalachian scholars for saying it, but I find all the definitions above resonate with my experience in some way. Appalachia *is* romanticized because it *is* beautiful; *is* poor in places; *is* in need of restoration, especially with regards to the land; *is* racist like the rest of the U.S., littered with confederate memorabilia and racist hate groups. But it

isn't *just* one or all or always those things. Perhaps that's the point though. There isn't a single way to define what it means *to be* Appalachian.

For instance, a look at the rhetoric of DNA ancestry tests can serve to illustrate how the perpetuations of stereotypes and ways of defining Appalachia persist. After taking advantage of an Ancestry.com 50% off special for mapping DNA, my vial of spit was traced back to the Southeastern Kentucky and Holston River Valley Settlers. My heritage was described as such:

> Thousands of settlers followed Daniel Boone into Kentucky in the late 1700s. Among them were the descendants of English, Scots-Irish, and German immigrants who settled the mountainous terrain of southern Kentucky's Appalachian region. These rugged individualists lived in close-knit family clans, farmed and hunted to survive, and became famous for their home-brewed moonshine. Coal mining brought the region a wave of relative prosperity, but its collapse finally led some to leave Appalachia for the first time in 125 years. (Ancestry.com, 2018, n.p.)

Being cast as "rugged" isn't too far off from the stereotypes that Appalachian scholars have to work against even to this day. Were early Appalachian settlers really and truly "individualist"? Possibly. The description, despite its ambiguity, is a clear indicator of how Appalachia is written about and perceived even now. The rhetorical depictions and cultural consumption of Appalachia has been studied at length to combat these reductive castings of the region (e.g. Bradshaw, 2017; Snyder, 2014; Webb-Sunderhaus & Donehower, 2015).

Appalachia has been cast as one of America's Others for quite some time. You could say that it's othered status was in part shaped by the ARC's influence, but mostly the othered status has been formed by outsiders looking and coming in. After the Civil War, capitalism sunk its teeth into the region, marking Appalachia as a place to be saved with the promises of modernity, which should be understood as profit (Catte, 2018, p. 36; McKinney, 2004). Whether it was academics that come to study Appalachians (see Catte, 2018, p. 38-39; Obermiller & Scott, 2015), corporations that exploit land for coal and resources (Lewis, 2004), or the government that subsidizes healthcare, welfare, and education (Whisnant, 1994; Davis & Baker, 2015), Appalachia in the cultural imagination is simultaneously set apart from America and deeply part

of it. As Eller puts it, "We *know* Appalachia exists because we need it to exist in order to define what we are not" (2008, p. 3). A parallel can be drawn with Eller's point here to similar arguments about queerness in regards to straightness.

And, this leads me to my point: Appalachia is queer. Appalachia is a queer place. Those who identify as Appalachian know this, I've found. Appalachia identities exist but it's incredibly difficult to spell out what it means to be Appalachian. Appalachia is queer because it's just as slippery an identificatory category. The trickiness and contradiction that surrounds Appalachia as region and identity aren't the only premises to warrant its queerness though.

Whether queer theorists draw from Rich's compulsory heterosexuality (1980), through Derrida's différance (see Wilchins, 2004, p. 38 - 52), or by way of Foucault's Repressive Hypothesis (1978), there's a notion in queer theory that through queerness, straightness is propagated and reified as the norm. In other words straightness needs queerness to set it apart (Berlant & Warner, 1998; Butler, 1991; McCruer, 2006, p. 6 - 9), just like America needs Appalachia to set its dominant culture apart. Although don't mistake me. I'm not implying Appalachia's queerness is the same type as sexual or gender non-normativity (although it certainly can be). This doesn't mean to be Appalachian is to be queer-read-as-non-straight, either; homo-/trans-/queer-phobia and queer hate crimes are just as prevalent in Appalachia as they are elsewhere in the United States. It is in otherness, strangeness, indeterminacy, and resistance that Appalachia and queerness overlap.

Working under the assumption that Appalachia is a queer place and to be Appalachian is to be queer in its own way, I still haven't addressed *why* I chose Appalachia as the site of my research. In order to get there, it's important to spell out my positionality as a researcher, or what Grabill (2012) calls a research stance. The research stance, he says, "is the single most important issue to consider when researching in or with communities and needs to be better understood in any conversation about research methodology" (p. 211) and it addresses these 3 questions:

- researcher identity: Who am I personally? as a researcher? in relationship to my discipline purposes?
- as a researcher. Why research?
- questions of power and ethics. What are my commitment with respect to research? (p. 215)

Identity, both of my participants and my own, is at the heart of this project along with the queering of literacy. It's the reason I begin with a story in my prelude and, as far as this chapter, intertwine my queer stories into the academic prose.

I am an Appalachian queer [6]who bought into the fable that to be Appalachian and to be successful, is to leave Appalachia. "To leave", as Catte critiques it, "is to demonstrate our ambition, to be something other than dependent and stubborn. To leave is to be productive rather than complacent, and to refuse is to be complicit" (2018, p.127). It cannot be overstated how Appalachians have a bad reputation for being dependent and lazy, expectant of aide, lacking motivation — all factors grossly misrepresenting and overlooking how this narrative began. Appalachia was long a piecemeal part of my identity, encroaching but never fully actualized till grad school. I didn't want to be associated with where I grew up. I actively worked to muffle my dialect. I sought higher education as a ticket *to get the hell outta here*, as my Mom would say. I came out young, at 14, as a huge *FUCK YOU* to everyone around me. Reading and writing and being in the top 10 - 20% of my class all through Elementary, Middle, and High School took priority so I could "make something of myself."

I worked so hard to not be the stereotypes of where I lived during my first 18 years, even if I didn't know I was Appalachian at the time. Now I realize now that I was struggling with the stereotypes of Appalachia. This only occurred to me when I was faced with the question all academics must ask at some point: Why does your research matter? Before I could answer, I realized Appalachia was a hole in my life. It was a place on a map that I tried to cover up with a college degree, choke out with Standardized English, and erase by moving to the city. "You're from Kentucky? But, you don't sound like it," a undergrad English professor once asked me. Still I can hear her and see where I stood when I was caught for being from rural Kentucky years

[6] I am not attempting to claim that to be Appalachian *is to leave Appalachia*. Instead, this was my perception of the area where I grew up and was intermittently homeless. I think the reason I had this perception was mainly due to the stereotypes that lingered from the Appalachian Migration. As early as the 1930 then into the late 50s and beyond, Appalachians left their mountain jobs in order to find economic success in more urban, Midwestern cities like Cincinnati. My mom has even told me stories of how she experienced this herself as a young girl, around the age of 5 (circa 1970). She used to run the streets of Reading, a northern suburb of Cincinnati. For more on the Appalachian Migration see Williams (2002).

ago. Now I'm returning to Appalachia not to fix some problem there, but to understand why on some level and in some instances, it's considered a problem to be Appalachian for Appalachians.

You can look at this at this way: Appalachia has come alive for me. *Animate Literacies* isn't simply a project of addressing a dissonance in the field of literacy, rhetoric, and composition research in regards to queers and Appalachia. *Animate Literacies* is all those things and more. It is also a spiritual journey where I'm trying to make sense of my own queer relationship with the home I've never considered a home. Not only am I trying to make sense of this lacking in my life, but in-line with animate literacies, Appalachia has galvanized my research as an active agent in my work. As such, I'm left wondering: how can we give place the agency it deserves?

Rural Literacies and Environmentalism

The binary of rural and urban isn't always productive for a theory of animate literacies. Those categories don't adequately account for place as agential in literacy practices, nor do they always help to explain how animate literacies flows in and through places — animate literacies is immediately concerned with place, not with the qualifications of rural versus urban. In-line with Reynolds' (2004) thinking, places, as I see it, "are constructed and reproduced not simply by boundaries but also by practices, structures of feeling, and sedimented features of *habitus*" (p. 2) — or, embodied practices that become habits. This section thinks through place in such a way and how the rural-urban binary falls apart for Appalachia, too. I turn to conversations in literacy studies that discuss this rural-urban divide and how often times these conversations typically turn to talk of environmentalism. I, then, turn my focus to how even talk of environmentalism tends to overlook how the land and particular places are agential in and of themselves.

Rural Literacies (Donehower, Hogg, & Schell, 2007) argues the role of place factors into literacy development. As its title suggests, the text seeks to interrogate and intervene in the understanding of rural place in literacy studies, positioning rural literacy as a critical inquiry in the field of composition and rhetoric in particular. The authors understand "rural"

> as a quantitative measure, involving statistics on population and region as described by the U.S. Census; as a geographic term, denoting particular regions

> and areas or spaces and places; and as a cultural term, one that involves the interaction of people in groups and communities. (p. 2)

The term, then, is not limited strictly to location alone. By situating rural in such a way, the authors seek "[t]o acknowledge the diversity and complexity of rural populations," and as a result dismantle "the commonplace myth that rural America is homogenous" (p. 3).

While literacy in rural areas had been studied (i.e. Brandt, 2001; Heath, 1987), it isn't until this text that the terms rural and literacy were fused together in one definition. The authors first give their own expansive framing of literacy:

> Literacy has been used […] to mean everything from the skills needed to learn to read and write at the barest functional level to the ability to recall and apply vast amounts of knowledge from a variety of fields […] "literacy" describes the skills and practices needed to gain knowledge , evaluate and interpret that knowledge, and apply that knowledge to accomplish particular goals […] . "Reading" refers to the ability to gather and process knowledge from a variety of "texts"; "writing" means the ability to transform knowledge to achieve a particular purpose, just as writers transform ideas and information to accomplish rhetorical goals. (p. 3-4)

The authors demonstrate that literacy is complicated as I have been arguing. In this light, reading no longer is limited to words on a page; writing isn't using a word processor or pen and paper. Reading is a symbolic act of interpreting data and information from texts, understood in the broadest sense. Writing is to take that information and redistribute it via the writer into the world and their communities. This understanding of literacy doesn't lose the literal meanings of reading and writing, but in a very postmodern sense, opens up the terms and allows for innumerable types of literacies to be studied.

Donehower, Hogg, and Schell spell it out: "Rural literacies, then, refers to the particular kinds of literate skills needed to achieve the goals of sustaining life in rural areas — or, to use Brandt's terms, to pursue the opportunities and create the public policies and economic opportunities needed to sustain rural communities" (p. 4). There are a few premises that the authors are working with in order to reach this point. Initially, they assume that sustainability is

key to rural literacy. Sustaining life presupposes that life in rural areas is worth sustaining, an agreeable argument. The authors draw on ecocompositionist Derek Owens definition of sustainability that relies on "adjusting [a community's] current behavior so that it causes the least amount of harm to future generations" (p. 6). Futurity and generational reproduction are central concerns in this vision of sustainability. Insofar as rural literacies' connection with sustainability, I can't help but wonder if they authors are thinking through the many public and economic limitations or exclusions of literacy that affect queers in rural spaces. While the authors don't engage with queerness in terms of the resources of literacy, they do point out there are often outside efforts and influences to squelch these resources in rural areas.

Like many scholars, Donehower et al draw on The Department of Commerce's Bureau of Census' year 2000 census stipulations that any area that has less than 1,000 person per block group or per square mile are considered rural, and the authors here also draw from this definition (Donehower et al. 2007, p. 2-3 [see also: Herring, 2010; Halberstam, 2005, p. 22-46]). That being said, the authors point out they understand rural as a "a geographic term, denoting particular regions and areas or spaces and places; and as a cultural term, one that involves the interaction of people in groups and communities" (p. 2). I support this framing of rural, and add that within the cultural aspect of its definition, rural is also a personal definition. Most of the time, from my experience, rural is a matter of identity. I've known plenty of individuals who have moved from rural Kentucky to cities and left the rural aspects of their identifications behind, while others embrace rural identity or a combination of rural and urban as who they are. Rural, then, is defined by population density, geographic terms, cultural *and* identificatory measures.

It's for this reason I agree with Donehower et al that rural literacies are always operating against negative stereotypes. They write:

> Rural Americans are often thought to be illiterate, untechnological, and simplistic — stereotypes that we have encountered frequently as those from rural backgrounds and as educations in American colleges and universities. On the other hand, we also wish to address the often romantic or ahistorical visions of rural life that are as common as negative stereotypes. (p. 14)

Rural literacies engage with both of these stereotypical views, proving that the matters of being literate isn't really the issue. Instead the problem lies in cultural perception of rurality. Or as Donehower et al puts it: "Many of these [rural] people, though, are quite 'literate' by any measure", and "then literacy deviance may have little to do with actual reading or writing ability; it is instead an issue of economic and educational class" (p. 22). Another element that negatively affects the perpetuation of these stereotypes has been globalization (p. 16), where technology has been thought to be the savior of all literacy woes with its promise of access to information and education.

Donehower et al explains how these outside forces influencing rural literacy often take the form of education reform. She identifies three issues with rural education and rural literacy, that have been consistently thought of as in need of repair (p.19-23), or as "solutions to the so-called problems of rural literacy": 1) the attempt to "'modernize' the rural population by bringing them into line with the technological, economic, and cultural systems of urban life"; 2) "recognize rural culture as a thing apart from urban life and work to preserve its difference"; 3) the most radical solution is to abandon rural settlements, merging with city school districts, "making city centers the locus of educational activity" (p. 27). Notice here how Donehower et al critiques the ways in which rural literacy is always marked by the need to be fixed within the framework of the urban. It is as though the rural cannot coexist with the urban inside the frameworks of the progress narrative. The rural is constructed as problematic because it can't be modern. A benefit of naming and understanding rural literacies works to expose these misconstructions of rural place while at the same time presses against such outside forces. Donehower — in her own chapter — ultimately calls for literacy sponsorship in order to combat these views:

> Literacy sponsors in rural areas have an obligation to do research, to determine the specifics of local literacies situated in particular contexts, and to assume that past characterizations may be riddled with inaccuracies, given the strong weight of public memories about rural literacies that rely heavily on the Deliverance/Davy Crockett stereotypes. (p. 70)

My project takes up Donehower's call to action. It exposes the necessary work of rural literacy scholars as essential to not only rural peoples and places, but also the value of literacy research. *Animate Literacies* responds to Donehower's statement that the "specifics of local literacies" need to be interrogated more in depth but also by doing so we must reconsider what we may be missing in those particular rural contexts. To animate the framing of rural literacies, then, begs the questions: What non-human sponsors exist in the rural that may not in the urban and why are they overlooked in terms of literacy? What could rural literacies be taking for granted? And it certainly brings into focus, how has queerness been missing from rural literacies?

Besides a non-human perspective, other scholars have also questioned the extent to which frameworks of rural literacies are helpful especially in terms of specific places like Appalachia. When Sara Webb-Sunderhaus (2015) writes on the importance of developing rhetorical theories for Appalachian literacies, she aptly notes, "Appalachian is not a synonym for rural" (p. 192). Continuing, she claims that "scholarship on rural literacies will not necessarily help us, due to the specific history of Appalachia" (p. 192). In particular, "Appalachia needs a literacy theory that is grounded in the region and sensitive to its long history of exploitation and marginalization without positioning Appalachians as passive victims or ignorant rubes" (p. 192). Ultimately, she argues, "We need a theory of literacy of and for Appalachians that acknowledges literacy's contradictory nature and makes real distinctions among the functions and values of literacy for groups, families, and individuals" (p. 191). I'd like to think *Animate Literacies* can offer another model through which to think about Appalachia and what it means to be Appalachian.

It may be a model though, that requests us not to have to decide between a theory of literacy only for groups, families, and individuals and for the sustainability of Appalachian communities in rural landscapes. I could see how ecocomposition could offer a way to bridge a gap here. Ecocomposition as a subfield in composition, rhetoric, and literacies studies beginning in the late eighties (e.g. Cooper, 1986), has built itself up around the idea that writing classrooms "serve as a foundation for students to further understand their identity in a world where social concern reflect a growing consciousness of environmental threats" (Dell, n.d., n.p.). Even then, talk of sustainability (Owens, 2001) and nature writing (Johnson-Sheehan & Stewart, 2007) appear to treat the land as inert, something observable, and without any power on its own. *We* are always attempting to save the landscape, be *apart* from nature, understand the world *out there*. Ecocomposition isn't wide enough to fill the rift.

Dobrin (2002) gets us closer to treating the landscape as an actor in worldmaking, arguing we have to experience our environment by being in it. Still, I'd like to think that there is no divide between myself and "nature." Even sitting here on my computer writing, behind a screen and at a desk I am still in "nature" despite looking through window to my right and seeing my garden. What if we consider a different option: there is no "nature" out there; we are always already in it. Humans invented the concept of nature, as they did "environment" and "ecologies." The way I view "nature" is as a human construct, artificial and participatory in human exceptionalism. So, in order to propose an alternative perspective, which opens up literacy studies to treat the land as an active participant and avoid treating it as a passive victim, we have to admit to the damage humankind has caused in the construction of the Anthropocene.

The Anthropocene, Descartes, and New Materialist Futures

From the Greek *anthropo-* to be in relation to the human and *-cene* from *kainos* meaning new, Anthropocene points to the current geological period of time marking how humans have permanently altered the earth. Anna Tsing (2015) writes

> the Anthropocene [is] the epoch in which human disturbance outranks other geological forces […] . Without planning or intention, humans have made a mess of our planet […] The most convincing Anthropocene time line begins not with our species but rather with the advent of modern capitalism, which has directed long-distance destruction of landscapes and ecologies […] Such techniques have segregated humans and political identities, obscuring collaborative survival. (p. 19)

Drawing the Anthropocene's origins to capitalism, Tsing implicitly draws literacy into the fray. The rise of global and industrial capitalism and the increase in literacy goes hand in hand. Brandt's notion that literacy is a resource much the way electricity is a resource has different meaning when we read it through the lens of the Anthropocene.

In her critique of the Anthropocene, Donna Haraway in her recent collection of essays, *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), offers some insight for an alternative mode of dealing with anthropocenic consequences:

> Man plus Tools does not make history. That is the story of History human exceptionalists tell […] That History must give way to geostories, to Gaia stories […] Revolt needs other forms of action and other stories for solace, inspiration, and effectiveness. (p. 49)

What has literacy been if not a tool, as my last chapter shows? How can we conceptualize literacies differently? In particular, I'm interested in what Haraway means when she argues for other modes of storytelling. In the next chapter, I go into detail how a methodology of queer storytelling — the stories of other queers, stories of mountains, creeks, animals, stone and smoke, stories of place, queer stories of fucking, sucking and romping, stories that expose queer-phobia and make audible queer pain, stories where finding community is finding survival, stories that attempt and fail to construe in words the agency of the nonhuman — is a queer framing of Haraway's point above.

When I make the leap from discussing literacy sponsorship as economic resource in the last chapter, to arguing that literacy is playing a role in the demise of our planet in this chapter, I do so acknowledging that I'm making a claim that may feel out of place in a literacy studies project. To understand the logic behind the Anthropocene's humancentrism is to understand, though, that "the rise of capitalism entangles us with ideas of progress and with the spread of techniques of alienation that turn both humans and other beings into resources" (Tsing, 2015, p. 19). This narrative of progress is partially the reason that, "Increases, and demands for further increases, in the volume and velocity of global traffics in peoples, goods, services, capital, and information are forcing literacy scholars and teachers to revise their models of literacy and literacy instruction" (Horner & Lu, 2014, p. 111). In other words, literacy is enmeshed in the labor of capitalism (See also: Horner, 2016). By proxy, I argue, literacy had an impact on and in the rise of the Anthropocene. How did we get here?

One place to begin is the philosophy of Rene Descartes. Often called the "father of modern philosophy," Descartes offers us a springboard to which we came understand why the world outside ourselves seems so inert — inanimate, if you will. New materialist philosophers have made this point:

> Many of our ideas about materiality in fact remain indebted to Descartes, who defined matter in the seventeenth century as corporeal substance constituted of length, breadth, and thickness; as extended, uniform, and inert. This provided the basis for modern ideas of nature as quantifiable and measurable […] (Coole & Frost, 2007, p. 7)

How do we quantify and measure? Through sign-systems and the uptake of those sign-systems — tools aimed at dividing the world up into measurements whether through words or numbers. To put another way, as early as the seventeenth century, literacy had a role to play in labeling the world an inactive material, computable by human language.

Another consequence of Descartes' philosophy was the separation of the human from nature. A "corollary of this calculable natural world" was "a sense of mastery bequeathed to the thinking subject: the *cogito*" or *I think* (Coole & Frost, 2007, p. 8). The dictum of *ergo cogito sum*, or *I think therefore I am*, was Descartes' raison d'etre and consequently, "modern philosophy has variously portrayed humans as rational, self-aware, free, and self-moving agents" (Coole & Frost, 2007, p. 8). Our capacity for reasoning has deluded our place in the world: "The [Cartesian] understanding of matter thereby yields a conceptual and practical domination of nature as well as a specifically modern attitude or ethos of subjectivist potency" (Coole & Frost, 2007, p. 8). This ethos of subjectivist potency, as I read it, is a nicer way to put an ongoing argument of *Animate Literacies* all along. Through our logical capacities we are told we are capable of doing anything *as long as we put our mind to it*. In other words, because I'm a reasoning-being, all other non-human beings out there are, by their lack of self-awareness, below me and thus can be dominated. The Cartesian model starts to sound a lot like capitalism[7].

If matter is out there, not alive in the same way we humans are, then humans are capable of measuring its worth. For instance, vegetation turns into crops. Crops are turned into farms. Farming requires harvesting and distribution. Distribution turns profit. More profit, means more crops, means expansion and more capital. Tsing (2015) calls this scalability and explains how it is a requirement within capitalism. "The success of expansion through scalability," she writes, "shaped capitalist modernization": "Eventually, [investors] posited that everything on earth —

[7] There are connections here to biblical literacy as well. Genesis does give man dominion over nature.

and beyond — might be scalable, and thus exchangeable at market values. This utilitarianism, which eventually congealed as modern economics and contributed to forging more scalability […] " (Tsing, 2015, p. 40). Capitalism. Anthropocene. Scalability. Cogito. The aftermath of such modernization begins to paint a clearer picture why Appalachia was resourced for its land and its peoples thought of as less than for not being "educated." It becomes clearer, too I think, through the lens of capitalism and the Anthropocene why literacy sponsorship has often been seen as a humans-only club: a tool of capitalism passed down, from one person to the next, as long as it serves advantage (read: has capital) to both the sponsor and sponsored.

I'd like to suggest that *Animate Literacies* topples over this pyramidal worldview. Nature is no longer on the ground, below us, while we sit in our towers of capitalism, reading our books, talking amongst ourselves, and looking out at the world we think we have mastered. In fact, the nature-human binary isn't as useful just as the rural-urban isn't that help in thinking about animate literacies. What happens if we stay on this anthropocentric path of ruin? That type of binary human versus nature thinking has led us here. As I write this, for example, over the last week there were record-breaking forest fires producing a fire tornado (not a typo) with 140+ mph winds in California (Rice, 2018, n.p.). We must become more adequately equipped for not only how we read and write the world, but how the world comes to write us before it sweeps us away in a fiery vortex to an Oz-inferno I don't particularly want to visit. This is where queer, posthumanism, and new materialist thought can offer some insight into breaking with the binaries that privilege the human..

An overlap with my point has been made with ecological studies. Critiqued in a similar way that I'm critique human folly in literacy studies, queer ecology proposes that species and lifeforms are not tidy, distinct from one another — species live in a current of DNA much to how literacy, as I purport, is a water-like flow of energetic forces. It "requires a vocabulary envisioning this liquid life" that "life-forms constitute a *mesh*, a nontotalizable, open-ended concatenation of interrelations that blur and confound boundaries at practically any level: between species, between the living and the nonliving, between organism and environment" (Morton, 2010, p. 275). How do we get to the point that we are teaching and using this alternative, liquid vocabulary? A theory of animate literacies is an attempt to enact such liquid lives, especially by listening to literacy in a new way (discussed at length in the next chapter). It

also requires us to understand an alternative way of thinking about our place in the world and what to do with the problem Descartes left us with.

Two recent branches of philosophy have offered some ways to think through the Anthropocene's wreckage. Object oriented ontology (OOO, for short) proposes the radical assumption that things alternatively called objects have their own agency and independent existence (see: Bryant, 2011; Harman, 2009; Morton, 2013, 2015). New materialism on the other hand, offers a point of view that claims we should concern ourselves less with what makes up the objects in the universe, and more instead with how we can get along better with the nonhuman agents around us (see: Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Coole & Frost, et al., 2009). There are differences and layers of argumentation on the Venn diagram of OOO and new materialism that I won't unpack here, since philosophers have done so elsewhere (especially: Bryant, Srnicek, & Harman, 2011).

I'm more concerned with a common perspective both philosophical branches share: We shouldn't worry about proving things exist outside our perception of them because we can never know. This problem has been defined as *correlationism*. As Morton puts it, "The problem as correlationism sees it is, is the light on in the fridge when you close the door?" (2012, p. 9). Morton demonstrates how correlationism limits the world outside the human mind. Another way to frame the question, as my Papaw always joked: If a bear farts in the woods and no one's around, does it make a sound? We will never know. Once we come to terms with such unknowable things, we realize we've been asking the wrong questions all along. Morton explains it this way:

> But the problem [of correlationism] goes back further than the Romantic period, all the way back to the beginning of the modern period […] . The restriction of philosophy's bandwidth attempts to resolve a conundrum that has been obsessing European thinking since at least the uncritical inheritance by Decastes of the scholastic view of substance [of things] […] Descartes uncritically imported the very scholasticism his work undermined, imported it into the area that mattered most, the area of ontology […] . Epistemology gradually took over […] (Morton, 2013, p. 9)

Correlationism assumes that "meaning is only possible between a human mind and what it thinks" (Morton, 2013, p. 9). We can't solve the paradox; we can learn to live with it in more creative ways. Animate literacies exposes how these orderings have also ordered the literacies we engage with. The Cartesian divide of matter and subject, where the world outside myself only has meaning when I'm in its presence, has inadvertently ordered the world in hierarchies of agency and developed language that mirrors such orderings, the premise of animacies theory (Chen, 2012) all along.

