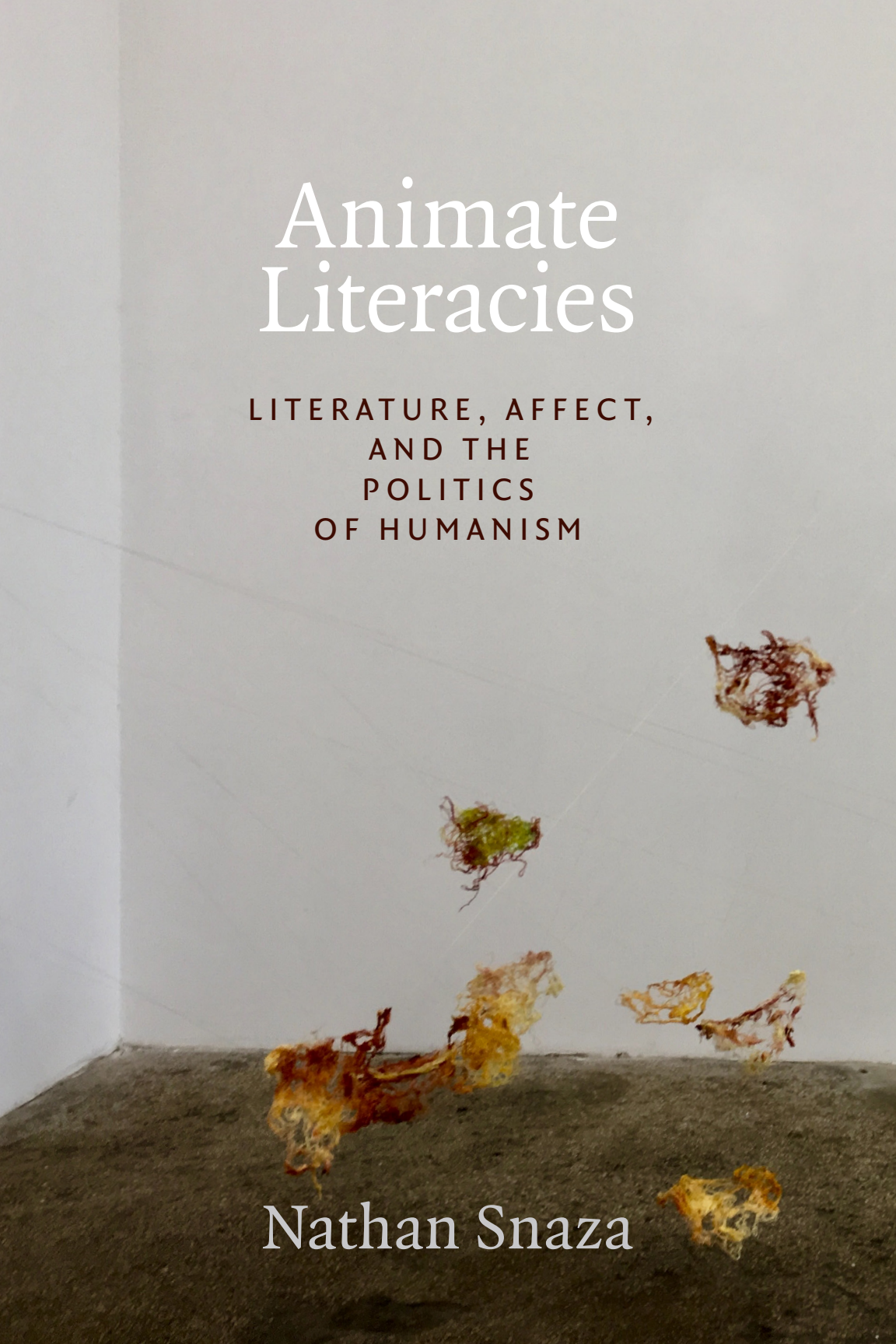
Animate Literacies

LITERATURE, AFFECT, AND THE POLITICS OF HUMANISM



Nathan Snaza

Animate Literacies

Thought in the Act

A series edited by Erin Manning and Brian Massumi

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Acknowledgments

Books emerge through ways of living, and this one springs from an extraordinary decade spent in collaboration with my life's most abiding friend, Julietta Singh. It came into being through exchanges of books, thoughts, and feelings with her over time. I learn from her daily what it means to live, think, parent, teach, write, eat, and desire new worlds. Our experiments in queer kinship and coparenting have been formative to this project, as has our daughter Isadora, whose wonder is infectious and who is embedded in these pages.