All definitions, studies, and pedagogies of literacy have propagated literacy with human apogee, and we are so inculcated by this spawning of human-exceptionalism that we need wider ways of being to bring the nonhuman into our worldview. My suggestion for another option is a queer turn back to an origin myth that doesn't have thinkers like Descartes at its helm. We need new stories to shape literacy not as rungs on a ladder or that triangulates agency into a pyramidal structure.

Another Way: Magical Thinking

We have to come to a different origin myth where the playing-field is leveled and all actors have a fair shot at making the team. The Anthropocene has told a story with the human as the protagonist and capitalism as its motif. What if "rather than limit our analyses to one creature at a time (including humans), or even one relationship, if we want to know what makes a place livable we should be studying polyphic assemblages, gatherings as a way of being" (Tsing, 2015, p.157). Which is to say, not only do we study literacy through analytics like literacy sponsorship or restorative literacy practices, we must also examine those devices as part of a larger story. This section explores another way of thinking of the world, as interconnected, vital, and emergent, to eventually reach another means of approaching literacy and literacy practices as animated.

How do we come to face non-human actors as equals, and accept we don't have to have all the answers — a critical underlying tenet of OOO philosophy (Harman, 2005; Morton, 2013, 2015)? Even physics has shown that we can't have all the answers. Quantum mechanics can't make sense of the smallest particle it can identify and forces us to abandon that "any object has, by itself, any intrinsic properties at all" (Bohm, 1989, p. 139). We aren't required to know the

theories of quantum mechanics to reach this point, I'd say; we need a theory of literacy where we can learn from such unexplainable events, things, and affects.

It requires a radical shift from divisive thinking. No longer is it us humans in here and nature with its non-humans out there. We have to come to terms with the notion that no matter how much we divide the world up into pieces, smaller and smaller, imagining we will arrive at the truth like an infinite Russian nesting doll hiding the Truth in its innermost chamber, we will never find it. Instead *Animate Literacies* proposes the thinking of *being-with*, as I've been calling it, or, as new materialist, Karen Barad names it, intra-action: "[T]he object and the measuring agencies emerge from, rather than precede, the intra-action that produces them" (2007, p. 128). Barad is discussing the relationship between tools and their users in quantum physics when she coins this term, intra-action. Besides quantum mechanics having its own magical reasoning[8], my point is simply that it requires an alternative worldview to entertain and accept that we may never know that outside ourselves but we mustn't see ourselves as wholly separate either. Meaning emerges from the actions between us and the world.

Bennet (2010) describes this alternate view in "the form of an onto-story" (p. 116) where things have "thing-power: the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effect dramatic and subtle" (p. 6):

> [P]icture an ontological field without any unequivocal demarcations between human, animal, vegetable, or mineral. All forces and flows (materialities) are or can become lively, affective, and signaling […] . This field lacks primordial divisions, but it is not an uniform or flat topography. It is just that its differentiations are too protean and diverse to coincide exclusively with the philosophical categories of life, matter, mental, environmental […] . In this onto-tale, everything is, in a sense, alive. (p. 116 - 17)

[8] Quantum physics has shown photons and electrons can affect one another when they're not in close proximity, being described "spooky action at a distance" by Einstein (1935, p. 777-80), "something like telepathy or backward-in-time causation" (Morton, 2013, p. 44 - 45). I'm not attempting to pretend I'm know exactly how quantum theory can explain this. I've attempted to read Einstein's arguments and it reads like an experiment in module logic, which exposes contradictions in physics. My point here isn't to explicate Einstein's argument, but to highlight that literacies deployed in factions, like quantum physics or, say some banal example, like Dungeon & Dragons, used to keep others other aren't getting us anywhere except more divided.

Bennet recognizes that we need other ways of telling stories, "protean and diverse". A critical function of onto-stories, then, reveals to us that the world has already and always been a participant — we just haven't been looking for it. In other words, we don't have to imbue the nonhuman actors with agency in our new origin myth because they've been there the entire time; it only requires us to pay attention in new ways to supplement the already broad field of literacy studies.

It's our perspective on what makes up literacy that needs to adapt. That requires what Morton (2013) has come to call, *Realist Magic*. Invoking and spinning the literary subgenre of magical realism, Morton suggests that agency isn't linear and actants aren't always human:

> In magic realist narratives, causality departs from purely mechanical functioning, in part to resist the seeming inevitability if imperialist "reality," in part to give voice to unspeakable things, or things that are almost impossible to speak according to imperialist [read: capitalist; read: Anthropocene] ideology. *Realist Magic* argues that reality itself is not mechanical or linear when it comes to causality […] . The realness of things [is] bound up with a certain mystery in these multiple senses: unspeakability, enclosure, withdrawal, secrecy. (p. 17)

The world is out there and full of things, but we have to have a bit of what I'm calling *magical thinking* to come to grips with such a terrifying idea: we aren't always as special as we'd like to think.

Let's consider your agency as a reader for a moment. You can lift my words from this page, bring them to life by *the act* of reading — you will yourself via alphabetic literacy to take up meaning from scribbles or pixels. You are making something happen when you read. The doing of traditional literacy, of reading and writing, is already a fantastical notion if we step back and observe how words have their own power through our will to bring them to life. Agency and will are, in this way, similar. Will-power, will-ful, will-ing. *Will* is synonymous with choice, causality, the act of giving. To have a will is to be agential. Magic is another synonym. Magic is to change reality according to one's will — literacy may very well be the stuff of magic.

Yet, magic has a bad rep. It's seen as the stuff of fiction. Imagined as nothing but whimsy and fantasy, magic doesn't have any "real" life effects. Hollywood and science, I imagine, are most likely two main culprits of such connotative shaping of magic. Magic isn't considered to exist. But, I propose that magic is real and warrants another consideration for its import. Starhawk, eco-feminist and activist, known for her many works on Goddess and earth-based philosophy (1979, 1982, 1988, 2003, 2004, 2011), defines magic outside of its stereotypes:

> Magic is the discipline of the mind, and it begins with understanding how consciousness is shaped and how our view of reality is constructed. Since the time of the Witch persecutions, knowledge that derives from the worldview of an animate, interconnected, dynamic university is considered suspect — either outright evil or simply woo-woo. (Starhawk, 2004, p. 26)

In this way, as Starhawk explains, magic besides the fantasy-scapes of Hogwarts or Disney films is actually an alternative systems of reasoning and science. Before its separation from the church, and even before the church existed, science was folded into a magical worldview of interconnectedness (York, 2013). Framing magic this way does a few things. First, it takes serious our *relationships* with/in the world aren't merely two-sided: the human on one hand and the non-human on the other. It's a constantly moving entanglement of relationships. Secondly, it entertains that we can listen and learn from the non-human not by identifying its true nature or its essence, but by *being-with* the non-human. To say that magic exists is to accept that there are things beyond human reasoning in the world (Starhawk, 2004, p. 27), just as Morton pointed out earlier. Magical thinking is key to meeting the inevitable halfway[9].

Magic, then, "is, in a sense, pattern-thinking" or an "art of opening our awareness to the consciousness that surround us, the art of conversing in the deep language that nature speaks" (Starhawk, 2004, p. 10 - 11). It is a magical worldview because it denies centuries of "scientific reasoning", which through its enterprises vies the world as mere resource — separate, and conquerable without consequence (Morton, 2016). Alternatively, a magical view puts it thusly:

[9] This is a nod to Barad's *Meeting the universe halfway* (2007) wherein she by way of quantum mechanics argues that meaning and matter emerge between and simultaneously with actants.

> Does magic work? Not by waving a wand, Harry Potter style, and muttering the right incantation for the right result. Not by any simple sense of cause and effect. But magic does work, in the terms of its own worldview. Which is to say, once we understand the universe as a dynamic whole — a whole that we, with our human minds, are part of — we also understand that any change in any aspect of the whole affects the whole. Magic, then, is the art of discerning, choosing, and attuning [oneself] to those changes. (Starhawk, 2004, p. 27 - 28)

The human isn't above their world, but a part of it; intra-action then is a matter of relationships constantly emerging. This brings me to another associated word associated with magic that requires explanation: Witch.

Witch isn't a bad word; Witch is a queer word, fraught with potential volatility and the capacity to disrupt hierarchies of agency. Like Starhawk, I too "prefer the word *Witch* to prettier words, because the concept of a Witch goes against the grain of the culture of estrangement", estrangement being the by-product of the patriarchy for Starhawk (1997, p. 25). The shaman and witch were both doctor and therapist, healer and preacher and teacher (Harner, 1980). Even in Appalachia, Granny Women were and in some places still are queer outcasts of sorts who discern illness and "read" the mountainside to find which plants can heal (Welch, 1976). This isn't to say that to engage with magical thinking you must practice Witchcraft or identify as a Witch. As such, I realize I am walking across thin ice here, asking my reader to entertain magic in such a way.

A theory of animate literacies requires such risks as I've pointed out. Furthermore, the literacies we have in academia aren't always accessible to everyone. We need new ways of thinking about being-with our world that don't necessitate a college education. Why am I turning to Witches and magic, instead to say, just relying on queer critique to offer an alternative method of studying literacy? For starters, three of my participants practice alternative spiritual literacy practices. One identifies himself as a witch, while all three hold spiritual beliefs that resonate with a magical view of the interconnectedness of objects in the world[10]. It would be an

[10] Kyle's, Corey's, & Ak'esha's stories never make their way into the dissertation because of time constraints. My aim is to use their stories, their spiritual literacy practices to

appropriate time to come out the broom closet myself — I, too, identify as a queer, Appalachian witch.

Furthermore, if I were to turn to queer methods alone I'd would still be finding the human to be the exception. Instead I'm simultaneously juggling both queer theory and magical thinking, realizing that on one hand queerness emphasizes subjectivities and the importance of the individual. While on the other, magical thinking makes room for what object oriented ontological philosophers have called "flat-ontologies." That is to say, flat-ontologies takes all objects — anything that can be considered a "thing" — to be of equal importance, where one object is not more special than another in the many different arrangements objects find themselves (Bryant, 2011); flat ontologies flatten animacy hierarchies similar to the way queerness bursts them open.

Magic, I argue was the original philosophy of new materialisms. Anthropologists call this animism: the belief that "vitality is universally immanent" and unlike the "Abrahamic division between the spiritual and the physical", "the purpose of human activity […] is to live communally within a spiritual equilibrium as reflected through the rhythms and patterns of the universe" (York, 2003, p. 35). Magic you could say is a literacy of immanence — recognizing the at times porous but always malleable boundaries between self and other in the immediate world. No longer is the Word God, transcendent and without reach. The story of literacy changes with magical thinking.

To think magically is to see that literacy emerges as agency does, through the intra-action of a spectrum of actants — an argument that typified literacy methods and expertise may not, at least until now, have considered. When I say literacy forms between relationships, it requires magical thinking: a rewired worldview that being-with one another and others is, to echo Haraway (2016), "webbed, tentacular, knotted" (p. 59) and not linear. Literacy is the flow of energies pulling us together in meaningful ways but also emerges simultaneously from those relationships. Jeannette Armstrong (1995), Indigenous Okanagan scholar writes on this point:

> The Okanagan word for "our place on the land" and "our language" is the same. This means that the land has taught us our language. The way we survived is to

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inform a later article, tentatively called: "Coming Out the Broomcloset: Spiritual Literacy Practices of Appalachian Witches."

> speak the languages that the land offered us as its teachings […] We also refer to the land and our bodies with the same root syllable. This means that the flesh which is our body is pieces of the land come to us through the things which the land is. (p. 323)

Armstrong demonstrates how literacy forms through relationality. Moreover, through the energetic flow of literacy, relationships for the Okanagan peoples between body, place, land, and language are formed. Literacies animated are emergent through multiple relations: not merely those relationships of human to human or human to human-written text. The nebulous assemblage of animate literacy practices is on-going and not merely belonging only to humans.

If literacy is emergent, then, through multiple relations with human and nonhuman actants we cannot actively go out in search of it in the way literacy scholars have commonly asked asked the question, *Who taught you to reach and write?* Instead, we have to ask for stories based around objects and affects, and wait for literacy to announce itself. I propose we look to queer stories are potent places to discover how the world has been a part of literacy all along, animating it. Turning to the queerness of storytelling (as I do in the next chapter) I aim to show how animate literacies shake-up and topple-over anthropocenic tenets — since queers often times aren't able to survive in ways deemed acceptable or viable in the Anthropocene (Kirksey, 2018; O'Rourke-Suchoff, 2017). I think queer storytelling offers one way of engaging these webs, I think it would be irresponsible to simply say storytelling is the fixall to the Anthropocenic ruin we find ourselves in.

Turning away from division, we can see how relationality illuminates the many configurations of human and non-human relationships through metaphors. It isn't merely that we use language to represent the world; representation and meaning works both ways in the metaphor. As a result, the metaphors used in stories can offer a way into the recesses of how new modes of relationality occur and it takes a bit of magical thinking to discover these metaphors. I propose then that we take up metaphor, and a new analytic of finding those metaphors in stories — what I come to define as metaphoric tracking, to think literacy otherwise.

Chapter 3: Queer Stories And The Mess They Make

Interstate 70 stretches across Ohio, an artery that connects the state's left and right borders, with Interstate 75 running perpendicular to it, intersecting at Ohio's heart, Dayton. 70 and 75 both have directed me my entire life, acting as an indecisive compass of sorts. The antecedent roadways to 75 were U.S. Route 127 and 27, both still running parallel and even overlapping the interstate today. "127 Days" went through Kentucky where I grew up — a persistent presence in my life despite having moved over 12 times alongside being intermittently homeless during my first 18 years. The late summer event is touted as the longest yard sale in the world, with over 2,000 vendors. "127 Days" stopped traffic, redirecting vehicles and in their absence, pointed pillagers and kitsch enthusiasts onto its concrete road top to peruse yard sales that stretched into the horizon. There aren't any memories I have in particular of my Mom and I going there. Instead I remember the feeling the hordes of people evoked in me. The throes of bodies spilling into the road, blocking up space, impeding time irked me when I was young. Why should roads be anything but a connection, a way through, not a place to be stationary?

But blockages seem to be a theme with the 70 and 75 axis in my life. 75 pulled me north, to Lexington, Kentucky then to Cincinnati, stopping at each city for years. I move up and down the blacktop even to this day, knowing the ghosts of my memories can sense me driving past. 70 eventually pulled me farther north. Now I live close to 70 on the border between Indiana and Ohio. Yet here I am, impeded once again. Not by yard sale junk, but by the research for *Animate Literacies*. I sit here, in a Starbucks right off I 70, stranded on my way to West Virginia to begin collecting stories that follow in these pages. Finding a new used car to replace my old used car was a struggle in its own way — having no cosigner or financial support from family, I've had to wait and save from the little graduate stipend I have — and it seems struggle has continued. Although I cannot help but to think that perhaps if I'm putting forward a new way to see, act with, and to do literacy, then perhaps the imposition and jarring experience of my research trip, and the many different trips I take throughout this project both literal and rendered in text, are important in a chapter on methodology.

I'm still headed to "West-*by*-*God*" Virginia[11], just not the way that I planned for; *Animate Literacies* is much the same in that it is a project that argues that mischance and blockages are of equal value in *how* we interact with world. Where we are stopped and hindered as well as how our plans turn in new directions are crucial in understanding that literacy is an exchange of forces that requires us to act in various ways. Warner and Berlant have pointed out that "[t]he queer world is a space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies" (1998, p. 198). An animate literacies methodology would explore such a world actively, with a willingness to be blocked and to find alternate methods of doing literacy research.

That's what this chapter is concerned with and aims to ask: How is animate literacies enacted as a methodology? Where can animate literacies be found? Maybe, even, who should care? And, how do I study it? I'd like to clarify that methodology and methods, as I use the terms, are distinct from one another while simultaneously always linked. When I say methodology, I think of two questions: Why do we study the way we do? And: How we plan to study in such a way? When I say methods, I'm referring to the actual everyday practice of the research. Or as feminist sociologist, Sandra Harding puts it, a "method is a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence" while "methodology is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed" (1987, p. 2-3). In this chapter, I draw from scholarship on queer ethnography to develop and argue for queer storytelling as a methodology. Extending my expanded definition of literacy in chapter 1, I argue that the *being-with* or relationality of animate literacies can best be analyzed through queer metaphors. Offering an alternative to the methodology of literacy sponsorship, I conclude this chapter with a new analytic: *metaphoric tracking*.

Metaphoric tracking is a method of listening and searching for metaphors in queer storytelling. It shifts the methodological questions of literacy studies from, *Who taught us to read and write?* And, *What or how do we read and write?* to a question of *How do we use literacy to read and write* the world *around us?* And, more radically, *What ways has the world written us*?

[11] This hyphenation is a colloquialism used by West Virginians in reference to their state. In my research I couldn't find its exact etymological origins, but a common explanation not credited to any particular reference involves West Virginia's secession from Virginia during the civil war. WV was "on the side of God" and did not want to be associated with the Confederate South.

Metaphoric tracking looks at affects and matterings in metaphors to offer an alternative model of analyzing literacy. Metaphoric tracking doesn't aim at replacing literacy sponsorship in toto, but to open the world of literacy studies to the agency of matter and affect. This chapter reads less like the typified genre associated with methodology and methods, as it develops metaphors to suggest that the queer, the methods and the theory, the researcher and the participant skirt around each other, always coconstituitive.

A Note on Participants

Animate literacies may be theoretical insofar as queering literacy, but it follows other literacy scholarship of studying literacy by collecting and analyzing "data" — a term I mostly avoid because it rings of sterile, aseptic technique rinsing off any personality. Know that when I write of *stories* I am aligning with the conventions of literacy narrative "data" but attempting to imbue life, animating what is often considered inert evidence in academe. In my introduction, I pointed out scholars such as Brandt (2001, 2004), Pritchard (2017), and Webb-Sunderhaus (2015) look to literacy narratives and person-based interviews in order to study literacy. The same can be said for the acquiring of evidence in *Animate Literacies*: I collect queer Appalachian stories as the grounds from which a theory of animate literacies can emerge.

I have only two criteria for my participants: 1) They must identify as queer in some way (broadly and personally defined), and I make this explicit through the participation consent form — they might belong to the LGBTQ community; embrace nonnormative sex and pleasure; live with a "crip" body (See McRuer, 2004). 2) The second criteria links my participants together, underpinning animate literacies' focus on place: Appalachia. They may not necessarily *identify* as Appalachian, but must be *from* Appalachia in some way (think: have family from Appalachia; moved to or away from Appalachia; born in Appalachia but don't live there, etc.). I leave how they qualify their relationship to Appalachia up to my participants. It should also be made clear my participants are all at least 18 years old. Some participants did not share their age, but merely confirmed they were 18 years or older.

The participants were recruited among acquaintances in Appalachia, through colleagues and through word of mouth in my personal life. Some participants were recruited through the community Facebook sites to which I belong to such as Queer PhD Network and the CCCC's Queer Caucus and Appalachian Special Interest Group — I also shared a call for participation on

my own Facebook profile and asked friends to share. It is important to note: Some participants are people I have never met except through the venues I outline here, while others are close friends, even family. Grabill's (2012) articulation of research stance — "understood as a position or a set of beliefs and obligations that show how one acts a researcher" (p. 211) — is critical to maintain levels of openness not only with my participants but also with my readers. I want to be clear my relationships will be made plain both to my readers and to the Appalachian queers who contribute to my research. There are 5 stories in the next two chapters. Justin's story is the focus of chapter 4. Lexi, Elizabeth, Lara, and Macy are the focal points of chapter 5. I met Justin through a personal friend during 2015. Lexi was recruited to participate in my research through a mutual friend. Elizabeth, Lara, and Macy reached via email after my call for participant was issued on Facebook[12].

I use a set of interview questions (Appendix A) in order to engage four areas in my participants lives: *trauma* (whatever this means to them); their understanding of and their relationship to their *bodies*; the role *place* and land plays in their lives; and their *spiritual beliefs* and practices. These four categories shift away from human-linguistic privileging in current scholarship. The four categories help in exploring how affects — especially those associate with trauma and spirituality — have agency in my participants lives. The same with the other two categories, bodies and places, but pertaining to the world of matter — the nonhuman, objects, anamility, matterings.

I want to note here that I embrace the fluid nature of queerness in such a way to allow for conversations and disruptions to occur during the interview process. I am in agreement with Manalansan (2014) that queer person-based research is messy and embrace the possibility that a structured interview may not always be able to represent the polyvalent nature of how literacies function in my participants' lives. The interview questions, then were merely a departure point in order to enable the storytelling. Because the interview process requires textual transcription, I use audio recording through my iPhone and audio recorder. Participants reale names are not used unless they requested otherwise, and even then I don't reveal if their aliases are real or not (see Powell et al., 2015 for more on using real names anonymously).

[12] I have a total of 9 interviews for my data set. Because of time constraints, I was unable to incorporate every story. For my data analysis in chapters 4 and 5 I emphasized individual stories over trends and correlations between all the data I collected.

Queer Storytelling as Methodology

We should always begin with story. Storytelling isn't just the medium through which Appalachians are known to make meaning and art, but it is also gets us as close as we can, I believe, to that which cannot be captured in language. Even by telling the story you never capture the original setting, context, audience, environment in toto. In its retelling, details of the events change, locations both in the story perhaps or where you're telling it again, the reason for telling the story changes. The story is slippery, immediate, and fleeting. The refutation of this, I realize, is that we read stories too, making them appear more fixed insofar as we can sometimes touch them — still, even when we read a story, we change as individuals from reading to reading. The stories we read take on different meanings during different parts of our lives, why we reread and with whom we share the stories, in print or otherwise. Storytelling is messy.

In this way the storytelling and queerness are correlative. "If the term 'queer' is to be a collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings," Butler (1993) writes in her earlier work,

> it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, and queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes, and perhaps also yielded in favor of terms that do that political work more effectively. (p. 21)

Queer is "never fully owned," always denying meaning but constantly a referent that functions in no single part of speech and writing. I am a queer, *a noun*. I queer literacy studies in this dissertation, *a verb*. This chapter is concerned with my queer methodology, *an adjective*.

Queer, as Butler suggests above, is always deployed in the present responding to a politicized past and possibilities of meaning in the future. Butler mentions that queer's valences are always political. When I think of politics I think in particular of power: Who has it? Why? And, how can we resist it when necessary? The stories in *Animate Literacies* become political in that they help frame a queering of literacy studies as well as the politics around the literacy of queers, of Appalachia, and of Appalachian queers. That is to say, I am asking how queer

Appalachian storytelling resists stereotypical narratives of Appalachia while at the same time giving queers the agency and power to tell their own stories.

Labeling my primary method and methodology of "data" collection queer storytelling is a politically charged decision, too, because (1) it resists typical patriarchal, white, heteronormative academic approaches that don't always embrace storytelling as serious business and (2) it also embraces queerness at every level — researcher, participant, theory, methodology, and method, even genre and medium. My methodology agrees with Halberstam that "a queer methodology is, in a way, a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information" and "attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other" resisting "academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence" (1998, p.13). One of the methodological frameworks I draw on is queer ethnography, though my study is not fully enthographic in that relies more on interviews that formal documented participant observation.

When I say ethnography, I am thinking along the lines of Handwerker (2001), when he writes ethnography "consists of the processes and products of research that document what people know, feel, and do in a way that situates the phenomena at specific points in time in the history of individual lives" (p. 7). A queer ethnography would document phenomena in queer folx's[13] lives, as other scholars have done (Gutierrez-Perez, 2017; Lewin, 2016; Merabets, 2014; Weiss, 2011; Wiggins, 2000). Animate literacies challenges us to go farther, though — *queering* ethnography is necessary. Anthropologist Wiggins elucidates, by the "queering of ethnography [the] questions are not asked by the fieldworker in hopes of evidencing some preconsidered theoretical concept. Instead, the fieldworker waits for the questions of the interlocutor — indeed becomes an interlocutor — and allows these inquiries to inspire his/her considerations" (2000, p. 114). Wiggin's point here may not sound far from conventional ethnography, but I'd argue that what makes a queer ethnography queer is its inclusion of nonnormative sex, desire, and embodiment, which my project aims to inquire about. But queerness is messier still.

[13] The suffix of -x in folks is a deliberate rhetorical move for inclusion. In the same vein of reasoning where "women" has in particular feminist contexts been rewritten as "womyn" in order to decenter the masculinist implant of "men", or where "Latina" and "Latino" are rewrote as Latinx to include genderqueer or nonbinary Latinx identities — folx is an even wider term that aims at including of all these nonnormative identity categories. I would also argue that folk as a moniker implicates rurality as well, adding to the place-based agency of my theory of animate literacies.

As Manalansan aptly puts it, the words *queer* and *mess* aren't "limited to bodies, objects, and desires" but also point out "processes, behaviors, and situations" (2014, p. 97). Both terms entail ways of doing and acting; invoking Chen's animacies here, you could say that messy queers and a queer messy methodology subvert and demolish hierarchies of normalities insofar as how we do our research generally speaking, and how to animate literacies altogether. Phrases, like *Oh gurl, you're hot mess*, or *I'm a mess* — and let's not forget the femme-shaming idiom that plagues the gay male scene, *Don't be a messy bottom*[14] — all take on new meaning, reorienting methodology in queerer ways.

Caroline Dadas (2016) has grappled with mess and queer methodology in digital spaces and social media. "Because the *perception* of privacy remains something to which researchers must become attuned," she writes, "highlighting the need for researchers to become familiar with the nuances of each potential [research] site remains critical" (p. 64). While it's the case that she's writing about "online subjectivies", her point that queerness "allows for strategic ambiguity" (p. 64) resonates with animate literacies. Acknowledging that "messiness and complication" are embraced by queerness, Dadas points out that the public/private divide may not always work, noting that "what *is* queer is allowing for a broad range of possibilities when it comes to interacting with participants and data" (p. 69). As you will see in the next section, my methods of collecting and analyzing queer stories rest on other possibilities of what constitutes literacy research.

As I see it, in order to truly embrace queer research we have to be willing to improvise when the situation presents itself while we are collecting queer stories. We have to be willing to get messy. Here are few ways my research became messy, where I let the stories of my participants animate my research: the interview questions at times turned irrelevant during the interview, when many of my participants told stories that took my research in different directions; participants shared stories of fucking, and I responded with some of my own stories in turn; honesty in the face of pain, is another instance where the research took queer turns, loosening the interview setting into something akin to meeting a stranger in a bar.

[14] Don't mistake my claim here as a conflation of femme and bottoming (i.e. the act of receptive queer sex). Butch, femme, androgynous, or other queer gender expressions and/or dispositions aren't necessarily correlative with preferred sex roles. This turn of phrase makes the mistake of such conflation, and by doing so reveals how messy animacies can be.

Two main concepts come to mind with regards to my queer methodology: *transparency* and *reciprocity*. Transparency on some level breaks through the public/private divide that Dadas points to. While Dadas is writing about social media as a messy, queer site of person-based research, her points on queer methods congeal with my points here. As she puts it: " Social media as a method presents researchers with complications — including the fluidity of user identity, which applies to researchers as well — that requires flexible thinking on the part of the researcher" (p. 69). That is to say, how you situate yourself and your work in public spaces (digital/social media in Dadas' case) requires discerning what level of transparency is required of yourself as a researcher. Queerness and mess would press the boundaries of transparency, risking visibility between researcher/participants, reader/writer, public/private as well as understanding that visibility is not always stable. In this way, transparency becomes a praxis, with praxis being understood as "research that privileges neither the theoretical foundation nor the observed practice" (Sullivan & Porter, 1997, p. 27). By framing transparency as praxis, I take strides to ensure that my participants have maximum involvement with their stories that I discuss and showcase. Before any publications, final drafts, and any material used of my participants stories, I contact my participants allowing them to make comments, question my representation of their narrative, and allow them to withdraw after the fact.

Scholars in rhetoric, composition, and literacy research have taken reciprocity as a critical component of person- and community-based research (Lather & Smithers, 1997; Royster and Kirsch, 2012), and I certainly don't lose sight of its importance here. At its heart, reciprocity concerns itself with relationships:

> Reciprocity includes an open and conscious negotiation of the power structures reproduced during the give-and-take interactions of the people involved in both sides of the [research] relationship. A theory of reciprocity, then, frames this activist agenda with a self-critical, conscious navigation of this intervention. (Cushman, 1996, p.16)

Reciprocity is a core element of our methodology in rhetoric, composition, and literacy scholarship due in large part to feminist epistemologies: "This nonhierarchical, reciprocal relationship, in which both researcher and researched learn from one another and have a voice in

the study, is informed by a feminist desire for eliminating power inequalities between researchers and participants and a concern for the difficulties of speaking for 'the other'" (Powell & Takayoshi, 2003, p. 395; see also: Schell & Rawson, 2010; Nickoson & Sheridan, 2012; Sullivan & Porter, 1997). Queer theory, by extension, does the same with calling into question normative sexualities and bodies (Alexander, 2008; Alexander & Rhodes, 2016; Kafer, 2013, in particular, p. 14-19; Mcruer, 2004). Working under the assumption that feminist methods derive from gender analytics, I have to ask: What would reciprocity look like if queer methods come from taking nonnormative sex and sexuality as a point of theoretical analysis? Put another way: What does queer reciprocity look like if we are taking the bawdy and the salacious as sites of analysis?

I'm not entirely sure I can answer those questions. Perhaps, I can't fully make out the contours of queer reciprocity, because, as anthropologist Mark Graham argues, there isn't any method that is inherently queer, noting, instead, that "[a]ll methods can be put to queer political ends that disrupt normative alignments" (2016, p. 185). This highlights animacies theory's use of queer being volatile and unstable as a category. Violating any "proper" use — queer is elusive, refusing, resisting and contradicts any stable method. But queers have stories, though, and you'll read of them in the remaining chapters. Ultimately, my point is this: There needs to be some anchor or center of gravity in order to study literacy in such a queer new way and queer stories can be such a site.

Animate literacies' methodologies should disrupt our conventional understanding of literacy and at the same time challenge us to think about ways of being that may violate terms of what is considered appropriate. Simply put, the queer methodology I am suggesting —collecting queer stories based on transparency and reciprocity — deals with uncomfortable topics. This may, for some readers, cause pause or bring up ethically complex areas around sex and sexuality. My methodology relies on writing, interacting, and researching as transparently as possible in spite of how uncomfortable it may be for all persons involved.

Perhaps what I'm grappling with concerning queer transparency and queer reciprocity is similar in nature to Alexander's (2018) point, when he asks:

> But I'm also wanting to know what might happen if we turn attention to literacy as ways of being not just sponsored (and hence extorted or suppressed), but also desired. What methodologies might we develop to account for the ways in which

> some of us have had to seek out new ways of being literate in the world? […] How might the promises of literacy be experienced differently if we understand literacy as a thing *desired*? (p. 532)

To desire something or someone in ways that aren't acceptable or deemed normative, is to desire queerly but may not necessarily be queer desire. Alexander's understanding that literacy can be a thing worth desiring mustn't be lost in a queer study of literacy. If we think of desiring literacy may be helpful insofar as how we ask our questions in our methodologies. Moreover, though, Alexander's point exposes literacy as a thing unto itself, "a thing desired." This can have some implication as far as how we approach our research. In fact, I'd like to offer that queer reciprocity doesn't end with the relationship between participant and researcher, but instead extends farther between researcher and reader.

A queer ethic of transparency and reciprocity would extend to you, my reader. As a writer developing a theory of animate literacies where literacy has a life of its own, I cannot ignore the agency of my words once they're read. As such, it should be desired that literacy animated would acknowledge openly and honestly the relationship between participants, researcher, reader, and writer on all levels. Granted you can't directly write back or speak directly to me as far as reading this on a page. However, I can attempt to be as transparent by clearly articulating the motives behind my actions. This requires of me to be honest both about my position to my research, any biases I may have, and the processes involved in doing this work; it requires reciprocity between me and my participants, even if that means simply listening to painful memories (e.g. Powell and Takayoshi, 2003). Moreover, I believe if animate literacies is deploying queer storying telling as a methodology, it requires that the researcher take their own queer subjectivity into question — the researcher's queer storytelling is part and parcel to a queer methodology.

What this may look like in regards to genre-conventions could vary, but at its heart I believe that the self is always called into question, as writer, researcher, participant, and reader. While mulling over the possibility of writing a queer self in their digital text, *Techne* (2015), Alexander and Rhodes "understand queer *composing* as a queer rhetorical practice aimed at disrupting how we understand ourselves to ourselves. As such, it is a composing that is not a composing, a call in many ways to acts of de- and un- and re-composition" (n.p.). Let's widen

their argument, here, to queer methodological research as well: queer methods should disrupt how we research our research. What would it mean to de-search, un-search, re-research? From the perspective of animacy theory, the suffixes here point out adverbial agency: *de-* from the Latin for *from, down, away*; *un-* synonymous at times with *in-* and *non-*, meaning *not*, *to undo, reverse,* or *do the opposite*; *re-* which points us *back, backward,* to do *again, anew*.

As a methodological framework for literacy research, then, queer storytelling would seek to look down and away from typical studied sites of literacy — away from texts and pedagogy, as it were. It would undo, reverse and be in contrast with previous methodological approaches, always looking backwards in order to think *again* about the basis for approaches to studying literacy. When Alexander (2018) writes of how he learned to be queerly literate "*outside* a formal curriculum," he states:

> These elements — work on digital platforms, the experience of collaboration, and acculturation across a lifespace — are other dimensions of literacy that need more nuanced attention, particularly as they are often pursued simultaneously by many people in many different situations and contexts. We need methodologies that will better track the development of these kinds of literacies. We need a phenomenological approach that will account better for the complexities of literacies that are not just sponsored, but that emerge out of deep needs for affinity and affiliation. (p. 532)

Animate literacies can offer a model, I believe. A critical requirement of deploying queer storytelling is learning to listen and be receptive, and actively engage in the process of listening both during the person-to-person interaction but *also in the writing of the storytelling*. If we need more nuanced means of coming to literacy, then we need to recognize that we must undo our perceptions of what constitutes literacy from the get-go. Animate literacies takes up queer stories because to be receptive, to listen, to attempt to locate the role of the nonhuman in our literacy practices is to acknowledge that literacy isn't the mere ability to read and write, and literacy isn't exclusively human.

Stories are queer because they resist a Westernized, and by proxy, a deeply messianic way of knowing and being. They animate theory by blatantly refusing to adhere to qualified

knowledge-making of declarative empiricism. Lee Maracle (1990), Indigenous Canadian writer, scholar, and poet points out plainly: "Academicians waste a great deal of effort deleting character, plot, and story from theoretical argument" (p. 7). Maracle makes the case for storytelling as being "in every line of theory" (p.7), a claim I'd like to reinforce here in *Animate Literacies*. Through collecting stories and telling stories, I am queering the basis for knowledge production both in the writing of this project for an academic audience but also by retelling a stories of literacy.

Animate literacies' focus on and incorporation of other constituents of literacy becomes a performance of sorts similar to the critical storytelling of Cultural Rhetorics that takes place in "Our Story Begins Here: Constellating Cultural Rhetorics" (Powell, et al., 2015). The digital publication, written in three acts akin to a screenplay, performs a reading that decolonizes typical genres of academic writing. In it a host of actors speak individually, as a whole, and back to an imaginary interlocutor. The storytelling, both in format and in content, highlights the reciprocity and transparency that I've unpacked so far:

> [P]eople make meaning through relationships that are always constellated. Remembering this helps us to mark our own cultural practices and objects as scholars as fundamental to the knowledge we are actively making and distributing. Cultural rhetorics as a scholarly orientation, necessitates our attention to how relationality exists in different ways and at every step of a scholarly project's process. The practice of relationality changes throughout that process, and is made visible in multiple ways. (Powell, et al., 2015, n.p.)

"The practice of relationality" holds a considerable amount of bearing on my methodology à la animate literacies' relation to the nonhuman. Next, I hope to bring into clearer focus how looking to queer metaphors can act as a opportunity to study literacy in a new light.

Metaphor as Relation, Metaphor as Method

The question lingers from chapter 1: how do we approach the non-human on their own terms? Through engaging new materialism, I've suggested that a queering of literacy studies requires an attempt to decenter humanistic tendencies. We cannot, I realize, succeed at

completely removing the human out of literacy, although we can learn how to *be-with* the non-human in more creative, *meaning-making* ways. Looking to stories and the metaphors used in storytelling, I propose a new materialist analytic tool to analyze literacy: *metaphoric tracking*.

Metaphoric tracking borrows from and adapts Laurie Gries' (2015) new materialist rhetorical method of iconographic tracking in visual rhetorics and circulation theories, and applies similar tenets to queer animate literacies. The metaphoric tracking method draws from actual stories, events, and individual experience, using the methodologies of queer storytelling as a point of departure and site of data analysis. Central to metaphoric tracking is the metaphor: "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 5). Moving away from the ability-resource model of literacy requires us to acknowledge that literacy exists in interactions; literacy is found in the ways of *being-with* others.

Scribner (1984) explored how literacy is often discussed and researched with three metaphors in mind: literacy as adaptation, literacy as power, and literacy as a state of grace (p. 8). The first, dealing with adaptation, centers on functional literacy, or "conceived broadly as the level of proficiency necessary for effective performance in a range of settings and customary activities" (Scribner, 1984, p. 9). Functional literacy parallels what I've been calling the ability-resources model of literacy. The author points out there's an element of "common sense" to this metaphor (p. 9) — you need to be literate to function in mundane situations. It brings to mind reading labels on medicine bottles or street signs while driving. Scribner warns against brushing off the mundaneness of literacy as adaptation because we risk homogenizing literacy acquisition and ignore local, community-based literacy practices (p. 10). This point has been made since 1984 when Scriberner pointed out the treatment of literacy as adaptation (e.g. Donehower, Hogg, and Schell, 2007; Stuckey, 1991). Nevertheless, it is still important to consider when we consider how even at the local level metaphors of functional literacy can be problematic if, as animate literacies hopes to add, we neglect the agency of places.

The second metaphor of literacy as power seems obvious and has been threaded throughout *Animate Literacies*. Much like Stuckey's (1991) argument on the ideological model of literacy, Scribner argues that "literacy has been a potent tool in maintaining the hegemony of elites and dominant classes in certain societies" (p. 11). Noting that while "masses of people have been mobilized for fundamental changes in social conditions […] rapid extension of

literacy have been accomplished," Scribner makes the argument that literacy as power isn't primarily about personal empowerment even while it's often packaged as such (p. 12). This metaphor, I believe, has shifted in part to the individual and, perhaps, the macro-scale Scribner is writing about at the time has taken a backseat in literacy studies. Much as Pritchard (2017) and others have made clear (e.g. Banks, 2011; Selber, 2004) individuals have used literacy for self-empowerment. This isn't to say that literacy as power has elided state-power and hierarchies of oppression, but access to new literacies often enables new modes of self-agency. Whenever literacy as power, notice, has been used as a metaphor it is focus is on the power of humans alone. It's also a matter of human ownership. I'd like to think that animate literacies as a theory can broaden our understanding of how power, like agency could be shared between actants.

Lastly, Scribner's metaphor of literacy as a state of grace reinforces my examination of literacy studies' tendency to treat literacy as transcending the inanimate world: "the tendency in many societies to endow the literate person with special virtues" has both religious and broader, secular implications (Scribner, 1984, p. 13). Despite the literacy myth being disproved (Graff, 1979), Scribner's state of grace metaphor requires us to question, even today, if literacy still "creates a great divide in intellectual abilities between those who have and those who have not mastered written language" (p. 14). The author turns to her anthropologic work with the Vai peoples of West Africa (Scribner & Cole, 1981) to demonstrate how these metaphors may not always stand up outside Westernized contexts: literacy isn't necessary for survival in Vai communities (Scribner, 1984, p. 15); letter writing exists but outside postal systems, resisting government oversight (Scribner, 1984, p. 16); journaling is common but those who can write aren't privileged for their ability to do so (Scribner, 1984, p. 16).

Scribner's metaphoric analysis highlights the importance of paying attention to how we talk about literacy and the language used in studying it. Adding to this position would mean accepting "that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 3). What if instead of looking at the metaphors we use to theorize literacy, we looked at the metaphors people use in the stories they tell about their own literacies — especially those literacies that extend beyond traditional reading and writing?

Metaphoric tracking looks for queer metaphors in queer storytelling as indicators of relationality on all levels. Metaphors of reading and writing alone aren't enough to widen the scope of literacy. Metaphoric tracking seeks out two specific types of metaphors, what I'm terming *literacy affects* and *literacy matters* in order to support my theoretical approach to literacy. Literacy affects are metaphors in queer stories pointing to ways of being affected and affecting others, and most distinctly, how affects can linger and perhaps have a tempo-spatial lifespan. Literacy affects deal with subjectivity. That is to say, identity is often times bound up with the emotive states made apparent by storytellers. Literacy affects would also explain how affects can stick to places (Ahmed, 2004). Think back to my prologue. The nightmares of "a deep abyss" affected my waking world; however, they failed to accurately represent it (there wasn't a deep abyss outside and I wasn't in my grandparents' house). This failure to make sense of these dreams is arguably queer: I made new meaning by way of these dreams, or more accurately by being haunted by them until I discovered my grandfather had passed. Through the literacy affect of a nightmare, I also created a new way to be-with my grandmother, because I came out to her that very same day.

Literacy matters, on the hand, emerge out of relation to objects, matter, and place. Literacy matters look for relations *in and through places*. Literacy matters also pay attention to how *performance and the sensate* are critical in animating literacy. I'm tempted to say literacy matters are metaphors of the tangible here, too, but fear it risks being reductive for some objects aren't tangible. For instance, air or sunlight or climate change are still objects just not tactile in the sense we can press against them or pick them up. Take the literacy matter from my story where the "mountain got up and left." Clearly a metaphor because mountains indeed don't walk, yet through the metaphor I acknowledge the mountain's agency in my story as well as how literacy failed in terms of my relationship with my grandfather; I never had the opportunity to tell him how I prayed for the mountain to move.

Metaphor tracking is a method of literacy research where actively seeking out metaphors in storytelling reveals relationships in lived lives, exposing how being-with others (both human and nonhuman) shapes literacy and creates meaning. The metaphor is a temporal-spatial container, meaning that metaphors are always situated in the space of different things and they change overtime. From this temporal-spatial understanding, Lakoff and Johnson (2003) theorize

three particular types of metaphors, which animate literacies will rely on in its method of analysis: structural, orientational, and ontological.

Structural metaphors are "cases where one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, p. 14). Structural metaphors are situated in systems, and are thus reliant on the structures that give them meaning. For instance, in the Anthropocene it is common place to say *time is money*. We can only understand this in a system such as capitalism where you are paid for your time. Outside of the systems they reference, structural metaphors dissolve into nonsense.

Orientational metaphors are spatial insofar as they proceed from our bodily experience in direct relationship to place and time. Orientational metaphors "arise from the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment" (Lakoff & Johnson, p. 14).

Lastly, ontological metaphors uncover modes of being and ways literacy discloses what can exist and what cannot:

> Understanding our experiences in terms of objects and substance allows us to pick out parts of experience and treat them as discrete entities or substances of a uniform kind. Once we can identity our experiences as entities or substance, we can refer to them, categorize then, group them, and quantify them — and, by this means, reason about them. (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 25)

Ontological metaphors in literacy are deployed by the forces of the Anthropocene disguised as human exceptionalism. The literacy sponsor, by this way of thinking, even acts a metaphor. That is to say, an individual who "is" a literacy sponsor, only becomes a literacy sponsor retroactively through literacy research's container metaphor of the literacy sponsor itself. The person *isn't* a literacy sponsor ontologically speaking but becomes such through metaphor.

Thinking through ontological metaphors is difficult because they're so innocuous and are the basis for our everyday lives — we have to think of our existence in terms of metaphors in order to process information. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) offer an explanation, which may be helpful on this point:

> Ontological metaphors like these are so natural and so pervasive in our thought that they are usually taken as self-evident, direct description of mental phenomena. The fact that they are metaphorical never occurs to most of us. We take statements like "He cracked under pressure" as being directly true or false. This expression was in fact used by various journalists to explain why Dan White brought his gun to the San Francisco City Hall and shot and killed Mayor George Moscone. Explanations of this sort seem perfectly natural to most of us. The reason is that metaphors like THE MIND IS A BRITTLE OBJECT are an integral part of the model of the mind that we have in this culture; it is the model most us think and operate in terms of. (p. 28-29)

Methodologically speaking, metaphoric tracking has to be wary of overlooking ontological metaphors that we may take for granted because of how ingrained they are in our collective stories.

As far as *Animate Literacies* is concerned, I actively look for blocked meaning in metaphors, metaphors that shouldn't exist, or, in other words, from my participants' stories I look for these structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors that are queer in all the ways I have engaged thus far. I see these three types of metaphors working next to and correlating with certain aspects of the new framework of literacy I proposed in chapter 1.

The method of metaphoric tracking looks for these three metaphors in particular ways within storytelling. For structural metaphors, metaphoric tracking looks to phrases, statements, and questions where meaning is contingent on systems, cultural understand, or context. Much like how *time is money* is a metaphor that speaks to a larger system of capitalism, metaphors that rely on meaning derived from broader cultural references make clear how animate literacies emanate from a combination of sign-systems, performances, and the sensate. In the queer stories I collected, I looked for contingent meaning in the language my participants' used to tell their stories.

Metaphors that deploy "I" statements and/or that rely on "to be," no matter what tense, to declare two unlike things similar through difference expose ontological metaphors. Metaphoric tracking would actively seek out moments in stories where states of being are coupled through the relationship between various literacy actors. These metaphors can be personal or they can

point to the relationship between other things. Orientational metaphors are perhaps the easiest to catch, with prepositions being their primary identifying marker. Grounded in experience, orientational metaphors point out how literacy arrives in relationships of actors. Take this example: I breathe *in* the flower. "In" as preposition brings together myself and the flower. Via prepositions we understand too the relationship to place and how we navigate it. Looking to orientational metaphors we can see how queerness denies typical animacy hierarchies and re-orients how literacy flows in and through particular places. Adverbial clauses also have a role to play in orientational metaphors. Answering questions *Where? When? How? To what extent?* adverbs distinguish types of spatial relationships. Adverbs do not require objects, but still carry with them the weight of orientational metaphors.

Through metaphoric tracking I'm particularly interested in moments where language fails to account for queer experiences and new metaphors arise as a result. As I said at the beginning of this chapter, a queer methodological approach allows for interruptions and dialogues between researcher and storyteller. When I don't understanding my participants, I interject to ask a question for clarity. I take note because these moments are moments where meaning has failed somehow. Both in my annotations during these moments and in the story themselves, I look at these instances for metaphors. Notwithstanding the researcher's notetaking, a transcription of stories is necessary to look for metaphors.

Searching for metaphors in the transcription isn't easy and often takes multiple rereadings or listening to recordings many times. For this reason I've narrowed the focus tracking metaphors related to four aspects of queer literacies: trauma, bodies, places, and spirituality. Importantly, metaphoric tracking isn't limited to these four categories, and by the end of *Animate Literacies* it'll become apparent that the possibilities of metaphoric tracking may very well go beyond what I am theorizing here.

Becoming a Night-Crowler

Animate literacies asks us to be suspect of literacy emerging solely and wholly through human sociality. It also requires us to not rule out there are other ways literacies can be understood and thus studied, which could be considered fantastic or magical through our current paradigm. To put it plainly: literacy arises in part from our interactions with the matterings and

affects around us. What follows, I'd say, from this premise, is that the same should be said about methodologies of animate literacies.

Animate literacies' methodology asks us to look at the literacies we use to tell our stories. To look back. Look away. Look again. And to do so as transparently as possible with literacy, with how we research it, with whom we research it, and most importantly with ourselves. That is to say, we don't have to take the story away from theory — stories are enough in themselves. We don't always have to rip flesh from stories, gnawing for bits of data bone-deep, or mine for facts to the point that narrative arcs are demolished, flattened for their profit. Yet if we must and when we must look for data points, let's do so with an attempt to disrupt the verisimilitude of meaning-making devoid of story, by seeking new metaphors and new ways of being-with that topple over hierarchies.

The interwoven testimonies of the queers I interview act as mirrors reflecting their light back at me, and perhaps, I'm attempting to do the same with you. If Malea Powell (2012) was right when she suggested that stories and telling stories are events, attempting to hold together "complex shimmering strands of a constellative, epistemological space long enough to share them" (p. 284), perhaps we need new ways to read the stars. In fact, one method I used to write *Animate Literacies*, echoing Powell's metaphor, was to write by the moon.

The moon wanes and waxes, moves in cycles and can teach us be literate of the cycles in our own lives if we pay attention. During the waxing phase of the moon, when he fills full of light, I filled these pages you read now. Two weeks writing. Two weeks creating and composing. I poured energy into drafts of *Animate Literacies*. And when the moon was full of the sun's reflection and he tugged at the oceans with his gravity, I'd look at my work. Admire it. I'd then recede from my work like the shoreline. Two weeks reading. Two week revising and rethinking and recomposing and researching. Anticipating the new moon's dark face, I'd stop and pause. New moons are simultaneously a time of facing doubt by turning inward to assess oneself as well as a moment to start in a new direction. I'd send a draft off for revision every month on or near the new moon for this reason. Maybe, then, deploying a methodology of animate literacy is to be queerly playful. Not taking too serious a queer method would entail that we get messy both in the process of doing queer ethnography and writing about it.

At the beginning of this chapter I mentioned that I made it to West-*by*-*God* Virginia, but I didn't explain how. My best friend and queer brother of 15 years, Kyle drove to pick me up at

that Starbucks off I70. He lives in West Virginia with his partner, Corey. Corey is one of my participants, and having grown up in West Virginia his entire life, he was more than willing to share his story. We wound through the serpentine backroads, headed towards a river and swimming hole prior to our interview the following day.

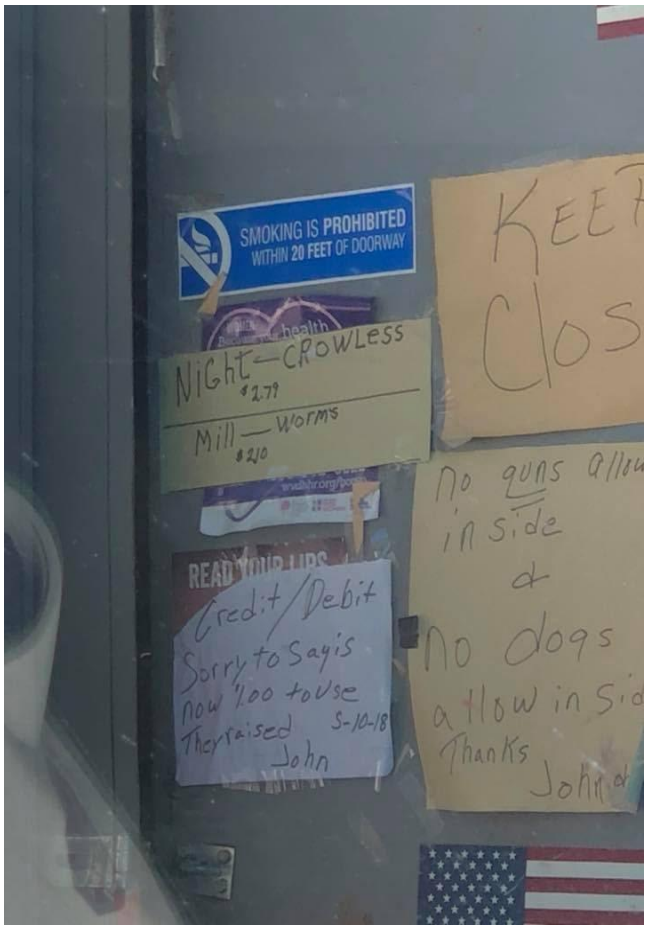

FIGURE 3.1 HANDWRITTEN STORE SIGN. TAKEN IN WEST VIRGINIA.