And now, two brief stories. In 2011, weeks before defending my dissertation, I was interviewed via Skype for the Copeland Fellowship at Amherst College. The theme, that year, was the Future of the Humanities. The camera on their end was positioned such that I couldn't see any humans most of the time, so it was like being interviewed by a seminar table and a window that spoke in various voices. Near the end of the interview, Austin Sarat, the chair of the committee, asked me what I would think of a proposal to close the Department of German to open, instead, a Department of Catastrophe Studies. While I later kicked myself for not replying, "Thinking of Walter Benjamin, I suspect a German department already *is* catastrophe studies," in the moment I rehearsed a standard claim that I would oppose any move that would further diminish a focus on the in-depth study of languages and literatures. Austin replied, "So, you're a humanist just like the rest of us?" Needless to say, I didn't receive the fellowship. I want to begin by thanking Austin Sarat for his obvious disappointment, which I took to be not just in me, but in "the rest of us." The affective charge of that response reoriented my reading, thinking, and writing, and without it I'm quite certain I would have written a very

different book. *Animate Literacies* is my attempt to wander way from being a disappointing humanist.

The other event that made this book possible was a leave from teaching in the spring of 2013 to stay home with my infant daughter, Isadora. Writing anything scholarly while caring full time for an infant whose needs and schedule are radically unpredictable (despite exerting whatever control we tried) was out of the question, so I filled the small amounts of downtime I had by emailing people. If there is a benefit to not holding a tenure-track position, it is that I wasn't in a rush to publish a monograph and was able to take time to figure out how to unlearn my humanist habits. So I envisioned an edited book on the politics of humanism and schools, both university and P–12, that would gather scholars working across humanities, social sciences, and educational fields. No publisher I contacted could see a way to market such a volume, but those emails set into motion chains of events that determined my antidisciplinary career and brought me into conversation with people who radically changed how I thought.

The folks housed in education programs I contacted became some of my closest colleagues in the fields of curriculum studies and educational philosophy, in part through my work coediting two books collecting their essays. While *Animate Literacies* isn't pitched as a direct contribution to the field of curriculum studies, all of my thinking about these matters has been shaped by my friends and comrades in that field. First and foremost, I want to thank my closest collaborators and coeditors: Jenny Sandlin, Debbie Sonu, Stephanie Springgay, Aparna Mishra Tarc, Sarah E. Truman, John Weaver, and Zofia Zaliwska. I've also learned more than I can ever comprehend from Peter Appelbaum, Sandro Barros, Donald Blumenfeld-Jones, Dennis Carlson, David Cole, Mary Aswell Doll, Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, Liz de Freitas, Jen Gilbert, Walter Gershon, Sandy Grande, Rob Helfenbein, Mark Helmsing, M. Francine Huckaby, Gabe Huddleston, jan jagodzinski, Jim Jupp, Crystal Laura, Patti Lather, Tyson Lewis, Bettina Love, Marcia McKenzie, Marla Morris, Helena Pedersen, Barbara Pini, Sam Rocha, Bettie St. Pierre, Eve Tuck, and Jason Wallin.

The late William Spanos responded to one of my emails with enormous enthusiasm, and within two months had sent me a full text for the collection. His generosity, to a young scholar he'd never met, kept me working to find a venue for the essays that didn't fit the curriculum-oriented

books. He also introduced me to his former students R. Radhakrishan and Asimina Karavanta, who each contributed to the collection. Mina invited me—and Julietta and Isadora—to Athens for the War on the Human Conference, and ended up coediting the collection with me: a special issue of *Symploke* called "Posthumanisms." Her friendship and thoughtful critique have meant a great deal to me, and I owe her an incalculable debt for leading me to the work of Sylvia Wynter. Jeffrey di Leo, at *Symploke*, also indirectly led me to Christopher Breu, who has become one of my most important interlocutors (about literature, music, politics, and pedagogy), and whose Facebook page hosts a dialogue about philosophy and literature that has inspired many of the ideas in this book. Some of the other participants in that dialogue—Stacy Alaimo, Carlos Amador, Sean Grattan, Annie McClanahan, and Rebekah Sheldon—have, whether they know it or not, helped me figure things out.

Jeffrey later invited me to review two books by Brian Massumi for the journal, which led to Erin Manning sending me a message the night before I began teaching for the spring semester of 2017. My literary powers are woefully inadequate to the task of expressing how much Erin and Brian's presence has meant to my life. Far beyond their support of this book, I have come to love their energy, their enthusiasm, and the way they dream better worlds into existence. Erin and Brian came to Richmond in April 2018, and the only word I've ever found that comes close to describing what happened among us is "magic." It was transformative far beyond what I could have ever anticipated.