Stopping at a convenience store, I caught the picture above on the door. Until I attempted to sound out "Night-crowless," I wasn't sure what the word meant. Night-crowless is a phonetic transcription of the *nightcrawlers*, a type of earthworm oftentimes used in catching bottom feeders like catfish — I know because my father whenever he forced me to fish on his farm, used to make fun of me for not wanting to pick up the bait worms, let alone pierce their muculent, writhing bodies with a fishing hook. Belonging to the phylum annelida, Latin for "little ring", earthworms are blind hermaphrodites who eat our organic garbage and surface from the ground when it rains. Their shit fuels our agriculture, especially in smaller, local farming and gardening

(See Sohn, 2016). After I encountered that sign on that backroad I knew that I had to relook and reconsider what I was doing in that very moment as a queer literacy researcher. What queerer figure to invoke than the earthworm in the way I navigate my theory of animate literacies?

The sign resonates with what I'm in search for with my methodology. If I were a literacy scholar in a typical sense I'd take night-crowless as an indication of failed semantics insofar as its meaning fails to be properly signed. But, as a queer literacy scholar that's *also* Appalachian I exalt night-crowless as precisely what I'm searching for in this queer project. So I am becoming not like the nightcrawler, but the *night-crowler*. Queer and contradictory and inappropriate. De-composing, blindly feeling around in the dark: I inch my way through these pages taking what could be cast aside as wasteful, utter garbage, off-putting, or "not the stuff of literacy," and composting soil for new literacies to egress and grow, die, to transform again. Worms turn up when it rains so much the water sits atop the ground, so saturated it can't take any more in. Animate literacies doesn't place confidence in only humans being privy to literacy; literacy lives in the alluvium of queer relations and forms from the intra-animation of actors surviving amongst one another, a tangled mass of kinships so bound up and knotted it's difficult to discern its beginning or end. But what do I know? I'm only a night-crowler: misspelt and wrong in all the ways that shouldn't make sense but still insist on being, queerly slithering through these mountains.

Chapter 4: Matters Of The Closet

Objects carry more meaning in difficult times.
- OA, *The OA*

She laid the cards out one-by-one. I was sitting across a woman with a table between us, crammed into a small, repurposed utility closet. The dim lighting, noise of a water fountain and ambient sounds of new age woodwinds accompanied pungent incense — none of this seemed unusual to me at 15 years old. The holy rolling of Pentecostals and the involvement with the occult ran parallel in my upbringing. On the one side, I was used to hearing of demons and devils, or listening to prophecies given during church service in a some rural Kentucky garage. On the other, I would tag along with my Mom to consult psychics all across Kentucky's hills and hollers, where she sought out sage wisdom through the shuffling of a pack of playing cards or Tarot deck.

Once we drove for hours to see a granny witch far out in the mountains. The gravel road crunching beneath my Mom's car, I sat in the backseat. I can picture it still. The woman swayed back and forth in her rocking chair on the front porch. Chickens scurried about the yard, around a house that looked as though it was finished mid-construction. Someone threw slop out the front door while the woman stared down at my Mom with one eye. The other was ghastly blue-white. She told us to go. She wasn't reading anyone today. Startled, we left. But there were other visits to various Kentucky augurs who surely could play the role.

The trips to the psychic in the trailer park stand out the most. Her single-wide was always filthy. My young self had grown accustomed to sitting on the edge of the couch as to not contaminate myself in the grim and gunk or risk having a roach crawl across me. While she told my Mom of cheating lovers and financial ruin to come, I would occasionally play with her grandkids. I'd use the opportunity to survey the entire house, fascinated with finding the new age paraphernalia hidden amongst the morass of trash and clutter. Books filled with spells and sigils surreptitiously beckoned me to peruse their pages when I snuck off to a back room. Otherwise, I'd sit quietly and admire the stones she had placed in any available space. Yet, what I'll never forget was once spotting the phallus shaped candle that sat on a shelf in her bedroom closet. The wick stuck out the tip, and the entire candle, perhaps eight inches tall, was scarlet. What arcane

or nefarious power did such an artifact possess? I was at once simultaneously fascinated and found it alluring, provoked by a desire which I couldn't name in my youth.

So, when I say that I was accustomed to the atmospheric climate of new age prognostication, I am genuine. And the woman turning cards over at the table when I was 15 was not the first to do so. This particular Tarot reading, however, shaped the rest of my life. She read my cards and told me that I would be a teacher someday. I struggle to remember what cards she turned over that led her to that conclusion. Did she turn over The Magician? Standing tall, pointing upward with his wand, his other hand gesturing to the ground beneath him. Crowned with a lemniscate, The Magician teaches how energy can never be destroyed, only transformed. On his altar before him, all four symbols of the Tarot and their corresponding elements: the wand, representing fire and spirit; the chalice, which holds the element of water; a sword, with its ability to slice through air; and the pentacle, the physical representation of money and earthly gains. Or was it The Chariot? The soldier behind the reins of The Chariot is drawn by two oppositely colored sphinxes, ancient guardians of balanced wisdom. The Chariot promises, through tempered action and the ethical control of forces in one's life, victory awaits at the end of a long, hard journey. Would teaching bring me from rags-to-riches, as The Chariot promises? While I'd like to think cards like these were part of my reading, I can't say for sure.

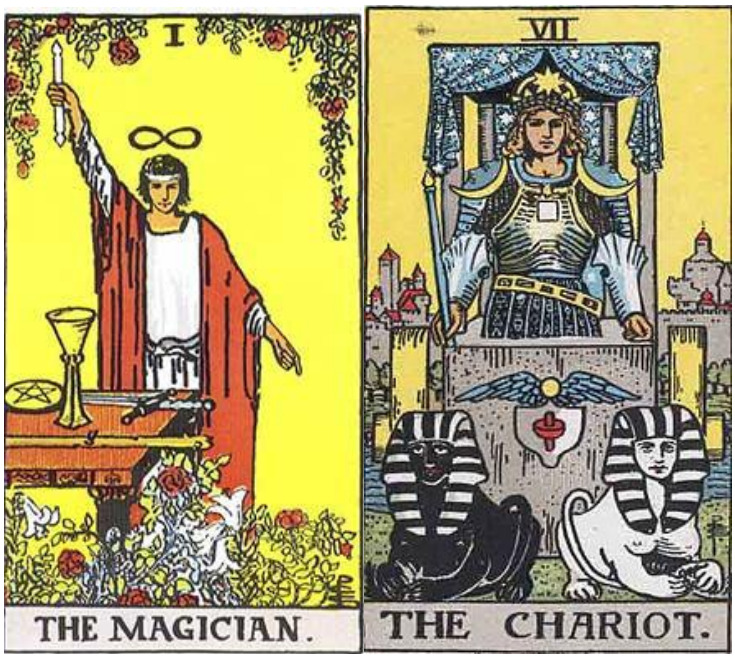

FIGURE 4.1 THE MAGICIAN AND THE CHARIOT. RIDER-WAITE TAROT.

I do know she explained that before I can actualize my path I would have to be completely open to my Mom, who sat behind me in this quaint broom closet — a typical demand of cartomancers who read for young adults is to have a parent in the room. The woman assured me that my Mom would always offer support and that I should have faith in the act of being true to myself. I seized up. My stomach soured. She gave me a light blue candle once my reading was finished, telling me to light it and ask for a smooth transition in owning my truth.

My Mom and I sat in quiet on the way home once we left. She broke the silence, asking if I had anything I wanted to talk about. She reassured me that she would love me no matter what. I blurted out, "I'm bisexual, Mom."

"That's okay, honey," I can remember her say. "Momma always knew, and it's okay."

I came out to my friends earlier that year in high school. Now I'd come out to my mom. The Tarot reading was in part the driving force for me to exit the closet. You could say, as far as literacy is concerned, the Tarot was and has been a literacy sponsor in my life since that day. As I write this, a deck sits a few feet away and I still consult their imagery routinely. Beginning with my coming out story also brings into focus how closets can be filled with things that can help us queers decide when, where, and how to leave their confines. My closet, it just so happens, was literally represented by a broom closet. There were more things, more agents in my coming out narrative though.

Perhaps I would not have given much value to the Tarot reading if it wasn't for the many trips to Kentucky backwoods and trailer parks that Mom and I took so many times. The car rides with my Mom were part of my coming out process, and by extension, the car was a safe enough space that allowed me to proclaim my sexuality that day. And it goes without stating that my Mom is perhaps the most significant literacy sponsor in my life. She will tell you she didn't finish high school, if you ask her. Her path to conventional literacy may be turbulent, but let me assure you, my Mom is literate in ways most can't relate. If it wasn't for her teaching me how to read the world, and in doing so, guaranteeing that I know how the world will misread me, then coming out that day wouldn't have been feasible; coming out takes plenty of actors, human and otherwise.

Furthermore, I don't think it's without reason to think of the phallus (or cock) candle that was stored in the trailer closet as a literacy sponsor either. A mix of spirituality, desire, and illicit intent, the red cock hidden away in that trailer taught me early on that such non-christian artifacts

were to be tucked and stowed away. My desire for its shape was something to be concealed as well, even if it was unnamable at such a young age. In fact, I realize now that I have never openly talked about the impact the candle made on me until now. The magical tool still serves a purpose. The cock candle has drawn me back in to assay how my sexual desire, my spiritual belief practices, and the way I come to interpret the world deeply coalesce on page, as a literacy scholar, as a queer Appalachian, and as a 15 year old who came out because of Tarot cards.

Most queer folxs have coming out stories even if their closets aren't full of Tarot cards or phallic ritual supplies. Usually coming out of the closet marks an ontological initiation into a life queerly lived. To make it plain: coming of the closet is the act of disclosing non-heteronormative identity and/or sexual orientation. The idiom is oftentimes seen as a political act: "Since Stonewall, however, the 'closet' has become one of the most widely used metaphors for the evolution […] of a gay or lesbian consciousness" (Hogen & Hudson, 1998, p. 140). Eve Sedgwick, who's scrupulous theorizing of the closet is widely cited in queer theory, has noted that the closet was the "defining structure for gay oppression" in the 20th century (1990, p. 71). It's from Sedgwick's ideas that Michael Warner (2002) aptly summarizes the function of the closet as

> a set of assumptions in everyday life as well as in expert knowledge: assumptions about what goes without saying; what can be said without a breach of decorum; who shares the onus of disclosure; what can be known about a person's real nature through telltale signs, without his or her own awareness; and who will bear the consequences of speech and silence. (p. 52)

The closet's pedigree isn't lost on literacy, composition, and rhetoric scholars, either. Notably, the first substantial instantiation of scholarship discussing coming out, the closet, and the writing classroom can be attributed to Malinowitz's (1995) *Textual Orientations*. Malinowitz predicted over two decades ago that we would have to grapple with coming out in the writing classroom more frequently and in various ways:

> Coming out is a speech act that, as the lesbian and gay movement grows and mass public discourse is increasingly infused with information about lesbian and gay

> existence, we can expect to see attempted more and more in our writing classroom. (p. 266)

And she was correct. Scholars have since interrogated, for example, the representation of LGBT/queer peoples in texts used in writing classrooms (Marinara, et al., 2009) and how queer texts can procure spaces of visibility (Alexander, 2008; Monson & Rhodes, 2004). Attention to the intersections of sexuality, technology, and the teaching of writing (Banks & Alexander, 2009) has garnered credence in the field as important places where the closet functions as well (see Alexander, 1997; Alexander & Gibson, 2004).

More recently Eric Pritchard (2017) has called for more nuanced approaches to how we study and teach issues around coming out:

> We must also remember that issues affecting LGBTQ students and teachers are wrapped up in queer sexuailty and gender as they are with race, class, disability, citizenship, colonialism, and other factors. The issues that emerge from this scholarship need to be continually troubled along those additional lines. We must examine, for example, the role of reading and writing in coming out and sexual disclosures, specifically the shifting meanings of coming out across a diversity of LGBTQ experiences. (p. 45)

I pick up Prichard's call for troubling these many overlaps in this chapter. I explore literacy matters of the closet, which is to say: I not only look to the many ways my participant's in their storytelling grapple with the plethora of social, systemic, and/or lived realities that accompany coming out, but also contemplate what other *things* matter in coming out. Instead, through engaging with one participant's coming out story I reimagine the closet as not only a metaphoric space of identity but also of containing a number of unaccounted actants that are participatory with the process of coming out.

What would it mean to think of self-disclosure as an entangled, messy event not merely about a subject's identity alone or as a social phenomenon, but one that involves a diversity of material actors? What would happen if we looked for *what* catalyzes the act of coming out rather than solely focusing on the coming out itself? How, in other words, can we animate the literacy

act of declaring one's sexuality and/or gender as well as recognize the nonhuman actants involved with outing oneself? How can new materialist refigurations of agencies help us reimagine the way literacy emerges from being-with the world, or in this case the closet? More directly related to my participant pool, how does the physicality of Appalachia function in these narratives of coming out?

Following these lines of inquiry, I've titled this chapter "Matters of the Closet" as a deliberate attempt to rethink what *matter matters* in terms of the closet's metaphoric space. The dual meaning in *matters* opens a space for subverting meaning around the closet. If some-*thing* matters, it's important and has value. *The matters at hand* denotes priority and focus. Then there is the matter that makes up material. Such wordplay isn't my singular aim, because I do realize and agree with Barad's (2007) observation, "The belief that grammatical categories reflect the underlying structure of the world is a continuing seductive habit of mind worth questioning" (p. 133). In lieu of being seduced by semantics, my point in this chapter looks to a literacy story I've collected from a queer Appalachian at length and with deep analysis in order to reconsider what matters in his literacy. More specifically, I am concerned with thinking through how coming out stories are not only confined to discursive practices but rather are embodied enactments with a range of literacy sponsors that are not necessarily textual or, for that matter, human.

I closed last chapter with the prospect of deploying metaphoric tracking in my research participants' stories as a model through which we can understand how literacy is caught in the flow of relationality with the nonhuman. If not obvious from its title, this chapter is concerned with the particular method of tracking literacy matters: metaphors that permit a glimpse into how being-with objects and places in literacy is as equally important as the ability to read and write, and all other acts of discernment. I've chosen the closet because much like how other queer writers who have reflected on the inanimate as critical to their queer lives[15], our relationship with objects *needs* to be queer if we are better understand them outside of human exceptionalism. Similar to how Chen (2012) came to "realize that queerness had everything to do" with the theory of animacies, so have I come to realize that queerness has everything to do with literacies that are animated (p. 233). The queer closet in this chapter is treated as a metaphor that contains

[15] I'm thinking of Ahmed's (2006) desk here. Chen's (2012) rumination on a couch serves as another example.

multiple objects with their own agency and not merely a genre through which to read these participants' stories.

I see the closet as a material literacy metaphor in a few ways. To begin, the conventional closet is contingent upon entry and departure from the same threshold, figuratively and literally. A closet sequesters what it contains. Matters of the closet frame this chapter because closets are full of stuff. We store things in a closet. The closet beckons us to hide our secrets, our failures: the dirty clothes we didn't wash before company arrives; the shoe obsession; non-aesthetic cleaning liquids and powdered agents used to keep the lived-in part of the house clean; a secret phallus-shaped candle; a place to give a Tarot reading. Things get shoved into a closet not to be looked at. Yet, they can also be wonderful places of chaos and mess. A closet can be a surreptitious place of queer awe.

The aim of this chapter adds to the copious amount of work that acknowledges the coming out narrative as example par excellence in queer literacy work (e.g. Alexander, 2008; Banks, 2003, 2009; Cummings, 2009; Hudson, 2014; Kinder, 1998; Malinowitz, 1995; Nichols, 2013; Pritchard, 2017; Ringer, 1994; Smith, 2000). Coming out narratives enable scholars to "unpack the layers of social, cultural, and ideological meaning and phenomena revealed and highlighted by the coming-out process" (Cummings, n.p.). Noting how "straights have the 'narrative luxury' of not having to consider their self-narration," Alexander (2008) writes that coming out is "an act of rhetorical staging and performance, frequently on that is carefully crafted and narrated" (p. 106). For Alexander, he sees this difference as key to studying sexual literacy, whereas Banks (2003) highlights how such "coming-out stories seem almost always to be" personal narrative, centering around an individual's experience (p. 36). I want more from our scholarly acknowledgements about literacies of the closet. I want the things animating the closet to be given consideration along with the queer person who left or leaves its enclosure. I want the matters of the closet to be animated.

The closet reveals how our relationship with things are equally important in understanding their thing-power, or "the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness" (Bennett, 2010, p. xvi), and affects how we become and are literate. On that note, we must account for the items in the closet. The closet isn't greater than the sum of its parts; each matter of the closet can hold as much value as the closet itself. The importance of the object isn't only about the thing unto itself

either, but instead its affiliation with the closet and the literacy act of coming out. Being open to receive such objects underlies animate literacies' federation with animacy theory: "Thinking and feeling critically about animacy encourages opening to the senses of the world, receptivity, vulnerability" (Chen, 2012, p. 237). Animate literacies asks us to do the same with literacy. Matters of the closet asks us to do so queerly. Some closeted objects demand more attention than others. Some may recede to the background. Oftentimes one thing points to another, and their interactions push us out the door in unexpected ways.

Think of the Tarot reading from my story earlier. Think of the table. Think of the cards. By my being-with those objects in that (actual and figurative) closet were just as equally as important in my queer literacies as was my self-disclosure. It's for this reason that in the following pages I spend ample time with Justin's coming out story. At the time of our interview, Justin was in his early 30s. And while he wasn't always drawn to English during his education, his interests in mathematics and arithmetic led to him teaching high school math. When Justin shared his story with me he was finishing his Masters in computation, and had left high school teaching to pursue computer programming elsewhere. Justin grew up in the Appalachian region of Southeast Ohio in a small rural town that ran along the Ohio River. He no longer lives in Appalachia, but lives close enough to drive and visit his family when the occasion arises.

I go back into Justin's closet taking animate literacy with me, and attempt to discover what objects existed with Justin that enabled and disenabled his coming out. I am looking for the actors in his stories that may or may not be central figures but nevertheless are enmeshed with the participant's coming out narrative. The remainder of this chapter represents how I see literacy matters moving through storytelling, and, as such, I spend a considerable amount of time with a single story in order to offer many ways of demonstrating animate literacies' theoretical application. Out of the 7 participants I interviewed, Justin's story stood out in particular for having the most *things* in his closet. I look at the varieties of ways Justin's closet was actively shaping his world prior to his coming out. Then, I explore how Justin's story illuminates an aspect often associated with the closet: death. From there I explore how closets contain things, and how Justin's closet was filled with water heaters, scars, and hospital visits among other things. Finally, I conclude this chapter with thinking about objects as they are taken out of the closet, and what it may mean for objects outside the closet to work as literacy sponsors in the coming out process.

Matters of Justin's Closet

Justin and I met when he was in a gay relationship with a close friend in 2015. I didn't know Justin was Appalachian like myself until after he reached me on social media willing to participate in my collecting of queer Appalachian stories. After deciding on a day and time, I interviewed Justin over the phone and recorded his interview on a voice recorder, later to be transcribed. It's important for context, as I will detail later on, Justin wasn't able to come out till his was 25 in large part to a childhood accident that left 40% of his body covered in scars. He also has a twin gay brother. Otherwise, I have lightly edited the transcript to omit pauses and filler words for reading convenience. Scholars (e.g. Brandt, 2001; Shon, 2006) have made similar moves with their transcripts of participant interviews for ease of reading. While my intention was not to edit for Standardized American English like Sohn attempted to do with her participants, my editing sought to remove filler words that were non-starters in terms of the storytelling. These include "um," extra "likes," "yeah," "ya know," and so on.

I initiated the interview by asking Justin how he identified. He told me he was "a cisgender male" and "100% homosexual," a factoid I felt silly inquiring about since these points were obvious from our friendship. However, during the length of the interview I found out details of Justin's life that I hadn't known. Justin grew up in a family of six. While I knew that Justin has a twin who is also gay, I learned he had a younger and older brother. He grew up with his mother and his father, until they divorced when Justin was ten. Justin let me know early on in our conversation that he didn't come out till he was 25. "I didn't come out [till] I was almost 25 […] . I just never thought about my queerness or identity in any sort of sexual ways until I was 20 to 23," he explained.

Even though Justin admits he didn't even "know what gay was" he realized he had same-sex desire from an early age. "I would grab the Sears catalogue that we for some weird reason had in our bathroom," he explains, "and flip straight to the men's underwear section and start jerking off to it." Justin may not have been equipped with the sexual literacy to name his desire, if sexual literacy is limited only to the "knowledge complex that recognizes the significance of sexuality to self- and communal definition" (Alexander, 2008, p. 5). Justin's embodied desire made him literate, though. Justin was able to read the images of the men on display even if he wasn't "reading" alphabetic text. In this line of thinking, Justin's reading of the Sears catalogue

queerly fails to uphold conventional notions about what it means to be literate. As a nonhuman, nontextual (i.e. a text with words intended to be read) literacy sponsor, the Sears catalogue animates how Justin's became literate of his own desire, of bodies (his and other men's), and, later of his sexual orientation. That is to say: Justin's sexual literacy emerges, at least in part, out of his interaction with the images of men in the catalog, his embodied urge "to start jerking off," and his desire for men.

When I ask Justin about when he was able to come out, his answer begins with him joining a college fraternity his junior year, and "messed around with one guy." The way Justin puts it, "He got me kind of drunk — pretty drunk — over fall break. One thing led to another, I slept a night in his bed and then he crawled up [into the bed]." This initial gay sexual encounter led to Justin living a double life. Between teaching Sunday school, running summer bible study camps, "then on the weekends [going] to fool around with guys," Justin said, " I was still considering myself straight."

Justin took a year to coming out completely, he told me:

> I came out to my friends first […] . I made it a birthday gift to myself. My birthday is in August, so I came out in about February of that year [to close friends]. I told everyone for my 25th birthday we cannot go out to get dinner and then go out afterwards […] until I come out with everyone. I came out to my parents probably the Easter after my birthday. I thought I couldn't do it in person. I had to do call my mom over the phone, but thankfully [my brother] had come out to them a couple years before me so it wasn't that big of a deal.

Justin's plan to give a birthday gift to himself by coming out is an interesting metaphor to track here as a matter of his closet. A birthday gift, generally speaking, is arguably a metaphoric object that represents another year of one's life. The birthday gift exemplifies celebrating one's life, including the day of birth. Justin coming out, as I imagine it is for many queers who come out, marked a birth of a different sort.

Alongside the birth of his queer self, Justin made a comment that particularly stood out:

> I was *so* naive. I had no idea what to expect, never had anything explained or never even explored those aspects of my life. I remember my mamaw passed away in February. This is 2009. The weekend before, I blacked out at a party and then woke up and was next to another man. She passed away the next weekend and it was that that pivotal moment in our family's life where like I finally had to be honest with myself.

He had *no* idea, *never* experienced, *never* explored those aspects of his life — those aspects, I take to be those matters of living in the closet. The repetition of negatives underscored by blacking out — a temporary death of consciousness — and the death of his grandmother warrant pause as to how we can begin to think of the closet for Justin. The impetus "to be honest" with himself was catalyzed by death in Justin's narrative.

Arguably, the closet for Justin was a deadened place, but one nevertheless still agential enough to propel Justin to disclosure. As not to forget, animacy at its core deals with liveliness and "seeks to trouble this binary of life and nonlife as it offers a different way to conceive of relationality and intersubjective exchange" (Chen, 2012, p. 11). Animate literacies take serious, too, the gradation of death: to what degree does absence, dying, and expiration function in our literate practices? To understand that Justin's closet was animated by his grandmother's death requires an explanation of how Justin sees his family. Later in our interview, when I ask about his relationship with his family now that he is out, Justin mentioned Appalachia for the first time and implicitly identified himself as being a part of "the very classic Appalachian family that doesn't talk about things." "Things" here isn't general for Justin, "things" is referring to his sexuality. He continued to explain, "I mean we're very quiet when it comes to family gatherings. […] They don't care [about his being gay], we don't ever talk about things gay related […] . They're very accepting of us [i.e. Justin and his gay, twin brother]." Justin's family avoiding anything "gay related" while being "very accepting" of Justin and his lifestyle could be perceived as contradictory, especially when queer politics oftentimes relies on a *we're here, we're queer* mentality. I think this contradiction is able to exist because family takes on queerer meaning in Appalachia.

For instance, in her recent work, Amanda Hayes (2018) notes how Appalachian rhetoric's "reliance on place and family are not only as socially important concepts (which they are), but

also on an implicit understanding that these are sources of knowledge on which to build one's process of thinking and identity-building" (p. 115). Appalachia as an actual place not mere social category, is actively involved with the formation of how Appalachians think and how Appalachians identify. What's more, "Place," she writes, "can be family. Family can be place" (p. 115). Hayes' chiasmatic articulation about family and place reveals how place matters for Appalachians, an arguably queer perspective. It is queer first because it exposes place as agential in Appalachia; the land has the power to form familial relations and kinships, leaving room for different kinships and different closets to emerge much like the possibilities that lay in queer kin-making. Furthermore, by claiming that place can be family, the power of Appalachian place transgresses sanguine genealogies, subverting normative familial structures by including the inanimate kin of the landscape. It's a very queer notion to entertain that, like queers who choose their families, the land via an Appalachian rhetorical lens can also chose its family. The Appalachian Mountains are a queer family member.

Since Appalachian families can be potentially viewed as queer because of their incorporation of the mountains as kin, it's important to acknowledge that Justin's grandmother dying potentially signifies his relationship to the mountains and his being Appalachian. He is able to articulate his queerness once he experiences loss and finds himself away at college, outside the Appalachian region. Justin's deliberation to come out to everyone as a gift to himself was marked by the death of his grandmother, demonstrating how closets can be queer places, teetering between life and death. For Justin his coming out was both a moment of celebrating his natal birth and the birth of his queer self, while simultaneously acknowledging how the death of his grandmother led to killing off the parts of his life where he could no longer be honest with himself. The argument could be made that his grandmother was a competing sponsor of literacy (Webb-Sunderhaus, 2015), meaning she inhibited his coming out. Justin never indicated that it was particularly his grandma who prevented him from coming out. It was what her death represented that, perhaps, was the reason he wasn't able to be honest with himself: his relationship to place and family. In this way, an animate literacy sponsor that works to inhibitor literacy could just as well be the *relations* between place and the sponsored and the familiar relationships.

In fact, speaking of his family, Justin did not say much about the process of his brother's coming out, which Justin explains little about besides it "happening his [brother's] freshman

year." What I do find striking here is the matter of proximity of Justin's closet to his family and his parents back home. Justin's reluctance to coming out in person to his parents calls into question how locality can shift the closet's agency. It needs to be considered then, how closets gain or lose power in proximity to where they are when someone is still closeted. Justin's closet loses the capacity to hold him when he is farther from his family of origin. Justin's coming out over the phone read through a conventional literacy lens may focus on only Justin's agency: Justin was more willing to come out when he wasn't home, and so it's a matter of Justin's agency. But to end at that point would elide the matters of Justin's closet. We should also ask how the closet as a thing changes in proximity to place — it wasn't just that Justin felt safer or felt it easier to come out not face-to-face with his parents, but it was *also that he was in a different place*. Agency doesn't solely lie in Justin's possession here but with a conglomeration of literacy sponsors: the death of his grandmother; the proximity of his closet; the clandestine hook-ups; the denial; the phone in his hand. All these factors were as equally important in the lead up to and the act of self-disclosure for Justin, and I'm venturing to say, as is the case for all us queers and our closets.

The Things in Justin's Closet

Ask just about anyone who has come out about their process and they can tell you where and when they did, perhaps even how they still must out themselves in various contexts and settings. Justin wasn't able to come out earlier in his life in part because of his relationship to his body. Justin explained he wasn't able to think about his sexuality till his early 20s, and he had good reason. There's no denying that Justin's first 20 years were shaped by his relationship to his body because they were spent dealing with the scars left by a severe burn from bath water. He explains, "It's taken me a long time, even this year being in therapy, to realize I'm allowed to be comfortable with myself." Justin detailed how being five foot and weighing 255 pounds the end of his junior year of high school made matters worse, "I just made the decision because it was the only way I figured I knew how to lose weight." "It started with stop drinking pop," he continued, "and then it turned into not eating at all, and I dropped 90 pounds in one year." Justin confesses, "I went anorexic and then bulimic my entire senior year." Struggling with eating disorders and his weight along with the myriad of complications that resulted from the burns left

Justin thinking, “I sure as hell won’t be desirable […] why even try?” Moreover it was his scars “that was a major thing that delayed [his] sexual exploration.”

Earlier on in our interview he told me the tragic story about what occurred to him as a toddler:

> So, I have third-degree burns on almost 40 % of my body. It’s from halfway up my butt then down to my feet. […] I would go through surgeries every year, every other year till I was about 14 or 15, and then have one every few years after that. […] It was an accident. My dad was home with me and [Justin’s twin brother]. It was about 10 in the morning […] we had a routine, and I don’t exactly know how it would happen, sometimes one of us would have a bath then the other, sometimes together. I was 15 months old. Dad had [my brother] in one room and then I just ran into the bathroom, just like a toddler would do, then jumped in the bathtub, knelt on both my knees and then turned the hot water faucet on. This is in December of 1985, and hot water heaters then would produce hot water so much faster than they do today. There were not as many regulations.[[…]] So it only took five seconds to get scalding hot water to come out and then about 10 seconds later I had 35-40% my body burned.

Thinking through the closet as the framework in this chapter, it’s important to be mindful that bodies are in closets as well. New materialist perspectives wouldn’t limit bodies exclusive to human domain. They would not demarcate the human body as a closed off, distinct entity either. By way of this thinking, I’d like to suggest that the body itself, apart from our awareness of it, can act as a literacy sponsor:

> That is, human bodies, like all other bodies, are not entities with inherent boundaries and properties but phenomena that acquire specific boundaries and properties through the open-ended dynamics of intra-activity. Humans are part of the world-body space in its dynamic structuration. (Barad, 2007, p. 172)

Justin's story of how he was burnt read through this argument offers insight as to how his body entered the closet. Drawing from Bennett's (2010) point that "it is thus not enough to say that we are 'embodied.' We are, rather, *an array of bodies*," (p. 112-113) , it serves to spend time with how boiling water, water heaters, and Justin's scars form an assemblage shaping his body, able to produce a closet deep enough he wasn't able to find his way out till his mid-twenties. When Justin explained that water heaters weren't "regulated the way they are today," I was curious to discover the history of their regulation.

Two[16] years prior to Justin being burned in 1983, Washington State was the first state to pass legislation that "recognizes that unnecessarily hot tap or bath water creates an extreme risk of severe burns, especially among the elderly, children, and retarded persons" (Hot water heaters — Temperature regulation, 1983). Problematic language notwithstanding, the state law resulted from three years of lobbying and the advocacy from pediatricians on behalf of children and the frequent burns they experienced from too hot bathwater (Erdmann, & et al., 1991). Afterwards, states began to adopt various plumbing codes capping water temperatures as they see fit for residential water heaters — Federal precedent only required a warning on the water heater detailing that boiling water can cause serious, potentially fatal burns. Over the next 7 years, the power of Federal regulation in water heater installation would only reach hospitals and medical facilities (HRP - 0905974, 1984), uniform standards for disabled access in public buildings (UFAS, 1988), and in prisons and jails (ACA, 1990). It wouldn't be until 1997 that Ohio state law would adhere to a plumbing code, mandating an anti-scald valve on all residential water heaters, which shut off water-flow over 120°F (IPC, 1993).

Water heater legislation and regulation is underway as 15-month-old Justin spends the year after being burned undergoing 8 surgeries. The doctors "removed tissue and started the skin grafting process," he said, and "20 years after that it was a mixture of physical therapy and skin graft surgeries." If agency is "an enactment, not something that someone or something has," (Barad, 2007, p. 178), we cannot completely account for the specific agents that caused Justin to be burned. Put another way, animate literacies isn't necessarily asking who's actions were the cause of Justin's burns.

[16] My research here into water heaters may appear to be a detour, but in fact, I am allowing myself to listen to Justin's story and *its nonhuman* actors, and respond accordingly. You could say that Justin's water heater is sponsoring my literacies learned in this chapter.

Animate literacies acknowledgement of agency as existing with nonhumans — in this case of the water heater — "means that accountability requires much more attentiveness to existing power asymmetries" (Barad, 2007, p. 219). Power is understood here not as "an external force that acts on a subject," but power as the reiterative enactments between human and nonhumans that become sedimented over time (Barad, 2007, p. 235). The water heater, both for Justin personally and independent from his story, serves to demonstrate how nonhuman agents can possess thing-power. The water heater's thing-power being caught up in regulatory systems exhibits how nonhumans can sweep us up in strange currents of relations. Moveover, it isn't only the relationality of actors that are important to animate literacies, but the meaning-making that emerges from the performances, sign-systems, and the sensate necessary to navigate such interconnections.

Justin's story can help clarify my point. Picking up where he left off earlier:

> [M]y dad's deaf and so he didn't actually, he didn't necessarily hear it at first and then he came running in and had to wrap me up in the towel and take me to the neighbor's house so they could call 911.

Looking back, I realize Justin never explained if his dad had access to a TTY and I was so intent on listening, I didn't think to ask. Regardless of this fact, I have to carefully consider embodiment's role in how Justin creates meaning: his own embodiment from being scarred; his dad's non-normative embodiment in an immediate environment that didn't enable him to directly contact 911 for help; proximity of Justin's neighbors. As a result Justin's retelling of his story is somatically constitutive. Justin is now literate of things like water heaters in ways others aren't, but also of skin grafts, physical therapies, and surgeries. In acknowledging Justin's animate literacies as founded in the sensate is to simultaneously recognize that the water heater's thing-power lies in its reiterative encounters with humans. The intersections of the regulatory power set in motion by the lobbying and protests of pediatricians on behalf of children and on the other side of the continental United States lingers behind Justin's story.

Alison Kafer's (2013) insights on the body in her theorizing of crip theory can help explain how the acknowledgement of closeted objects function as literacy sponsors and actants in queer literacy practices. Crip theory, its theoretical beginnings credited largely to Robert

McRuer's (2006) *Crip Theory*, proposes that disability and by proxy "crip"-ness are cultural orderings used to uphold systemic structures of heteronormativity and able-bodiedness, or, as McRuer calls it, compulsory able-bodiedness. McRuer's arguments rely on queer theory's destabilization of normalized sexualities and genders in order to claim that crip theory undermines social forms that purport bodies should *be* only one way, and moreover, should be "able" in particular ways.

Kafer builds from these arguments and offers another crip framework which she calls the political/relational model. "Under a political/relational model of disability," she writes, "the problem of disability is located in inaccessible buildings, discriminatory attitudes, and ideological systems that attribute normalcy and deviance to particular minds and bodies" (p. 6). Situating Kafer's argument next to my ongoing invocation of new materialist agency, I don't think we ignore that objects have a relational and political, and thus potentially queer, role to play in how we come to understanding bodies and their impact in literacy. This becomes especially true when we take into the multitude of bodies, objects, and places that closets contain. For Justin, the water heater wasn't only a literacy sponsor by its impact on his embodiment, but its thing-power was also brought into relief by the political structures that surround it.

Recall that litigation passed on regulating water heaters because of the bodies that unregulated water heaters were affecting on a continual basis. Water heaters were a particular threat to "the elderly, children, and retarded persons." Read through a crip lens: The power of the water heater jeopardized the non-normalized body. This law makes room "to trace the ways in which compulsory able-bodiedness/able-mindedness and compulsory heterosexuality intertwine in the service of normativity" (Kafer, 2013, p. 17). The potential for damaging the body that the unregulated water heater possessed was a threat to those bodies deemed not normal — the water heater was a queer/crip object because its potential to disfigure and make more queer those bodies already deemed other. For Justin the water heater initially limited his understanding of his own queerness — his scarred embodiment occludes his queer desires and identity.

Part of the reason he thinks it's taken him till his 30s to accept his body and his identity as queer, is due to the "Appalachian mentality," where you just "deal with" the "adversity in your life. You can't improve [the situation] so you just have to play the cards you're dealt." Not to diminish Justin's point of view nor his lived experience as being Appalachian, but this

stereotyping of the Appalachian mentality has been critiqued by scholars. The homogenizing cultural narrative that Appalachians are isolationists, residing in the mountains, who aim to keep outsiders out is bolster by a parallel narrative that Appalachians don't want to better themselves because there's no sense in it, a point that Justin seems to regard as true (See: Catte, 2017; Smith, 2015; Williams, 2002). I'm not interested negotiating existing scholarship with Justin's perspective; in fact, I find the irreconcilability even more productive in supporting my arguments in chapter 2 on Appalachia as a queer place. What I'd like to think through rather, is the ways Appalachia acts in concert with the water heater in Justin's closet.

I argue that Justin's perception of Appalachia and the scholarly critique are both contradictory and true from the viewpoint of animate literacies' agential understanding of place. For instance, Justin told me after I asked him how his family navigated the years of surgeries with a family of six:

> So a lot of our family lived in the same town […] Thankfully visits for just one day [when] we'd go to [the hospital], it'd be a day trip if we went for a check-up. If I was in for a surgery, my three brothers would stay with our mamaw and papaw, or stay with an aunt or uncle.

The meaningful relationships that enabled Justin to continue his surgeries were not merely social if we bear in mind animate literacies flow through place. Place provided material resources and his family functioned as sponsors of his queer literacy. Place shaped and funneled Justin's personal and familial relationships. Living close to family and neighbors allowed Justin to make meaning in the world through his body. Adding to this, it's critical not to lose sight that place is also tangled in the water heater's thing-power via lack of regulation because Justin's burns were created in Appalachia-Ohio, not Westcoast Washington, permanently affecting Justin's relationship to his body. So when I say that scholarly critiques of narratives about Appalachia can be suspended in a queer web of agential factors for Justin's literacies, I mean: animate literacies embraces contradictions and moments of misfiring insofar as academic literacy practices are concerned. Justin's story reveals how physical place, and the objects which participate therein, are constitutive in the formation of animate literacy practices.

Justin's literacy narrative upholds my view of literacy as an exchange of forces, emanating from a combination of sign-systems, performances, and the sensate is upheld by Justin's literacy narrative. While it may be the case that I focus less on how literacy emanates from sign-systems for Justin with the legislation being the most apt example, I think it is apparent how the synesthetic and the performative shape Justin's literacies. How he read his body through sensational means, how he performed in his body, how the water heater accident was somatic and lasting: all these sensations and performances structured the closet around Justin. The literacy matters involved with closet building act as a metaphor we can track to understand that literacy isn't only a matter of reading and writing but of queer world-making.

A Closet's Worth

"Our metaphors, our tropes, our analogies," Kafer (2013) proclaims, "all have histories, all have consequences" (p. 128). The onus of this chapter has been the metaphor of the closet as an animated literacy sponsor, which contains real, physical bodies and objects. Furthermore, through examining the metaphor of the closet up close we can begin to understand how the bodies and objects in them have their own agency that underscore the literacy act of proclaiming one's queerness. By highlighting how place is also a critical factor in the construction of closets, it has been my aim to argue that closets are enlivened by the ability to move in space. They are alive too by their ability to catalyze death and inanimacy into action. Kafer's statement that our metaphors — in this case metaphors which contain matters of literacy — carry with them responsibility to critique their histories and implications of use. By spending time with the metaphor and literacy act of coming out of the closet, so readily accepted in literacy scholarship, I show how metaphors of matter work to animate our understanding and incorporation of the nonhuman into our expertise.

To stake these claims I have focused solely on a single story from the many hours of my story collecting to demonstrate there are many ways of engaging matters of literacy. To list and gloss over Justin's closet in order to make room for other participants' closets would have been a disservice to Justin and all that his closet entails. To quickly sort through Justin's closet would have also been irresponsible of me on the behalf of my reader; spending an entire chapter to explore Justin's closet enabled me to show how animate literacies can be analyzed and discovered in storytelling. I'm left wondering: What happens to the objects in our closets once

we decided to come out? What happens to the objects that are or were shut away? I'd like to conclude with rethinking the use of the closet as a literacy sponsor once the coming out is over. Justin's story led me to ask these questions and it is his story that I'd like to close with analyzing.

Towards the end of our interview Justin elucidates that it is only in his 30s that he is able to feel comfortable being gay and being scarred: "I'm allowed to show myself to other people and not be ashamed of it." While Justin doesn't expand how he shows himself generally speaking, I would venture to say that Justin is discussing the history of his closet that's rendered visible on his body through his scarring. This is a safe assumption, because Justin tells me about a significant Pride event he attended in 2017:

> Even if it's as something as simple as last pride, at last year's pride it was the first time I had ever worn shorts to Pride. I've only been to a few [Prides], but it's a fucking hundred degrees outside. And I remember being like, oh my god, [wearing pants and long sleeves] is miserable. So, I said fuck it. I'm wearing a cut off shirt and shorts, and it was glorious.

Pride is celebrated across the US during June to remember the Stonewall Riots that occurred June 28th, 1969, which sat in motion the subsequent gay rights movement. Most Prides are held outdoors, involve parades in public streets, and drag shows are performed in outside auditoriums or on erected stages. June can certainly come with temperatures reaching a "fucking hundred degrees." Justin's ability to read the world, and the world that read his body as different, arguably queer even within the queer community cumulates into a single act of wearing shorts for Justin.

Shorts. Think about wearing shorts. What does it mean to consider wearing shorts when your legs or body may be read by the world as somehow unacceptable? For some, shorts may not mean much more than reprieve from the hot months. For Justin, even after coming out, the matters of his closet are still shaping how the world comes to interact with his body and his own understanding of his queerness. By wearing a sleeveless shirt and a pair of shorts, without uttering a word Justin declares his queerness. He uses his closet's matters to disclose his queer sexuality by attending a pride event; he queers his relationship to his body by refusing its concealment—by visibly showing his scars that got in the way of his queerness to begin with.

Yet, the shorts have the agency to do so — the shorts *and* the scars *and* the water heater *and* the Sears catalogue *and and and.* When I ask what are we to do after the literacy act of coming out is over, I think Justin can teach us a few things: closets don't disappear once queers exit them. Closets can pull us back in. They exist in our literacies to animate the past, reminding us of when we sought new life as queers killing off our silence. They also teach us that everyone's closets can hold multitudes. Justin's closet wasn't full of Tarot cards or cock candles; his closet contained water heaters and hospital visits and scars. Finally, Justin's closet reveals how the matters of the closet can still affect us. The shorts in his closet influenced Justin years after he had come out. Closets can remind us that how we choose to be-with nonhumans matters in how we discern the world, while revealing that the world around us can easily build closets around us without our doing.

Chapter 5: Queer Affinities

Clinical psychology tells us arguably that trauma is the ultimate killer. Memories are not recycled like atoms and particles in quantum physics. They can be lost forever.
-Lady Gaga, "Marry The Night"

Originally, when this project set out I planned to organize the chapters by each area of the participants' lives I inquired about during the interview process — trauma, body, place, and spirituality (See Interview Script in Appendix A). However, my work had plans of its own and set me down another path. I came to realize how my theory of animate literacies was animating my own writing. For this reason, in the previous chapter by looking to objects via the literacy matters of Justin's closet, I aimed to demonstrate how such nonhumans are caught up in the flow of literacy *emanating from a combination of sign-systems, performances, and the sensate*. Furthermore, in accordance with my assertion that literacy *flows through and in particular places*, then Appalachia has funneled the flow of this entire dissertation. At the heart of this final chapter, I am left with the task of elucidating and unpacking the remaining piece of my definition of literacy: how may literacy be understood as an *exchange of forces*.

To do so requires examining up close what I mean by force and what it means to exchange. I mention in chapter one that I am not limiting exchange to its transactional sense. That is, an exchange in the way I see working in literacy isn't for mere purpose of gaining one thing for another as you would, say, trade money for goods — it isn't always about profit for animating literacy. My use of exchange rests on the meaning of its core word, change. You can change your behavior, change the load of laundry, change a diaper, you can carry change in your pocket. Through the lens of animacies theory, change's agency rests in the ability to affect. Even as an object, pocket change still causes things to happen. What's more, with regards to how literacy flows through places, I find it coincidental the word may have some far distant relation to Appalachia's Irish history[17]:

[17] I recognize that this is one among many genealogical histories of Appalachia.

> […] from Old French *changier* "to change, alter; exchange, switch," from Late Latin *cambiare* "to barter, exchange," extended form of Latin *cambire* "to exchange, barter," a word of Celtic origin, from PIE root **kemb-* "to bend, crook" (with a sense evolution perhaps from "to turn" to "to change," to "to barter"); cognate with Old Irish *camm* "crooked, curved;" Middle Irish *cimb* "tribute," *cimbid* "prisoner" […] . (Online Etymology Dictionary)

An exchange, as I use it to define animate literacies, is the bending and crooked forces that ultimately *effect change, creating new ways of being-with and meaning-making*. The Irish roots may not have been an intentional connection I made from the beginning, but I can't ignore how even in my framing of this project I am still finding connections to Appalachia. Also, as Ahmed (2006) reminds us, if sexualities are queer because they "are seen as odd, bent, twisted," (p. 161), then I can't help to see literacy as an exchange of forces being queer by way of its etymological origins. Exchange seems suitable enough a term to think of literacy as ongoing movement of forces.

I believe before I can fully actualize animate literacies' stakes in forces, and to not merely stop at including nonhuman actors in the purview of literacy sponsorship as I argued through the metaphor of the closet last chapter, I must also attend to literacy affects. Literacy affects are deployed in our literacy practices by demonstrating ways of being affected and how we potentially affect others. Where my discussion of literacy matters in the last chapter pointed to things, coherent enough to exist on their own in participant's storytelling, my discussion of literacy affects point to states of being. Literacy affects bear witness to how an exchange of forces can bend meaning, make crooked sense, and queer relationality.

Recall that my method of discovering animate literacies relies on tracking specific types of metaphors in our storytelling, and that literacy affects are metaphors that deal with how subjectivity is contained within literacy practices. The subjective "I" is a clear first indication that a metaphor may have the potential to considered a literacy affect. The metaphors that make up literacy affects rely on verbiage that indicate states rather than action or processes, or in linguistics terminology, stative verbs. That being said, I don't want to become too mired in linguistics and lose sight of how matters of nonhuman agency, affective states, and queerness

underscore animate literacies altogether. In fact, in tracking metaphors, literacy matters and literacy affects oftentimes overlap.

Like Bennett (2010), I too "equate affect with materiality" (p. xiii) when taking into account all actors' capacity to affect, but to condense the two into a single theoretical framework with regards to literacy would be a mistake. If we are to bring new materialism and posthumanist ethics into our literacy research then we have to: 1) attend to the fact that there are nonhumans that participate in literacies and have strategies to identify them; 2) consequently, to see that literacy emerges from exchange of forces it's essential to locate moments in literacy practices that expose various actants' capacity *to affect* one another for change to occur. This chapter takes the latter as its main goal.

To clearly make this distinction this chapter is divided into two parts. In the next section I give considerable time to affect theory broadly conceived, its connection to queerness along with its import in literacy work. I unpack at length what it would mean to incorporate the queer and the affective in our approaches to literacy. It is necessary to delineate the meaning of affect. What's more, it's critical to understand the relationship and slippage between the terms affect and emotion, since both in many ways can be strikingly similar, even interchangeable, yet can philosophically differ.

First, I look to scholars who have been frequently cited in the development of affect theory, because their ideas have led to specific aspects of affect theory being folded into literacy scholarship. It is important, I believe, to see the nuances of affect theory used in literacy scholarship in addition to demonstrating how affect theory has been queered. I'm invested in thinking through what queer affects can lend in way of literacy studies, but also position queer affects as the centerpiece to concede that literacy affects are tools through which we can see animate literacies functioning as an exchange of forces.

Because I'm interested in the affects of various forces between an assemblage of actors in literacy, I've chosen to title this "Queer Affinities" and have not included the word affect in the title for a particular reason. While affect and affinity may not share the etymological roots, they still, as I see it, exist in orbit of one another. Affect, from the latin *ad*, "to" and *facere* or *factus*, "to make, do" in a literal translation means "to do to." Affinity, on the other hand, is a cognate of *affinitas*, from *affinis* directly translated as "bordering on." Affinities could be thought of as identifiable contact zones between affects. To put it another way, affinities are the formation of

affects when they brush up against bodies. If you have an affinity for someone or something, you are inclined to be affected by such actants. In a generic sense, for instance, you can say that you have an affinity for science fiction novels or for cheap smut. But animate literacies seeks out queer affinities that don't necessarily fit into convention. This chapter, which is examining literacy affects, is titled "Queer Affinities" because it points to how affects leave their mark on queers through literacy. I am interested in how queer relationships among all actors congeal through literacy practices. That is, this chapter is concerned with identifying the lasting, queer affinities between individuals, bodies, nonhumans, and the land that form via literacy practices. With each story I begin with moments of participants' writing, reading, and other acts of literacy in order to demonstrate how participants affective states linger past the page, forming queer affections between the storyteller and others. In particular I look to four participants' stories to demonstrate such queer affiliations.

While I go into detail for each story in the second half of this chapter , I'll quickly highlight the queer storytellers' information here. I begin with Lexi's story. Lexi is a mother, an ex-wife, and a recovering drug addict. She identifies as bisexual and lives in central West Virginia. The second story belongs to Elizabeth. Elizabeth was born in Kentucky but her parents quickly moved her to Tennessee as an infant where she remained till after graduate school. She identifies as bisexual, and lives with her trans partner in rural New York. Macy's story comes next. Macy grew up in southern Ohio, on the banks of the Ohio River. She identifies as a bi- and pansexual, cisgender woman. Currently, Macy is finishing her bachelor's degree at a midwestern university in Ohio. Finally, the last story belongs to Lara. Lara came to live in southeast Kentucky as a teenager from New Mexico. She is bisexual and attending an Appalachian private college in Kentucky.

When I say that each story begins with typical literacy practices, I am mean journaling, writing and interacting on social media, reading novels, and conducting research. Lara and Macy's stories also include sexual literacy practices (Alexander, 2008). These involve teaching others about sexuality, safe sex practices, and writing and revising policies on campus that affect bathroom access for trans students. Also, there are commonalities among these storytellers: they all identify as cisgender women; all four identify as bisexual (though, Macy who identifies as pansexual uses the term bisexual only in certain contexts, but more on this later); not counting Lexi, the three other participants experienced living outside of Appalachia; excluding Elizabeth,

the other three discuss feeling as though their bisexuality is not taken seriously or discounted; all four perceive of evangelical christianity in Appalachia as harmful either to their own relationship with the church and religion, or the queer community at large, sometimes even both.

These four participants' stories are unique because their reading and writing practices affect their understanding of self, place, and community. Community, as I'm using it here, varies for each participant, but is always underscored by their relationship to others. In a number of ways, the local places where the participants practice their literacies becomes animated and affect their understanding of self. In other words, the relationship between self and place is affected and mediated through their literacy practices. The subtle details in each story begins to stitch together a clearer picture of animate literacies expansion and reformation of literacy as an ongoing exchange of forces, pushing actors together and apart. Through paying attention to the lasting affinities that are generated from reading, writing, and other literacy practices, it becomes easier to see how literacy is alive, energic, and forceful with the capacity to affect not only how one reads and writes, but how actors relate to and within the world.

Queerly Affected

Before telling and analyzing the participants stories, I first situate my reading of their experiences in relation to current theories of affect and affective literacies. In affect theory writ large, Brian Massumi (1987, 2002, 2015) is recurrently credited with theorizing the distinction between emotions and affect. In particular he sees the two as interreliant but still separate concepts, noting that "an emotion is a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal" (2002, p. 28). In other words, emotions are possessed by an individual. *I am sad.* Sadness belongs to the subject in this statement. Affect speaks to something else. For Massumi (2002) "affect is synesthetic, implying a participation of the senses in each other: the measure of a living thing's potential interactions is its ability to transform the effects of one sensory mode into those of another" (p. 35). Emotions attempt to capture those moments of sensory participation.

Affect can be understood as "an ability to affect and a susceptibility to be affected" whereas an "emotion or feeling is a recognized affect" (Massumi, 2002, p. 61). In this way of thinking, it follows that affects precede emotion. Gregg and Seigworth (2010) elucidate these

points and expanding affect's reach as being "synonymous with force or forces of encounter", and in further detail,

> affect's always immanent capacity for extending further still: both into and out of the interstices of the inorganic and the non-living, the intracellular divulgences of sinew, tissue, gut economies, and the vaporous evanescences of the incorporeal (events, atmospheres, feeling-tones). (p. 2)

Affect, as I read Gregg and Seigworth, includes the potentiality of the space around and in us. They continue to state that from the myriad of force-relations, "affect as potential" equals "a body's capacity to affect and be affected" (p. 2). The feeling that's left after being affected or affecting another we come to call emotions.

Emotions, since they are personal and nameable, have been theorized as well. Notably, the psychologist and science reporter, Daniel Goleman (1995) developed an influential (though also problematic) theory of emotions with his watershed text *Emotional Intelligence*, which was quickly circulated in popular self-help discourse. In it he argues that emotions are as critical in thinking about intelligence as mental cognition, noting, "Emotional life is a domain that, as surely as math or reading, can be handled with greater or lesser skill, and requires its unique set of competencies" (p. 83). Goleman's neologism of emotional intelligence is widely used still. He declares emotional intelligence as "a meta-ability, determining how well we can use whatever other skills we have including raw intellect (p. 83)". It isn't outside the realm of reason to see parallels between the ability-based model of literacy in Goleman's definition of emotional intelligence, a point that wasn't lost on Rob Bocchino (1999).

Bocchino picks up Goleman's arguments in his book, *Emotional Literacy*. Writing mainly for primary and secondary educators, Bocchino defines emotional literacy as an "ability to understand and manage emotions resourcefully, to communicate effectively, and to self-coach are essential for all of us" (p. 5). Emotional literacy is distinct from emotional intelligence in that the latter "is the characteristic, the personality dynamic or the potential, that can be nurtured and developed in a person", and the former "is the constellations of understandings, skills, and strategies that a person can develop and nurture from infancy through his or her entire lifetime" (p. 11). Bocchino sees emotional intelligence as the subjective potential to experience emotional

states, whereas emotional literacy encompasses an individual's ability to grapple with emotive intelligence.

Conceptually, emotional literacy and emotional intelligence demonstrate how these lexical variations are intimately reliant on individualization, and are important in thinking about how literacy is always linked to an individual's ability. The capacity to understand one's emotive life is linked to learning how to be emotionally literate. In this way, Bocchino makes a similar move as Brandt in thinking of literacy as a resource. These constructs are helpful in certain contexts, I believe. One example that stands out: learning how to grapple with one's emotional states and what situations trigger those emotions have increasingly played a role in the mental health of students in primary and secondary education (Alemdar, 2018; Coskun & Oksuz, 2019). However, I think it serves to question what limitations accompany emotional literacy when we restrict emotions to merely a personal matter.

Mark Amsler (2001) can offer alternative perspective of literacy in terms of affect theory, in his book *Affective Literacies: Writing and Multilingualism in the Late Middle Ages*. Drawing from medieval historiography, literary studies, and the New Literacy Studies movement, Amsler defines affective literacies as: "a range of emotional, spiritual, physiological, somatic responses readers have when reading or perceiving a text" (p. 103). The assortment of responses he describes rely on three suppositions: the first being that there must exist a text to provide a response; secondly that the reader is literate enough in the particular type of text to have a response; and, lastly, that affective literacies are still firmly situated within the domain of human experience. Although I found Amsler's connection of literacy and affect useful Amsler is still placing center to affective literacies the human exceptionalism that I've critiqued since chapter 1. My theoretical view of affect differs from Amsler's because it doesn't rely solely on the affective states experienced while reading a book. Nor does animate literacies presume that to be affectively literate requires reading and writing in the traditional sense. After all, it's estimated that human communication is primarily nonverbal; we can read each other's bodies and be affected too (see Mehrabian, 1967, 1971, 2009).

I'd like to think that a posthuman, new materialist perspective can broaden affect's role in literacy studies. As Kuby, Spector, and Thiel write in *Posthumanism and Literacy Education: Knowing/Becoming/Doing Literacies*, the "posthuman subject finds herself immersed in a network of vital relations, not autonomous at all, yet autopoietic, reproducing and transforming

in relation to assemblages of which she is part" (p. 186). Since "[p]osthuman literacy researchers recognize that we are part of the ongoing activity of life" (Spector, Thiel, & Kuby, 2018, p. 187), literacy affects don't limit emotions to merely something one possess or some phenomenologically individual experience. My theory of animate literacies treats affects and emotions in their own right as separate pseudo-entities[18] that render relationality visible in our stories.

My work on literacy affects, in this way, aligns with Laura Micciche's views on affect, who has been a foundational scholar when it comes to theorizing emotions and affects in the field of literacy, composition, and rhetoric studies. In Micciche's (2007) *Doing Emotion: Rhetoric, Writing, Teaching*, emotions and affect at times are imbricated, morphing in and out of one another. This slippage becomes apparent she writes that emotion "best evokes the potential to enact and construct, name and define, become and undo — to perform meanings and to stand as a marker for meanings that get performed," notably because "bodies and emotions are not only enacted in writing but also imbued in how we come to writing" (p. 52). In this way, Miciche argues that emotions aren't merely possessed and personal, but also affective.

Emotions and affect overlap for Micciche (2007) because, for her, "emotions do something besides express individuals' feelings, usually thought of as internal states; emotions function as the adhesive that aligns certain bodies together and binds a person/position/role to an affective state" (p. 74). In reference to her book, she later clarifies this point, saying "emotions are something we do rather than something we have" (2016, n.p.). Because emotions are a doing, as Micciche argues, and I'm inclined to agree, they're inseparable from the writing process:

> Writing involves everything you do, everything you encounter, everything you are when making sense of the world through language. Writing is contaminated, made possible by a mingling of forces and energies in diverse, often distributed

[18] I am not referencing any particular prior use of the term *pseudo-entities*, here. In the last chapter, when I was looking at literacy matters I examined actual *things* made up of matter. Literacy matters are, in fact, entities, or as object oriented ontology would have put it: objects exist, this we know (see Morton, 2013a). So when I say pseudo-entities, I mean that emotions and affects exist but they aren't independent of the actors that experience them. They are *like* objects, but not fully their own – not in the way closets or water heaters exist on their own.

> environments. Writing is defined, ultimately, by its radical *withness*. (2014, p. 502)

There's that word again: *with*. The exchange of forces, which animate literacies offers to broaden literacy's domain of expertise, relies on being-with others as Micciche is pointing to here. To say that writing is contaminated also gestures towards my queer application of affect in animate literacies.

Affects have the potential to become queer when their effects fail to reproduce acceptable, normative emotive, or embodied states. If, as Chen (2012) tells us, animacy hierarchies are "ontologies of affect" (p. 190), we must account for how affects order bodies as acceptable or not. Sara Ahmed's (2004a) "affective economies" may be helpful, where she sees the object-subject relationship bound together by affects. For Ahmed, "emotions involve subjects and objects, but without residing positively within them" (p. 119). Ahmed (2004b) claims "emotions are relational: they involve (re)actions or relations of towardness or awayness" with particular objects (p. 8). The "words for feeling, and objects of feeling, circulate and generate effects" she also writes, "they move, stick, and slide," and we "move, stick and slide with them" (p. 14). Queer feelings become "'affected' by the repetition of the scripts they fail to reproduce, and this 'affect' is also a sign of what queer can do, of how it can work by working on the (hetero)normative" (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 155). Queer affects as I see them being deployed in a theory of animate literacies asks: how can affects queer our understanding of literacy, and how are queers affected by literacies? How can the feelings of queers offer insight into literacy practices that challenge meaning-making?

Through Lexi's, Elizabeth's, Macy's, and Lara's stories, my is aim not necessarily answer these questions but point out the lasting affects of literacy for these participants. Their narratives don't speak for all queers, and as you'll see, even sometimes their experiences are in tension with one another. When I read through and listen back to their stories I'm reminded that one of the queerest things we can do is meditate on irresoluteness. Not finding any solid answers in storytelling is, in its own way, a literacy affect because it asks us to sit with their potential to trouble our understanding of literacy. I hope as you read the following stories, you too will find that "staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present" with the "myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings" (Haraway, 2016, p. 1). I want to offer a word

of warning: the stories in this chapter deal with sensitive issues — like molestation, rape, drug use, strong religious condemnation— and some details may be challenging to read.

Lexi's Story: Affective Research

Trigger warning: this story contains molestation and drug abuse.

Lexi had a harrowing story to tell. Her interview haunted me since this research began because of its difficult content. When I interviewed Lexi, in the Spring of 2018, she was 28 years old. Lexi identifies as a bisexual woman, and being bisexual in her experience has left her at times feeling that "people don't necessarily take seriously" her attraction to women and men. She refers to herself an addict and had been in sober since New Years at the time of our meeting. She is also a mother. The father of her son is now her ex-husband after a 5 year relationship, with the last year spent being married. Until she started dating women, she had never experienced any trauma with regards to her sexuality, "never really had any issues" when she was only dating men. "It was terrible," she told me. Her first girlfriend "had a lot going on." To add insult to injury, she explains this first same-sex relationship didn't sit well with her son's father:

> My ex-husband called CPS [Child Protection Services] on me, because I was being with a woman. It didn't go anywhere, of course. He didn't like the environment that [her son] was being raised in. […] He showed his true colors around [her gay friend]. He wasn't okay with gays. He didn't want his son to be around them. And once I started to date girl, he was just not happy about the situation he [her son] was being raised in, which I thought was absolutely beautiful. [Her son] had a tough time for a second, because he was used to the man-woman [relationship], but after a little while he ended up coming around.

She reveals these details to me in the first 10 minutes. As Lexi continued narrating during our interview, I increasingly grew aware that her life and literacy practices were stitched together by traumatic events.

When I ask her what trauma may look like outside the relationship to her sexuality, her answers were arresting. I quote at length here because it order to grasp the full breadth and gravity of Lexi's experience:

> That trauma looks like a young girl being taken advantage of when she was 12 by a close family member. My father always used drugs his whole life. There was an instance when I was young and I was sleeping in his bed, and he didn't know it was me. He started rubbing on my body, above [my] clothes, but at that moment my whole life changed. That's when my childhood went away, when my whole self changed. I started getting angry. I didn't tell anyone except my best friend, and she went to my mom. I dealt with my whole family not believing me. I got in trouble for it, but my dad didn't get in trouble for it. I'm glad he didn't get in trouble for it because I love him. […] I've been raised around drug addiction all throughout my family. My grandmother and father were in recovery, so I never saw them using. My father was in prison for 14 years of my life. He was the main reason I knew I was going to try everything [every drug], every one, whatever was placed in front of me. I wanted to do what I consider research because I wanted to understand what took my dad from me. Cause he would get out of prison and he'd be good, he'd be my dad. And then within so long he would have a girlfriend. Shortly after that, I wouldn't see him anymore. I didn't understand why it would happen. So I wanted to understand why it took my dad. I wanted to know what mind altering substances do. He'd tell me not to do it. I'd want to do it more. I achieved everything I wanted to achieve.

I ask her when she said she "had to try every one" if she meant drugs. She confirms, yes, she's "done every drug." "Being an addict," as she refers to herself throughout the interview many times, is a theme underlying Lexi's narrative. Drugs are everywhere. Lexi tells me that we wouldn't have to walk far in the West Virginian town where we sat during her interview to buy any. In fact, West Virginia still leads the country with the most overdoses from drugs, particularly meth and opiates (Snoderly, 2018). When Lexi explained the reason she has used every drug laid before her as research to understand her father, and to proclaim achievement of such a feat, I was left ruminating and confounded.

What would it mean to understand someone else through a substance? How can we, if at all, come to grips with Lexi's concept of research as a practice of deliberately taking on other's

affective states? How does allowing oneself to be affected enable understanding, as Lexi claims the drugs did with her father? How do relationships get taken up by emotive states? Take for instance as Lexi explains above, she is simultaneously happy her father didn't get "in trouble" for molesting her despite the fact that she was reprimanded for telling her family about her sexual abuse. The moment she was molested her "childhood went away" and she became angry. Yet because she loved her dad, she still wanted to understand him and the drugs "that took him away." Her emotional life and her literacies that enable her storytelling is intimately bound up with her attempts to understand her father.

Even through Lexi's seeming contradictory emotional states she stays resolute throughout the interview, and I think back, wondering how she was able to house such conflicting affections for her father. Lexi's paternal affinity reveals how affects can teach us being-with one another can be learned even when our affective states may exist in contradiction. For instance, Lexi recalls a time she visited her dad in prison. At this point in her life her drug use primarily involved pot, alcohol, and cocaine. In their prison visit, her dad confided in her some wisdom, "'He told me, 'Don't do cocaine. It's too expensive. Do meth instead.'" Afterwards, meth became her drug of choice. It's worth highlighting that Lexi's view of the drug's agency (i.e. "it took") also reveals that drugs have their own agency in her animate literacies. The conglomeration of sexual trauma, drugs, her father, her bisexuality, and so on, are all affectively captured in what Lexi calls research.

With an understanding that literacy is an exchange of forces, we can see that Lexi is exchanging these relationships into a literacy practice of research during her storytelling. Research literacies has been defined "as the ability to locate, understand, critically evaluate, apply scholarly works — that is, to become discerning and knowledgeable about research" (McGregor, 2017, p. 6). I think Lexi's story offers us a queerer perspective on how research can be an affective literacy practice. Let me explain. Lexi tells me that she wanted to help her dad get clean when she started to sober up herself:

> He is still an active user. He is schizophrenic. It's a disease that runs deep in my family. He self-medicates which is the issue. It's just all he knows. He was just not ready. You can't make someone be ready. It's just something you have to

> want bad enough. I did want it but I didn't want it bad enough right away. I still had to experience another drug that took him from me, which is bath salts.

Notice how Lexi understands that willingness is enmeshed with the affect of literacies — her dad must *want* to go. Even she deduces that she "didn't want it bad enough," and though desire and feeling is measure in degrees of affect. From this part of her story, I asked her if the rumors of people doing inhumane acts while using bath salts were true. She said she never witnessed or saw anything like that. Instead she described her experience, or you could say, she presented her research findings through a lengthy metaphor:

> The way I described meth is a monster with tentacles. It wraps itself around your wrist and says come follow me and so you go. And before you know, it's got you hung, it's got its tentacles wrapped around your throat. And that's what different [with bath salts], it immediately grabs your around your throat and says you're coming with me. It was the first time I felt the addiction. Within a month I was craving it. It's disgustingly uncomfortable because it hits your central nervous system, and what it does with your central nervous system is that it just shocks it. Your central nervous system doesn't know what going on, and you can feel it throughout your entire body. When you're on it, your entire body start to feel *ick*. And I just wanted it, I wanted more.

This lengthy metaphor is important in making sense of Lexi's relationship with drugs and her capacity to make-meaning from her experience. The use of metaphor here is not only a literacy affect — Lexi is describing her affective state while she's using meth and bath salts — I'd say that her thick description is akin to field notes, and thus a form of empirical research. Considering that empirical research is based on "recorded observations of events", which "often provide a rich understanding of some phenomenon, person, or community" (MacNealy, 1999, p. 35, 45), I can't help but see Lexi's metaphor can be understood as testament to her own literacy practice of researching affective states. She is researching the emotional life of her father, her own use of drugs, and how drugs affect her world overall. This became even clearer when she reveals the next part of her story.

After she explained how bath salts made her feel and her experience of drugs all around, she tells me:

> I'm writing a book actually. I've written poems since I was a teenager, always wanted to publish a novel, I didn't know about what. I know I wanted it to be about me and my life story. I want it to look like a lifetime movie […] I've started writing more. I like to date things. I like to see what I'm doing at that moment. I started three years ago, just so I can look back and see where I was at the time, so I can see a lot of my [drug] use. When I do drugs I don't just do them, I look into them before I do them. I do a lot of research before because I want to know what it's going to do to me. I want to know how it's going to feel. I want to know how I'm going to come down off of it. I wanted to do research, and how do you do research if you don't have knowledge of it.

In a small amount of time, Lexi exposes how her poetry, the aspiring process of writing a book, and dreams of writing a novel are intertwined with her experiences. Writing offers her a way into understanding the ways she emotionally lives in the world. The mention of a Lifetime movie stands out because of the sentimentality that accompanies such films. What's more, when she discusses what she writes she does so through seeing herself. "To look back," "to see," "look into" all suggest that writing and research for Lexi is tangled with her ability to affect the world around her. In fact, it is the world that had prompted her to start "writing more." Then, to keep dates of every time she does a drug also opens up a conversation as to how she is in fact using her emotions to become literate with her affinity of drugs. She says, " I want to know how it's going to feel." Literacy affects move us past mere discernment but into emotional and embodied feeling-states that connect us to things, and in Lexi's case the repetition of such research practices led to her addiction.

Thinking of doing drugs as a research literacy practice may not align with our more orthodox understanding of research. I realize, too, that doing drugs may not always be a healthy choice. The argument could be made that Lexi's framing of drug use is justification; I'm not concerned with arguing diagnoses or whether her research practices mask her addiction. Her literacies exist as they are and I am not attempting to unearth their true motives, but rather to

explain how they are caught up in and as an exchange of forces. Lexi's story is an astute example of how literacy weaves in and out of our emotional lives. She wanted to know how she felt during her research as she says above. She wanted to makes sense of feeling and sensation while she was doing drugs, but I'd argue her feelings were also bolstered by the need to perceive her father and their relationship. When she says that she was interested in how she would "come down off" the drug also underscores the literacy affect of doing drugs as research. When you come down from a drug, it metaphorically indicates the high you experience while doing the drugs, pointing to the state of elation and sensation that drugs induce. Lexi wanted to know, to understand, to discern *and* to feel, to emote, to embodied what the drugs would do, and by calling it research she shows how unconventional methods can exist in animate literacies when we take into account the affect of literacy.

Elizabeth's Story: Bifurcated Places

Trigger warning: This story contains strong religious condemnation.

Elizabeth was born in Kentucky but shortly moved to eastern Tennessee with both her mom and dad. She stayed in Tennessee for her entire educational career, going to a high school that "was on the southern parts" of town, "where lower income people went and where people went who lived out on farms." As an undergraduate, Elizabeth left Appalachia and traveled to central Tennessee where it was "flat and had no mountains. It was still a similar culture in some ways" of where she grew up. She told me how she wanted to go to graduate school back east in the mountains, and only applied to schools that were "within 5 or 10 miles of home." It was during grad school that Elizabeth would come out as bisexual. She tells me now she has toyed with identifying terms, sometimes referring to herself as "queer" and is "still exploring they/them pronouns." She also clarified that she does identify as a cisgender woman. For the sake of her story here, I refer to Elizabeth as she/her because she is still exploring such queer identities and didn't give me any definitive instructions otherwise.

Elizabeth's story often pivoted from speaking about one place versus another. At multiple instances she told me stories about her literacy practices in Appalachia and then out of Appalachia. Her story opens a conversation on literacy affects and their ability to form queer affinities with places. Since literacy affects involve our states of being, this section explores how literacy is involved with our being in particular places. For Elizabeth, this takes shape with

regards to having a split educational experience in and outside Appalachia, as well as attending two different churches.

When Elizabeth and I talk over the phone during the summer of 2018, she explained to me how she was currently living in rural, northern New York. She moved there shortly after graduate school for a job. I ask her what it's like living so far away from home and Appalachia:

> I still live in a place that is very rural. It's still very conservative. It's just in New York state, so it comes with benefits. So for instance, my partner is trans and in New York it is illegal to deny care. Insurance companies have to cover it. So that's been amazing. Even though we are in a conservative area, he can still get the care that he needs. So that's been great. I don't know, it's interesting because the culture isn't that different. I would've probably experience a lot of the same things in any rural or conservative setting. I've found that being in Appalachia there was so much more community. There had to be. We had to be open and proud and out for each other. But up here it's like we don't need that because we are in a blue state. We still need that, we still need to be a part of a community. It's been interesting. We still haven't been able to tap into that yet here, where it was all very out in the open back in the south. Everywhere that I lived, it was all in TN, Southcentral, there was always an out community.

Elizabeth's story is deeply enmeshed with her relationship to place. Just from this quote alone, particular words like *conservative, rural, place, setting, community, blue state, south* all stand out. And in reference to place, when Elizabeth is discussing a "we" in her story she is talking about the "queer community" she and her partner belong to, as she frequently restates throughout our interview. She tells me that "we need" community in Appalachia, whereas in NY there's an assumption that a queer community "is not needed," due to the liberties associated with New York being a blue, and thus, a liberal state. In moments like these she reveals her relationship to Appalachia both as a place where she has found queer community.

I think this association with the queer life Elizabeth experienced in Appalachia being made up of a necessary community has some ties to her love of books and learning. "My mom and my grandmother are both librarians," she told me, "So books and reading was really

encouraged in my family." Yet, it wasn't only that she was encouraged to read that she found solace in books, it was the fact that she found herself isolated:

> I was a weird kid. […] I didn't have a lot of friends. Reading was how I spent most of my time. I would read every book in sight. I was drawn to worlds that weren't the world that we live in, fantasy and things like that really took my out of the place that we were in.

Place and reading are interconnected for Elizabeth. What stands out in her relationship to books is their ability to transport her away from the Tennessee mountains, which may seem at odds with her lamenting her move away from Appalachia to rural New York after grad school. As if she catches this contradiction immediately, she continues, "But, it is really interesting, when I really reflect on it, I connected with characters that were from mountainous regions, from poor regions. It just so happened that that would be part of their character." She comes to this conclusion on her own without my asking if her reading related to her Appalachian identity.

She tells me, "A lot of the books I read the protagonist would be a young girl who doesn't have a family anymore, she comes from nowhere, and she conquers whatever it is she has to fight." Reading for Elizabeth mediated her experience of self in the mountains. Listening back to and reading the transcript of our interview it felt at times she was coming to terms with the characters in the books she read. The literacy affect of yearning to belong somewhere else and finding community with fictional characters supports Pritchard's (2017) framing of "fictive kin." Fictive kin or kinship, he writes, "refers to characters in books, film, theater, television, music, and other cultural productions that participants described having a connection that felt familial, influential, and lasting" (p. 129). These fictive kin were her community elsewhere, and the only way she could find them was to read, or as she said almost in refrain, "I always read because it allowed me to be in another place." Even though the places she was transported to were often mountainous and poor, as I mentioned in the last paragraph, I'd argue the reason she wanted to leave was due to her lack of belonging to a queer community. I want to be clear: Elizabeth is referring to her Appalachian *childhood* as a heteronormative place to escape; once she came out as an adult, she is able to find her queer community in Appalachian outside of books alone. Elizabeth's affinity with fictional characters queered her relationship with the Appalachia before

she could find her queer community later in life. As a literacy affect, this last statement is telling. The books evoked an affect. Of course, she is using a metaphor here in saying the books took her to "another place," for she isn't speaking about literal place in this instance; the fantasy novels allowed her take on the affective states, however, of another person, in this case the protagonists she saw as herself.

Elizabeth's affinity for reading not only offered her an exit strategy out of the mountains, it also permitted her reentry. After college, upon entering grad school, it becomes clear that she was able to find the queer community she often returns to in her story because of her academic work and successes. Elizabeth doesn't reveal specifics as far as what she studies or where she went for school; when I asked her about specific locations or details like her field of work, she tells me "she'd prefer not to say." She does tell me however that she researches "instances of stigma that people experience and how that relates to mental and physical health disparities," focusing specifically "on the queer community." Elizabeth's research again brings up questions of how we take on affective states of others, regardless if Elizabeth's research is more aligned with academic research compared to Lexi's in the last section. I don't believe the two are that far off when it comes to research as a literacy practice, however, and this is especially true when taking into account that both Lexi and Elizabeth are "researching" how others embodied their lives.

To think of this point in the converse: both Elizabeth and Lexi can be considered researchers. Maybe Ann Berthoff (1981) was onto something when she says that in order to understand how "REsearch, like REcognition, is a REflexive act," "it helps to pronounce 'research' the way southerners do" (p. 31). I'm a southerner like Elizabeth and I believe that Berthoff's unintended slight to our syllabic inflection illustrates to what extent place is truly mediated in our languaging. Our literacies have affinities with places; place in turn affects how we read in the world, and read the world. I'm not discounting Berthoff's argument — I agree with her that research requires "looking and looking again" (p. 31). However, by using the stereotypes of southern accentuation, she implicates place into literacy practices and inadvertently shows how we talk is linked to where we talk, and where we research is integral to how we research.

Pressing this line of thinking farther, when literacy practices are affected by place, you could say that place bifurcates the relationships between self and communities; place demarcates

how we articulate ourselves in relationship to our communities. To put it another way: where we become literate separates and enables a recognition of the self from the community. What led me to this thinking was a specific moment of Elizabeth's story. Elizabeth explained in our discussion of her religion and spirituality that she had a "bifurcated experience growing up." What she meant is this:

> My mom went to a church, the United Church of Christ which is super, super liberal. They're very open and accepting. But, then when I was in 3rd or 4th grade, my parents got a divorce. My dad started going to a baptist church across the town. His mom is baptist and even though he was super religious he was just wanting to connect to a community that he was familiar with. That experience was much more conservative. I remember when I was about 12 or so, we were at the Baptist Church and the pastor said something, "All gays are going to hell." And I told my dad afterwards that I didn't want to go back. I remember that being one of the first instances it because really clear to me that people use religion however they want, for whatever agenda they have for themselves. I grew up really steeped in that religiosity.

Elizabeth's bifurcation occurs at a number of places. Her parents divorcing separated how she understood her familial unit. This takes shape specifically through the two churches she now went to. Not knowing much about the the United Church of Christ (UCC) myself, I was curious as to what Elizabeth meant when she said they were "super, super liberal."

In 1975, the 10th General Synod[19] of the UCC passed a pronouncement on "Civil Liberties Without Discrimination Related To Affectional Or Sexual Preference." The pronouncement did not aim "to make an ethical judgment about same-gender relationships" but instead to "clarify the ethical issues involved in human sexuality" (p.1). Interestingly enough, despite this first instance of declaring support for nonheterosexual chuch members, the pronouncement argues for government legislation to ensure the ethical treatment of gays and lesbians: "Further, the Tenth General Synod declares its support for the enactment of legislation

[19] The General Synod is a legislative order within the church. Their role is to pass church bylaws and issue doctrine.

at the federal, state and local levels of government that would guarantee the liberties of all persons without discrimination related to affectional or sexual preference" (p. 3). Even within the dogma of the church, literacy shapes how queerness is treated by proxy of places. The UCC relies on laws of the land, so to speak, to mediate their collective views on the treatment of LGBT folx.

The UCC will go on to fully own their call "for an end to rhetoric that fuels hostility, misunderstanding, fear and hatred expressed toward gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons" (2005, p. 5). And, it's endearing to know that the UCC was the first church to openly ordain a gay pastor in 1972. I argue that the literacy acts of the UCC — the passing of the pronouncements, the advocating for changes to the state legislation, even having an internal legislative order, the Synod in the church — mediates how Elizabeth's religion is practiced in particular places, even if only in her experience she is affected by this by her going across town to another church.

Moreover, in terms of literacy affects, the bifurcated experience of attending two different churches for Elizabeth extends beyond the literacy practices of the church at large. The preacher in Baptist Church declaring that "All gays are going to hell" affected 12 year old Elizabeth, as much as, I believe, the Elizabeth who was retelling these stories. Even the statement that queers are "going to hell" implies that literacies move us and affects how we are oriented to particular places. Hell as a destination is literal, I think, for evangelical christians. This is true if you take a trip and drive on most interstates in the Midwest or South. You're bound to end up passing a "Hell is Real" billboard. Elizabeth doesn't bring up hell anywhere but this instance of quoting the pastor, but in her retelling, she invokes the historic affect of hate that's withstanding in such religious discourse.

Eventually Elizabeth found her community of queers in Appalachia. She tells me she realized "family is so much bigger" once she found her partner and her community during graduate school. If literacy affects expose that through our stories our affinities with places are affected by literacy practices, then Elizabeth's view of family was certainly mediated by her literacies of place. She tells me how using the internet to stay connected to her chosen family back in Appalachia is important, and explained that she often times searches Instagram for #OurMountainsToo, a hashtag for queers to claim their place in the mountains where they live. She also tells me of the "queersgivings" they still have we she visits. Yet, what I'll keep with me

from having talked with Elizabeth, the part of her story that affected me the most is this: "We can make the places we need." She's right, I think. Queers and their literacy practices, even in the mountains — that are our mountains too — can create places worth living in and being-with.

Macy's Story: Sexual Literacy and Resisting Bi-Erasure

Trigger warning: This story contains rape and sexual assault.

Macy grew up in southern Ohio, and as she put it, "Kentucky was in my backyard." She's 22 at the time of our interview and is still finishing college in Ohio. Macy's story is fascinating for her narrative complicates sexual literacy practices as being bound up and enmeshed with literacy affects. She came out in college, she tells me, in 2017, just a year prior to our conversation. Macy explained that as a kid she didn't have access to the vocabulary to understand queer issues: "My computer usage was restricted at home growing up. I had no resources. I couldn't look up 'gay' on the computer or 'LGBTQ+' resources. I didn't even know what LGBTQ+ meant." I ask her: *Do you think your queerness is connected to having access to the knowledge and the language because you didn't have any of the connections at home as she did at college?* Her answer:

> This is funny. I'm remember something from 6th grade. There was this one book in my middle school library that was about queerness. It was really weird. It was a very weird book, and I have no idea what the title was, but it argued that being gay is a religion. And, people should have the same rights to get married. I was very confused so I rolled with it. It was the only thing I knew, but I knew intuitively that LGBTQ+ people should have the rights as everyone else did. But I didn't know anything [about queerness], so I think that that [i.e. the gay religion argument] was a thing for 3 years.

Later in high school, she told me, she found out what gay was because there was a gay pediatrician in town that some parents wouldn't take their kids to because "they called him a faggot." It wasn't till she "was an orientation leader at college" that she "would stay quiet and listen to LGBT stuff when it came up in training."

After she accessed queer sexual literacy as an orientational leader in college, she tells me that she identifies as pan. However, she typically tells everyone she is bi-sexual because of the labor required to explain pansexuality. In her own words:

> I usually tell people that I'm bisexual, but I identify as pan. The reason I choose when asked or in [particular] spaces, is because a lot of people don't know what it means to be pan. Bisexual, a lot of people already knows what that means. Usually where I'm from and the people who I grew up with, there are already so many educational roles I have to take on for them. And explaining what pan is on top of all that is just too much. I identify with bi-erasure. I don't think bi-erasure is okay, but I've experienced it all my life. And saying that I'm bi-sexual ties in more closely with my experiences.

The prefix pan comes from the Greek for "all." Thus, pansexuals are attracted to all valences of gender, not merely limited to male or female gender expressions. I find it striking that there are connections between the Arcadian god Pan, the half-goat, horned deity who preferred the limitless countryside to walled-up city limits, and pansexuality which is not bound by culture's limits for desiring gender. Also, it's compelling how the word panic comes directly from the associations of Pan the god, since he threatened civilization's rules, much like how Macy's pansexuality may cause those around her to panic if they found out she wasn't attracted to only two genders (or even reveal that there are more than two genders, for that matter).

Macy's statement stands out because she makes clear that being literate can regularly come with expanding one's energy in order to affect others' literacies. In her taking on "many educational roles" for the people in her hometown is an implicit indication that she is literate in ways they aren't: the "role" to educate she has to step into is the role of a literacy sponsor. Which is to say, Macy acts to make others more literate in what they know, bringing home from college the knowledge she has garnered. The labor that is spent for Macy comes at a higher cost, however, when you consider that it isn't just what she knows that makes her a literacy sponsor, but because her literacy is tangled with her queer identity. The "[d]evelopment of a sexual literacy," Alexander (2008) writes, "is a development of a fluency with the very narration […] through which our identities themselves are often achieved" (p. 19). When Macy chooses where

and under what conditions to disclose she is pansexual, she is discussing the affective labor of being a sexual literacy sponsor.

When Macy says she identifies with bi-erasure, she is referring to the phenomena of being made to feel as though one's bisexuality is frivolous or not legitimate. When bisexuality is dismissed as inauthentic, sheer indecisiveness, or even considered not to be real, it's erasing bisexuality from the queer spectrum. Early queer theorists, like Edelman and Sedwick, have been critiqued for ignoring bisexuality in theoretical terms of queerness (See Angelides, 2001). As of late bisexuality has resurfaced in cultural studies in a number of ways, for instance, with regards to intersectionality along gendered and racial lines (Rodriguez, 2016), or examining legislative discourse for acknowledgement of bisexuality (Marchus, 2015). *The Journal of Bisexuality* was established in 2000 in response to these issues, and to make more visible the B in LGBT studies.

The feeling of having an illegible sexuality affected by bi-erasure was more than mere aspect of Macy's labor endured through naming her desire; it affected her embodied life in her relationships. Macy continues to explain how coming out as bisexual has led her to experience violent trauma:

> I didn't come out in any way until I was in college. I chose to tell [the man she was in a relationship with], because I was coming to terms with my sexuality and I wanted to tell someone that would support me. A lot of people in my [home] area believed that being gay is a sin. So I shared it with him, and then over the next two to three months of our relationship he became very violent. Emotionally, physically, verbally. He said that I told him because I want to be with women. That I'm not sexually satisfied by him.

Macy's use of "coming to terms" here may be read here as more literal even though it's figurative phrase since she was developing a terminology for her desire; she was coming to the words that named her identity. The affect people back home had on Macy is worth recognizing too, when they equate gayness with sinfulness. Like Justin and Elizabeth, Macy wasn't able to come out until she was in college, outside of Appalachia. Macy's particular instance of coming out though is one that resonates and *feels* less about having to be outside of Appalachia and more about feeling secure enough come out. Although Macy thought her boyfriend would be

supportive, he ultimately turned violent because he thought she couldn't simply be bisexual because bisexuality was incompatible with his sexual literacy; for him it was an excuse to be gay, or it was an explanation of *his* inability to give her pleasure. In short and in Macy's own words, her bisexuality "threatened his masculinity."

Not only is the boyfriend threatened in this case, so is heteronormativity and its reliance on binary logics; Macy's bisexuality and her development of bisexuality in her sexual literacy operates from a "both/and" topoi rather than the "either/or" logics which underscore bi-erasure. Through this thinking, arguably the volatility of bisexuality may be the most disruptive in the queer spectrum of sexualities in terms of disrupting animacy hierarchies altogether. That is to say, bisexuality does not fit into enthymematic sense-making but bursts open such syllogisms even within gay and lesbian frameworks. For example, you are either gay *or* straight; if you are *x* (e.g. a man or woman), and you desire *y* (e.g. same-sex partners or opposite partners), then you are *z* (e.g. gay or straight). Macy used the word "threat" in reference to her boyfriend, but because they were in a "straight" relationship before her coming out, the threat is also connected to preconditioned affective state of comfort that supposedly accompanies heteronormative relationships. Recall that queer affects fail to reproduce the scripts of heterosexuality, with its "function as a form of public comfort by allowing bodies to extend into space that have already taken their shape" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 123). Macy's body by way of her desire broke the comfortable space in their relationship and unfortunately her body became the site of her boyfriend's abuse.

She details the extent of the violence:

> It was interesting because I am a very monogamous person. I didn't have any interests in anyone but him. So that really hurt me, because at first I thought these are valid questions, valid concerns. Then all of a sudden it transformed to another level. He made me take pregnancy tests every day, even when I was on my period because he was convinced that because [if] I was bi [then] I was so sexual and cheating on him.

Eventually, after Macy tells her mom of her boyfriend's irrational and dangerous behavior, her mom all but forced her to break up with him while letting her do it at her mom's house as a

precaution. Macy explains that "at this point it hadn't been too incredibly physically violent." She says that she only had a few bruises on her arms where "he grabbed" her "too hard, but it wasn't alarming yet." Two months later the boyfriend showed up to her apartment while her roommate was out of town. Macy tells me, he "found out because he saw my roommate was [out of town] on Snapchat, so he chose to drive up" to her college town and to her apartment. "I knew his grandma had died and he was sad, so I let him in. Then he physically and sexually assaulted me," she said. Continuing to narrate this moment, Macy explains:

> During that assault, he came over when he had a cold sore, and part of that assault was infecting me with herpes. He told me he wanted to do that because then I would never be able to have sex with women, because his idea of sex with women was exclusively oral sex, and no girl would want to go down on me if I had herpes.

There's plenty of emotionally laden issues at play here. When Macy begins to recall how hurt she felt that the legitimacy of their monogamous relationship exposes how her relationship is endured because of pain. That is, Macy withstood the abuse because of her own emotional state in order to show that she was in fact monogamous.

The idea of Macy's boyfriend forcing her to take pregnancy tests is disturbing, yet it demonstrates the heteropatriarchy's precarious state of fragility. Thinking about fragility on its own as an affect, outside of the context of Macy's story for a moment may help illuminate why Macy was willing to endure such violent abuse. To be fragile, to require careful handling, to be delicate as an affective state places an immense amount of responsibility on the bodies around the fragile body. You treat the expensive china with a sensitive touch. Don't drop the fragile fluorescent light bulb because for if it shatters the mercurial dust may contaminate your bloodstream. Fragile label warnings provide an interesting visual cue as to how bodies that are fragile are meant to be treated:

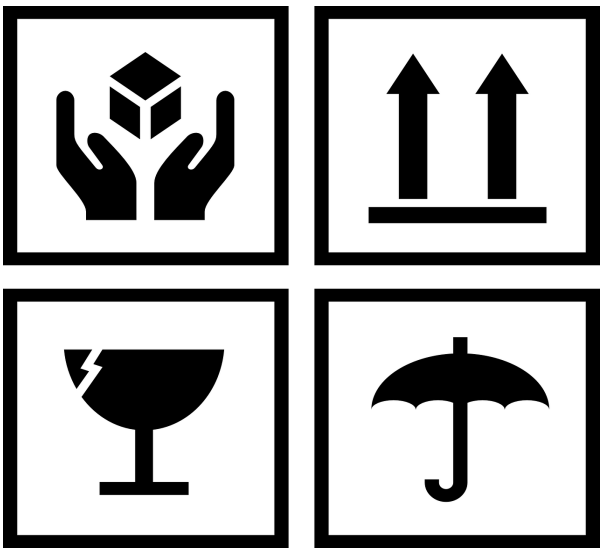

FIGURE 5.1 CAUTION LABEL

Notice that the hands around the box — the fragile body here — gesture towards the embodied labor of treating a fragile body with care; it is responsibility of the the hand's, and of the body to which the hands belong, to take care, to exert labor, to be mindful of the affective state of the body it must touch and act on. The directional arrows of the second icon are particularly revealing. Fragile actors must be kept in particular lines of orientation. The image here insists that we keep the fragile body *upright* as to protect its precarity. Conceiving of *up* in an animacies framework hierarchializes the agency of fragile bodies to kept only in one position; the bodies interacting with the fragile ones must accommodate around their straight, *right*, "correct" position. The image of the cracked glass suggests the true nature of fragility is the assumption of the body's broken state, as to say: this object contains within it an already brokenness that we must avoid at all cost. Those costs come from protecting the fragility, which I believe is meant to be the intended meaning of the umbrella. Shield. Protect. Deflect. The fragile body is one that is already broken unless thwarted through the labor of other bodies.

Macy's boyfriend takes on the animacy of a fragile body because her bisexuality refuses to uphold their relationship in the ways her sexuality did before. The labor of reaffirming his straightness was no longer about her keeping him and their heterosexual relationship comfortable. In fact, Macy's sexuality shows that there are other lines of orientation that stretch out in multiple directions. She no longer has to keep fragile masculinity in the upright position; she can take a more crooked path. Her boyfriend by questioning his ability to give her pleasure shows the crack in the veneer of masculinity like the cracked glass of the fragile warning label.

By turning her coming out into an issue about himself and his capability to produce pleasure inculcates his already state of brokenness — in his self-view he was already inadequate. When Macy folds up her umbrella, she leaves him exposed to his own insecurities.

Albeit, Macy doesn't immediately reach the point of leaving him or realizing this; it took her time, and happened only after he sexually assaulted her. Recall that Macy initially understood her boyfriend's reaction as "valid questions, valid concerns." She endured his fragility because her sexuality up until this moment fit into systemic compulsory heterosexuality that gives more agency to men; the patriarchy is as much about affective, ontological hierarchies as it is about gender. This becomes readily apparent through through the coercive pregnancy tests. To think of the pregnancy test as an apparatus in the new materialist sense, where "apparatuses are specific material reconfigurings of the world that do not merely emerge in time but iteratively reconfigure space-timematter as part of the ongoing dynamism of becoming" (Barad, 2007, p. 142). Through the forced pregnancy tests, Macy's boyfriend iteratively renders his own heterosexual literacy: anything outside the logics of compulsory heterosexuality would indicate Macy was cheating on him. In other words, the romantic relationship between Macy and her boyfriend is measured by her embodiment, her capacity to now be "so sexual" by her bi-ness that he needs to reconfigure the fragile structures that his own sexual literacy practices were built upon — the tests were an apparatus to allow this occur.

Macy stayed for 3 years in a relationship with her abusive boyfriend, because as she says, "she was coming to terms," or in through process of becoming sexually literate and was not yet able to make-meaning of her boyfriend's behavior. Only is she able to break the relationship once she told stories of her experiences to others Her mom, as she said, "basically made me break up with him." Since sexual literacy, as Alexander (2008) frames the concept, "engages the stories we tell about sex and sexuality to probe them for controlling values and for ways to resist, when necessary, constraining norms," (p. 5), I believe that Macy was only able to resist the harm that affected her from her boyfriend and the toxic relationship when she was able to express her own story, make it comprehensible in her relationship with her mom. This issue becomes more complex considering that the boyfriend after the break up intended to infect her with herpes so she couldn't have sex with women (his perception being that same-sex lesbian sex is strictly oral).

The assault Macy experiences underpins literacy affects' investment in literacy moving in a flow of sorts. Granted don't mistake me saying that literacy was present for literacy taking on some agency in the assault. Instead, literacy was not merely an inert force in the series of events that led up to Macy's attack. As I've pointed out already, her developing sexual literacy, of coming out, of challenging the stories of sexuality she had been told play a role as did the ex's interaction with social media (i.e. Snapchat, see p. 129 above). Animate literacies are ever moving in matrices of actors, places, sexualities, desires, and so forth. Paying attention to literacy affects reveal this interconnectedness, and how literacy is ever passed back and forth. Think of Macy's statement that she "knew his grandma had died and he was sad" so she "let him in." The literacy affect of sympathizing is an extension of the threatened-ness the ex-boyfriend felt even months after the literacy event of Macy's coming out.

Macy wasn't infected. She didn't press charges. She said she didn't involve the law because she "didn't want her life showcased" publicly, and reasonably so when keeping in mind that it was the bi-erasure that set off the series of events initially; it is understandable that she would not want to risk feeling as though her sexuality was at fault or to blame again in reporting it to the police. In many ways, Macy's story echoes Lexi's from a few pages back. Lexi felt like her bi-ness wasn't taken seriously. Macy and Lexi both shared with me the pressures of having systemic legislative forces affect their own sexual literacy. Lexi's husband was threatened as was Macy's boyfriend. Two women owning their sexual literacy narrative, owning their story and bisexuality was eclipsed by fragile masculinity. Literacy isn't to blame; literacy isn't without blame. Literacy and its affects linger in our sexual affinities, moving and shifting, a constant reconfiguration of affiliations.

Lara's Story: The Conquest of the Condom

This last story belongs to Lara. When Lara and I speak over the phone in June of 2018, Lara was attending an Appalachian private liberal arts college in Kentucky. She came to Kentucky at 15 years old, moving with her mom from New Mexico when her distant relatives kicked them out. She goes home during breaks and during the summer, when she isn't in college. She tells me, "I'm bisexual" and "I consider myself cis-gender female, but I've kinda been going through this time where I'm more gender fluid, genderqueer. As of now, I'm still [identifying] as cisgender." She grew up thinking that "you were either gay or straight," she said she "didn't

know that you could like both." Growing up she enjoyed school: "Did well very well in school. Always on the honor roll. I think I made three Cs my entire high school career. I cried about it because I made a 79." She puts it simply: "I loved it. I loved learning." The emotional connection to learning, education, and literacy becomes adamantly clear as I listen to Lara.

I end this chapter with Lara's story because in its own way, it strings together the previous three stories. Her story in particular links together how literacy affects move us, flow through our communities, our sexuality, foster a sense of place. Lara tells me a number of times that she is passionate about school. She even referred to herself as "a doer," being very active on campus. She explains how she initiated a group on campus in 2017:

> This last year I started a club last Generation Action, working with Planned Parenthood. Our goal for campus is to get out there and teach our peers sexual reproductive healthcare, teaching them sex care education. We do events on campus, host panels, we've done all sorts of different things this year. I found that passion, that sexual health education.

I ask her what brought her to that passion.

> It's a very funny story. On Facebook during my sophomore year, scrolling through Facebook and saw this ad that said free condoms. "Do you want free condoms?" Who the hell wouldn't want free condoms? I clicked on it and it was an application. I thought it was going to be something like a free sample of Lifestyles [i.e. a brand of condoms], but it was an application for the Great American Condom Campaign [ACC]. It's a campaign for the organization Advocates for Youth, that Trojan [i.e. condom company] has. They will send you 500 free condoms to hand out to the student body. You hand out condoms and educate how to use condoms properly. You hand out information about consent, [Trojan] has a whole culture of consent campaign that goes along with the ACC.

She "kept learning and learning and learning," on her own, through classes, the internet, and the AAC, and, as she puts it, she "realized, holy shit!" sexual education in America "needs to be

fixed." She was, like Lexi and like Elizabeth: a researcher. Moreover, like Macy, she began to take on the role of a sexual literacy sponsor but not because of her sexuality, nor because of her personal relationships, but because her digital literacies led her to condoms. Lots and lots of condoms.

Because the ACC had an incentive program built into it — the more you accomplished in spreading sexual health knowledge you received more merchandise — Lara began to use her campus as a place to "hand out condoms and educate how to use condoms properly," as I quote above. I like to think she is spreading the good word of the condom. She tells me this led to "getting the attention of our Vice President of Student Affairs. He called me into his office," she explained, because "It got to the point where we needed to get all these condoms in the dorms." Lara talked to all the Collegium, who were "all gung-ho, *let's go for it*." So she talked to her Student Government Association President, who her permission to put condoms in the dorms. Once their condoms found their way into the dormitories she was contacted by the Vice President for Student Life, the boss of the Collegium staff. He had no idea about the condoms supplied now campus wide. Explaining that Lara wasn't in any trouble, he just wanted to know who gave Lara permission to put condom in the student housing. He told her:

> I am really interested in this, and I have been thinking about doing something like this for a while. But we can't put condoms out without having education about them, he said. He explained that he wanted to form a Health Care Education Committee that I would have an active role in developing.

The committee was formed in Spring 2017, started the "slowest process ever" developing policy. She said she is someone who "wants to get in there and do things, and not spend five meetings discussing the wording of our mission." I think this last statement demonstrates through a framework animate literacies we can see how traditional models of literacies may not always function to explain the complete view of what literacy is or what it can do. We could focus on the writing itself. What words were used. Who and why did they halt the process. How was the policy implemented. Animate literacies broadens our focus here to include all actors and the affects they had.

In Lara's view literacy practices of writing policy were actually getting in the way of affecting the world around her. "It's frustrating being on that committee," she told me, "because we haven't done anything." When she says they haven't done anything, Lara is pointing to the moment where language can sometimes hinder action. Even though policy writing is still doing something, in Lara's view the policy doesn't affect real life until it functions outside of the bickering over word choice and semantics. She told me that "the next year's team will be able to do a lot more," and "move forward" because the "clerical work is out of the way." In this way traditional literacy comes to stifle the queer routes of animate literacies and their literacy affects. Reading and writing can clash with animate literacies, and the friction it causes still *does something in the world*.

Perhaps the most brilliant part of Lara's story, in my personal opinion, is her and her committee's goal to make available free menstruation products on campus. The committee has "gone out and bought pads and some tampons, but mostly pads because it's easier to provide" considering the cost. Because the committee is working with limited funds they have chosen "really populated places on campus" to provide the sanitary products because they can't "afford to put them in the dorms yet." She explained, "We've made it very clear that they [i.e. the pads and tampons] are going in both the male and female restroom." Their aim? Inclusivity. The way Lara put it, "It's a conversation starter. *Why are you putting pads in the boy's bathroom?* Well, you don't know if a female-to-male trans person going to go in there and might need a tampon."

Here's how it all comes together: As literacy sponsors both Lara *and* the hordes of condoms *and* the consent pamphlets *and* the individuals in the college's government *and* the tampons *and* the pads *and* bathrooms *and and and* all of these actors are flowing into and out literacies the entire time. Literacy is exchanging its forces on Facebook for Lara. The exchange took place in her Vice President's office. The exchange became blocked during the 5 quarrelsome meetings. The exchanges are caught up in a torrent of literacies that enable Lara to feel frustrated, to queer men's bathrooms by including menstrual hygiene products, to feel passionate about sexual health, *to effect change and be-with* one another on Lara's college campus.

Animate literacies revels in the jamboree of actors and their affective potential for world makings. Animate literacies also realizes that the world is wrought and teeming with pain, trauma, and hatred, and makes room for literacy studies to bring those emotions, feelings, affects

into our disciplinary home, making room at the table. Animate literacies is about finding the ontological aspects of literacy that fall to the side when we only focus on *who* can read and *what* they are reading or who can write and what they are writing. I say this fully embracing my queer and scholarly selves: animate literacies sees literacy as an orgy of reading/ writing/ knowing/ doing/ being together in a world so dense with meaning we will never be able to find the truth behind it all — we best learn how to get along with one another in more creative, queerer ways instead. The forces that were at play in Lara's story, as it is in all the stories in this entire project, reflect back through storytelling the potential to connect, to be-with each other and welcome new ways of becoming-with (Haraway, 2016). Yes, undoubtedly, the force of literacy can be exchanged as an ability to read and write; literacy as an exchange of forces, however, isn't only an ability possessed — the energetic flow of forces that make animate literacies possible is about finding more affiliations that make living life full of queer possibilities.

Epilogue: Animate Monsters: An Alternative Literacy Narrative

Rationale

I write this epilogue — literally Greek for "in addition to the word", from *epi* and *logos* — knowing I'm nearing the end of the logos, the logic, the "argument" of my dissertation. So, this is an attempt to disrupt the typical organization of dissertation by writing and thinking in ways that move beyond traditional logos. Instead of ending with a traditional conclusion, I offer here an example of animate literacies may look like through a pedagogical lens.

How could we teach animate literacies? By building "monsters" in the writing classroom. I borrow the image of a monster from Thiel and Kuby's (2019) chapter in *Posthumanism and Literacy Education* (Kuby, Spector, Thiel, 2019), titled, "Careful! There are monsters in this chapter: Posthuman ethical considerations in literacy practice." The inspiration for their chapter is drawn from a quote of Latour (2012), who writes, "Dr. Frankenstein's crime was not that he invented a creature through some combination of hubris and high technology, but rather he abandoned the creature to itself" (n.p.). Latour's point is that through the assemblage of tools, technologies, and practices our creations are usually disregarded after they served their initial use; we don't consider the consequences of our actions in making them. I'd like to think *Animate Literacies* acknowledges that literacy it caught up in such assemblages and we should consider what this means for our study of literacies.

Theil and Kuby cosign this view about monsters and our responsibility to care for our creations:

> You are creating monsters with people, places, and things, with minerals, and vegetables, and animals. In nooks and crannies and open farmlands that go as far as the eye can see. In elevators and classrooms and political arenas, on assembly lines and ballfields and performance stages. (p. 56)

It's what we do with our monsters after they're created, that Theil and Kuby, and Latour are ultimately asking. How can we be-with our creations in more meaningful ways, a similar question I've been asking all along. Theil and Kuby argue that literacy monsters exist, too, noting that, "All pedagogical practices are monsters, and some of these happen to be literacy

monsters," (p. 56) and argue it's through the assemblage of the nonhuman and posthuman elements that literacy monsters emerge. Think of taking a test as literacy monster: paper, desks, clock, time, classroom, books, bodies, sleep. Or, consider, a dissertation as a literacy monster: committee members, computer screens, department chairs, conferences, money, mountains, cats. If monsters exist, I'd add then they are imbued with life; monsters are animated.

If literacy monsters live, then I think they live because literacy brings them to life. Animate literacies is the current of electricity-energy-force that makes these monsters possible. The assignment that follows in the next section is an example of how we can help our students make their own literacy monsters, and read the world through an animated literacy lens. In a number of ways the assignment aligns with Haraway's (2016) point: "It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories" (p. 12). Worlds are built around the stories we tell, and the same can be said for the monsters we can create within them. Granted, this assignment is still in part about human agency — the agency of the writer. However, through the application of animate literacies theoretical tenets, you'll see that the assignment is asking students to stitch together a literacy monster through the weaving of other actors in a literacy practice. I agree with Law (2004) that, "All sorts of assemblages resonate to produce truths in one way or another. And our methods" — and our pedagogies, I'd add — "are implicated in other goods, political, aesthetic, spiritual, inspirational, or personally passionate (the list is not complete)" (p. 154). A theory of animate literacies can bring students' own assembled literacy monsters to life.

Assignment: Animate Literacy Monsters

This is not your typical literacy narrative when you tell a story on how you learned to read and write. This literacy narrative asks you to explore all the diverse forces that influences how you learned to make meaning in the world: through writing, through reading, through other forms of communication, through all your diverse ways of discerning and making meaning in the world. Other people may have influenced your development of literacy, but so might have nonhumans as well.

For example, you can probably tell me a story about who read to you as a kid or what was your favorite book growing up. But, I want to know more than that: I want you to see your narrative as a cobbled-together monster, built out of different (f)actors in your life. Maybe you

read on the playground. How did the playground play a role in your reading? Perhaps, you used to keep a journal. Did you hide it? Where? Why? Maybe your parent or a teacher taught you how to read and write. What other *things* were involved when that person sat down with you to practice sounding out your words or tracing your letters? Was the chair you sat impactful? What about the table? Did you struggle with reading or writing? Why? What kinds of things helped you with your struggle? Did you read at night when you were supposed to be asleep? Tell me about the flashlight you used. I want to know about your reading and writing *and* how those are made possible by other things, places, and feelings.

The main objective is to tell me about an important literacy moment and how that practice is stitched to other actors. If this literacy narrative was Frankenstein's monster, then the literacy practice is the heart of the monster, and your job is to piece together the rest of the body parts. In class we will do brainstorming on what this may look like through a number of invention exercises. I want this to be creative for you, and for you to work on writing a story about how you learned not only how to read and write, but how the world itself played a role (how thing in the world have read and written you). This narrative is your own literacy monster and we are going to build it together.

Objective:

- ❏ Explain how your literacies are made up of more than only reading and writing.

Requirements:

- ❏ Focus on and name a literacy practice.
- ❏ Identify and analyze three nonhuman actors, at minimum, in your literacy practices who have and/or still animate your literacy practices.
- ❏ Discuss at length how your literacy practices aren't just your own, but are extension of other actors
- ❏ Demonstrate how your sense of understanding of literacy has changed over time

Due Dates

- ❏ Body parts: You will come to class with a visual mapped web of various actors that branch off a single literacy

practice

- ❏ Stitching: This rough draft will experimental. You are expected to have "thick description" of the body parts in class. We will do some writing during class time
- ❏ Electricity: This draft will be a coherent whole. It should have a uniformity and flow to it and clearly work towards the requirements above
- ❏ "It's alive!" Complete drafts are due XX/XX
- ❏ Taking care of your monster: You will revisit your monster later in the semester, and see how it's grown since its first weeks of creation

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Caleb Pendygraft, Ph.D.
May 16th
Oral Defense
Dissertation Committee

Mountains on my Back

I shrunk writing this dissertation.

Literally. I was 5 foot 10 inches tall at the end of my Masters. Now I'm exactly 5 foot 8 inches. My spine curves towards the left by over 10%. If you have had any spinal issues or have happened across some medical lingo, then you may know that the spine is divided into three sections: cervical at the top from skull to throat; thoracic, your ribs; and the lumbar, everything else below, with the sacral joint ending in our tailbone. Each vertebrae is biologically evolved to interlink, and houses thousands of strands of nerves: a funnel for fibrous neural cord, running from the base of your brain to your taint. The vertebrae are numbered by the first letter of the region to which they belong; top to bottom, they are numbered.

I have developed what the doctors call *levoscoliosis* — from the Latin *laevus*, meaning left, meaning my spine is curved and still curving to the left. It developed from the years of

degenerative disc disease and having a discectomy during this dissertation, a surgical procedure where a neurologist removes part or all of a disc. There are discs wedged between each joint. They provide movement between bone. Think of the shocks that hold up a car; or citations that uphold arguments. The lumbar spine is numbered 5: L1, L2, L3, L4, L5. I had my last disc, the spongy material between my L5 and sacral joint carved out. I had a severe herniated disc there. Below you can see the black space between each vertebrae. Notice how there is barely any between the bottom two bits of bone; that's because the doctor scooped it out.

FIGURE 6.1 CT SCAN OF MY LUMBAR SPINE

The surgery took over 4 hours — the condition of my herniated disc was worse than they thought. There's a thin membrane that holds each disc in place, swaddling the delicate tissue nested between each vertebra; mine had burst open like overripe fruit rind. The doctor had to remove most of it, sawing off the bone spurs that grew in its place, like a dentist filing down gnarled teeth. That herniated disc kept me from sleep for 4 years. It would send sharp unyielding pain into my leg and numb my left pinky, ring, and middle toes. My thigh and calf were filled with molten, fiery pain from the pinched nerves. I couldn't walk for more than 30 minutes without wincing, or having to sit down. Tears in public were commonplace; I drank away the pain because I couldn't afford doctor visits. Let me rewrite that: this dissertation kept me up at night, nagging at my dreams, lurking behind every class I took or every draft of my fellowship application or my exams. I couldn't go more than a day without thinking of it; I wrote away the pain. I still can't feel my left pinky toe; this epilogue may be as equally without sensation. Animate literacies embraces failures, though, and the sensate.

I like to think my the bony spinal segments of the rib cage are pointing to my heart for a reason. I like to think the bend in my back leans towards my heart instead of away from it because during the last four years of graduate school, and the last two years writing *Animate Literacies* my heart had its own gravitational pull. That is to say, this dissertation wasn't about merely obtaining a terminal degree, nor was it about finding a topic so niche to write more than 60,000 words about. My heart was poured into its pages; my heart had a mission. Like the blood and muscle that keeps me alive, I knew that literacy kept me alive in ways that the academy didn't make room for. I imagine my heart simply insisted that the interlinking bones come near. My aorta beckoning my spine and its facet joints closer, cricking and cracking, bent because my heart insisted I had something to prove while I wrote this project.

Perhaps it isn't my heart, though. Maybe it's because of where I'm from and who I'm from. Once in a deep meditative drumming journey at one of the pagan events I've attended in the past 4 years, I visited an old woman — My mom's mom's mom's mom, maybe? — in an overgrown, vine-ridden hut that looked like it had grown out of the tree attached to it. She told me, "Your back is bent because you chose to take on the anger and pain and hurt of your ancestors." The ancestors that are standing on my shoulders, the ancestors from Appalachia have taken house on my shoulders and have perhaps pressed me so far down in the ground that I shrunk. I willingly took on the Appalachian stories of other queers because I know how much

queer stories can hurt. The stories belong to their storytellers, with their closets and their mountains and families too — there's plenty of weight there to shoulder in a single document.

Currently as I wrap up this epilogue I am living in a mountain attic, with the magic of Appalachia right outside my window. This is the 26th place I've lived in my 28 years. I've eaten out of dumpsters because I couldn't afford food my freshman year of college. I've come out of the broom closet as an Appalachian witch pages ago. My mom and I conned men to survive until I was 18 and college was a supposed escape. My spine is twisted, with parts missing and I have tried to fill these pages with what I know and how I am literate and why I am here and how I understand there are more ways to be literate than through words alone. Our bodies have their own language. The land, its own words. What can keep you standing erect one day, can bend and warp, and collapse into a life unexpected, full of crooked sense-making. Hopefully, by the time you are reading this page you are thinking of your own stories and words that make up your stories, and how those words are more than words.

I want to weave my remaining words together like my spine. I want to make connections, a web of actors, a multitude of energetic exchanges that has allowed me to make-meaning and be-with this dissertation. Here are some correspondents: My surgery took just over 4 hours. I've made a playlist to accompany my animate monstrosity here[20]. It is just over 4 hours long. There are 5 chapters in *Animate Literacies*; there are 5 stories that belonged to Justin, Lexi, Elizabeth, Macy, and Lara in this project; there are 5 vertebrae in the lumbar spine. I have chosen to write 5 vignettes that tether these points together. I name each one after one vertebrae in the lumbar spine region: L1, L2, and so on. In each, I reference a storyteller from my dissertation. In each, I echo what their stories taught me. Each of my 5 small stories starts with an epigraph from a song from the playlist that I find appropriate and timely to where or when the my story is being told. I stack these small stories of my own on top one another to mirror the image of my spine, curving like a night-crowler, finding its way in a flow of literacies I believe to be animated.

[20] The screenshot is an active link, which will allow you to listen or visit the playlist if you choose to do so.

FIGURE 6.2 SCREENSHOT OF PLAYLIST

L1:

Where did I go wrong?

I lost a friend

Somewhere along in the bitterness

And I would have stayed up with you all night

Had I known how to save a life

The Fray, "How to Save a Life"

I used to lay in the grass with my friend during art class as the high school years dwindled into summertime. She and I would read Tarot in her Buick, which her dad gave her as a gift after she got her license and out of guilt for beating her because she was gay. I remember driving with her to get her pills during our senior year. She was a best friend. She was a drug addict.

When I listened to Lexi tell her story, I realized that maybe if I had known or done my own research I wouldn't have had to attend my friend's funeral during my 3rd year of my PhD. She was a part of this dissertation, too.

L2:

The hot July moon saw everything
My first taste of love oh bittersweet
Green on the vine
Like strawberry wine
Deana Carter, "Strawberry Wine"

Lara wasn't born in Appalachia; she moved there with her mom. Her story reminded me of how homes move, and how Appalachia can welcome you home. I may have been born on a military base in New York, but I was still Appalachian. Appalachia welcomed Mom and me back after my dad tried to kill her so many times, and she had to run back to her family, our family in Kentucky.

My Mom loved my father immensely, with every ounce of herself. Why else could she had stayed with a man so cruel? She met my dad in church, a small church on a gravel road out in the countryside. She prayed to be with him, for the first taste of love. That changed once their love made me into flesh and bone with a crooked spine. She tells me over and over, that she had to endure his hatefulness and cruelty so she could have me: her greatest blessing in her life. When she sings strawberry wine at karaoke, I hear the pain behind her words and know that my love saved her.

L3:

I am a fighter and I
I ain't goin' stop
There is no turning back
I've had enough
Christina Aguilera, "Fighter"

Justin's story and his perseverance to find a working relationship with his body stayed with me during this dissertation. I still think about what he has endured to live the life he wants to live. His story causes introspection on my part. *What is my relationship with my body?*

I tried to kill myself early on during grad school. I kept it a secret till now. I slit my wrists, and when the blood pooled onto the floor I knew I couldn't die. I couldn't afford an ambulance and my husband had left me, so I called a cab. Calmly, I wrapped up my arms and paid the taxi driver. I stayed in the hospital for 48 hours.

I went to class immediately afterwards. No one knew. What I did know was that I had to continue; I had more life to live. I had to be a doctor; there wasn't any other choice.

L4:

Now listen little child, there will come a day
When you will be able, able to say
Never mind the pain, or the aggravation
You know there's a better way for you and me to be
Look for the rainbow in every storm
Spice Girls, "Goodbye"

When Elizabeth found her queer family, she made it sound like she found her place in life. My queer family is everything to me. Kyle, Corey, Travis, Mom, Danny, Jimmy, Caitlin, and my cat-children, Kali, Zeus, Oya. We queers get to choose our families. Our kiships are queer because they aren't contingent on blood relations; they're based on love and support and compassion. We celebrate the life of one another.

Even the family I didn't choose, bound by my heart with its own blood and gravity, still gave me glimpses into a life queerly lived when I was a kid. My Papaw, the one I wrote about in my prologue, used to read the bible to me, take me Sundays to church where I'd read the brightly colored children books on biblical parables.

I hated it. I hated tucking in my shirt. Waking up at 5am was and still is a plight. In protest, I'd lock myself in my Papaw and Granny's bathroom, play Spice Girls, and put on Granny's church dress. Then, I'd burst through bathroom door, run around the house until my dad would catch me. I'm sure my dad spanked me for it. I still went to church. I still read the bible.

But my Papaw knew what I was, and I think if Christ's love is real he had a host of it in his heart. When I dream of Papaw and he's laughing, I imagine it's because he still remembers

when I begged my dad for the Scary Spice doll as a kid — She was my absolute favorite. My father refused.

Then, one day, Papaw told my dad, "Damnit, Robbie, if he wants the damn doll he can have the damn doll." Papaw bought me my Spice Girl doll, and it's worth was more than the weight of mountains.

L5:

And baby when it's love, if it's not rough it isn't fun.

Lady Gaga, "Poker Face"

What would love look like as a literacy? A small detail of Macy's story stood out as I wrote *Animate Literacies*: her mom insisted that she break up with her abusive boyfriend and to do so in her mom's home. I'd like to think love is an affect of having a home, somewhere that can keep you safe.

I'm 14.

My mom loved me enough to buy me a cell phone when she and I had to split up from being kicked out, even when we couldn't afford rent. I had to live with my rich friends because I needed to stay in the best school district, and it broke my mom's heart. She made sure I could stay in touch no matter what. *Love*.

Then there is my first girlfriend. I loved her. I did. She was a stable factor in my life. If we are discussing sexual literacy sponsors, she certainly let me know I was *queerer than a 3 dollur bill*, as my Nanny used to say. My first girlfriend helped me write this even though she isn't in my life anymore. I used to stay at her house her parents bought for her in downtown Cincy, after I'd pull a trick behind a dumpster or in a local gay club. She loved me and I still love her, despite not talking to her for years.

Home hurts. Loving your home hurts. Appalachia has hurt me, but it has been fun finding my own as an Appalachian writer and scholar. I'm in love with my Appalachian roots. Tentacularly, they've grown deep into my soul-flesh. My spine may have made the decision unto itself to let me know, *Here are some tectonics: let's move some mountains, but you'll strain your back. Mountains get up and move; sometimes you gotta push with your words.*

Arriving at these final words, I think, *How can I make a monstrosity of myself?* Maybe the stacking of my vertebrae, maybe the stacking of my chapters is a mistake in literacy studies. Maybe you read this and you aren't convinced that literacy can be animated in all the many ways I've argued. Maybe. But, you're here still, and if that isn't *being-with* me, then I don't know what is.

I loved this dissertation. I truly did. And, love isn't easy. Love has been my story from the beginning, and love is rough.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions and Consent Form

Interview questions:

I. Trauma

A. How would you describe your sexual identity? Sexual orientation?

B. How would you define trauma? What is trauma to you?

C. Have you experienced any trauma in relationship to your queerness?

D. Does this trauma have any impact with growing up in Appalachia?

E. What are you able of telling about the trauma you experienced?

F. What reactions did you have to this experience, both then and now? Emotionally? Physically?

G. What was the most difficult part of this experience? What is unforgettable?

H. Looking back, what do you believe you learned from your experience?

I. Have you considered that trauma played a major role in your life? Why?

J. Do you see trauma playing a role in other queer peoples' lives in Appalachia? Could you give me some examples?

K. Do you have anything else you would like to add about your experiences in Appalachia? Any other stories that you find important to share?

L. If you could offer advice for others who find themselves in with similar experiences, what would you say?

M. Would you consider trauma important in learning to read and write?

N. How does reading and writing affect your daily life?

II. Body

A. How would you describe your relationship with your body?

B. How does being queer affect your body?

C. How is your understanding of your body affected by being in Appalachia?

D. Would you say that your body is read as queer?

E. Has your body ever been threatened because of your queerness? If so, how?

F. How do you experience your queerness through your body?

G. Does your body limit you in any way?

H. In general, how do you talk about your body?

I. When you were learning to read, how did your body play a role?

J. Were you read to when you were young? If so, where? (e.g. Before bed?)

III. Place

K. What part of Appalachia are you from?

L. What relationship do you have with Appalachia? Would you call it home?

M. Do you identify as Appalachian? If so, when did you know you were Appalachian?

N. In regards to your sexual orientation, could you tell me your experience being queer* in Appalachia? This can include your coming out story, if you have come out. If so, was it in Appalachia? If not why? How did you know you were queer?

O. Are they any places that are unique to your area? If so, how did these places affect your understanding of where you grew up/lived?

P. Are there any LGBTQ friendly places in your area/where you lived? Are there any unsafe places or places to avoid if you are LGBTQ?

Q. Where did you learn to read and write?

R. Did your particular school play a role in your reading and/or writing?

S. Do you have any favorite local authors?

T. Was your place of education important to learning to read and write?

III. Spirituality

A. Please talk about your religious upbringing. For example, did you participate in organized religion, e.g., go to church, synagogue, temple or mosque; celebrate holidays; and/or contribute time or funds to faith-based organizations or causes?

B. What role has religion played in your life?

C. Please describe the development of your religious identity. In what ways has it changed over time?

D. At what age were you when individuals within your faith community knew you were LGBTQ? What was the process in which they learned about it?

E. What motivated you to come out within your faith community when and how you did?

F. How did your coming out impact your relationship with members of the faith community?

G. Have your religious/faith views changed over time and if so, how?
H. Were any changes in your perspectives about faith influenced by experiences related you LGBTQ?
I. Was there a particular person or persons in your faith community that was a positive influence on your faith experiences?
J. Relevant to the intersection of your faith and being LGBTQ, who was the most significant individual?
K. What are your favorite memories of an event or events in your experiences in your faith community?
L. Have there been moments or experiences that have positively reinforced your LGBTQ identity within the context of faith-based experiences?
M. What is a negative memory of an event or events in your experiences in your faith community? Can you describe a time when you felt excluded or "othered" in a faith-based setting because of an LGBTQ identity?
N. What impact do you think being LGBTQ had within the faith communities you have been part of?
O. What would you consider to be your greatest challenges of being LGBTQ, in the context of your faith community?
P. How has your LGBTQ identity influenced your faith-based experiences in general or specific examples?
Q. What insights or advice would you have for LGBTQ individuals who want to be active in their faith communities?

Consent Form: Animate Literacies

My name is Caleb Pendygraft, and I'm currently a PhD Candidate in Miami University of Ohio's English Department. I'm a queer pagan from Appalachia Kentucky doing research on the literacy of other Appalachian queers. My research is moving away from more traditional studies of literacy that understand literacy to be merely reading and writing. Instead, I'm looking at other ways queers in Appalachia "read" and "write" themselves into their world. I am collecting stories from participants, 18 years and older, that look at four areas in their lives: trauma, their body, places in Appalachia, and religious/spiritual communities to which they belong.

I am collecting stories in a number of ways, including collecting video interviews and documentation of significant places in Appalachia that hold value to you. In the instance that you would like to participate in the video documentation, I'd to be happy travel to you if I'm able — especially if you're near Southern Ohio or Kentucky. However, you **do not** have to participate in video documentation if you'd prefer not to do so. The interview process will be organized in the following ways:

1. You can agree to be interviewed via this consent form either through email or by signing in person.
2. We will interview in person, over the phone, or through Skype. Depending on what level of anonymity you'd prefer, I will record our interview on an audio recorder or through video. The interviews may run 1 – 3 hours depending on how much time you have available.
3. I will use a series of interview questions as a set of guidelines to collect your narrative, with the aim of having a conversation and listening to your story. I'll be happy to send these your way prior to the interview.
4. The video and/or audio interviews will also be used in writing my dissertation, along with conference presentations and publications. The video footage will be stored on an encrypted hard drive. All identifying information will be confidential unless you state otherwise.
5. There will be no penalty to you if you decline at any point to participate. You can withdraw consent at any point during the interview. If at any point you experience distress during the interview, recording and interviewing will STOP immediately, and we will discuss whether you wish to continue and what resources are available to support you.
6. When the material from the interview is used in any future writing or research, I will give you the opportunity to review final drafts before publication. At that point, you can choose to suggest changes or to withdraw from the study. My dissertation committee and myself would be the only ones to access this data before it is used in the dissertation, publications, or conference presentations.

Note: You may choose to complete an audio recorded interview that I will then transcribe or you may choose to conduct a video recorded interview. However, if you choose to be video

recorded, be aware that your face may be shown in any digital online publications that arise from this research. Your name and any names associated with your stories can be changed. Any personal information will not be linked to your video interview (e.g. address, income, job, etc.) without your permission.

Since trauma is one of the areas I will ask questions about, there is a possibility you could experience emotional distress during the interview. If that happens, the interview process will end immediately and we will discuss together the next steps take. It is up to you whether to continue or to withdraw from the interviewing process. I have included resources at the end of the consent form that may be useful if you were to experience such distress.

You can withdraw from the study at any point by letting me know that you would not want to participate in person or any other means of contacting me. You may also choose not to answer specific questions, but continue to participate if you like. I will share all writing and edited video from your data with you before publishing it and will make any changes you request. If at any time you feel misrepresented or that for some reason my writing about our time together is misconstruing your story, you have the right to withdraw from the study. While there are no immediate benefits of participating in my research, your story will help add the LGBTQ scholarship in Appalachia. Your contribution can help develop further awareness of LGBTQ Appalachian lives.

For questions about the research, please contact me: pendygrc@miamioh.edu, (859) 333-4901; or my faculty advisor Jason Palmeri, palmerjr@miamioh.edu. For questions or concerns about the rights of research subjects or the voluntariness of this consent procedure, please contact the Research Compliance Office at Miami: (513) 529-3600 or humansubjects@miamioh.edu.

If you agree to participate in this research: "Animate Literacies" Please sign below (you can sign by typing your name and emailing me if we are not meeting in person). Please keep the information above for future reference. By signing you agree that you are at least 18 years old.

Participant Name (Printed) Date

Participant Name (Signed) Date

- ❑ I agree to an interview that will be audio recorded and then transcribed; quotes from the transcript may be used in print and digital publications.
- ❑ I agree to a video recorded interview; edited portions of the video may appear in online publications, in an electronic dissertation, and in online journals.
- ❑ I agree to participate in video documentation of places important to me.
- ❑ I would NOT like my name used in this study, and will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications. I understand that if I agree to be video recorded, I may still be recognizable to people who know me even if use a pseudonym.
- ❑ I am OKAY with my real name being used in relation to quotes or edited video from my interview.
- ❑ I am at least 18 years old.

Resources:

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender National Hotline: 1-888-843-4564
Trans Lifeline: 1-877-565-8860
The Trevor Project: 1-866-488-7386