I want to thank the participants of an ACLA seminar that Julietta and I organized in 2015 called "Bodies/Texts/Matter": Karyn Ball, Christopher Breu, Hsuan Hsu, and Susan McHugh. I read "*Beloved*'s Dispersed Pedagogy" there, and their responses shaped the book that grew out of it. I also want to thank Stephanie Springgay for bringing me to the University of Toronto/Ontario Institute for the Study of Education as a visiting scholar in early 2017, and for inviting me to have the After the Anthropocene Working Group in Toronto read two chapters of this book in draft form. The spirited discussion helped me to clarify many of the stakes of this book. I also shared a portion of the book with participants of the "Nonhuman Encounters" event at New York University, organized by Ann Pellegrini and Katie Gentile, who also happened to be, along with Carla Freccero, the speakers on the Animals panel with me. This was the single most

exhilarating and inspiring academic event I've ever been a part of, and I owe a great deal to Ann for inviting me, and for all the conversations we had around it, conversations that haunt the pages of *Animate Literacies*. Christian Haines, Christopher Breu, and Greg Seigworth read drafts of the manuscript and offered crucial feedback when I needed it most.

In graduate school, I spent time in two different PhD programs—comparative literature, where I finished, and literacy education, where I began. Working in and across two fields that are so institutionally separated—at the University of Minnesota, they were housed in different colleges—has inspired my affective dysphoria with disciplinarity. In the years leading up to beginning this book, I often found myself toggling back and forth between the theoretical humanities and curriculum studies (in terms of journals and conferences), even as I have persistently failed to see any benefit to their separation.

My years at the University of Minnesota were shared with a host of incredible teachers, mentors, and friends who animated my education: Richard Beach, Robin Brown, Tony Brown, Thomas Cannavino, Aaron Carico, Siobhan Craig, Patricia Crain, Cesare Casarino, Nicholas de Villiers, Shirley Garner, Andrea Gyenge, Matt Hadley, Christian Haines, Wade Haynes, George Hoagland, Nate Holdren, Qadri Ismail, Kjel Johnson, Josephine Lee, Richard Leppert, Catherine Liu, Cecily Marcus, David O'Brien, Valentine Pakis, Aly Pennucci, Ricardo Rebolledo, Sara Saljoughi, Harvey Sarles, Simona Sawhney, Hoon Song, Matthew Stoddard, Benedict Stork, Gary Thomas, Joe Tomkins, John Troyer, and Julie Wilson. While in curriculum and instruction, I flourished thanks to Tom Friedrich, Kyle Greenwalt, and Mark Vagle. Above all there, I want to thank the members of my doctoral committee: Timothy Lensmire, John Mowitt, Thomas Pepper, Jochen Schulte-Sasse, and Shaden Tageldin.

Working at the University of Richmond has afforded me the unusual opportunity to teach across disciplines and constantly experiment with my pedagogy. I especially want to thank the students across the years in my Vampires in Literature and Film, Modern Literary Theory, Feminist and Queer Theories, Democracy and Education, and Philosophy of Education classes. In the Department of English, I could not have found more proactive and generous chairs than Suzanne Jones and Louis Schwartz, or better colleagues: Bert Ashe, Laura Browder, Abigail Cheever, Daryl Dance, Terryl Givens, Libby Gruner, Brian Henry, Ray Hilliard, Peter Lurie, Joyce

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I want to also thank the university for funds that enabled Julietta and me to bring Jack Halberstam, Christopher Breu, Erin Manning, and Eileen Joy to campus. In different ways, each of them has shaped how I think about the politics of the university, humanistic inquiry, and what it means to be a teacher.

The city of Richmond has been a constant source of ghosts as the former capital of the Confederacy struggles to think through its past as it rises to a new status as one of the US's hippest cities. Especially because of my involvement with the local public schools—part of it made possible by the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement at the University of Richmond (and especially the work of Sylvia Gale, Amy Howard, and Cassie Price)—I am keenly aware of how the legacies of slavery and a slave economy are woven entirely through the material fabric of contemporary life, and how settler colonialism is an ongoing violence. At the same time, it is a city hospitable to an ecologically oriented food scene that quite literally keeps me alive. Rebecca Ponder and Alistar Harris (and Georgia) at Origins Farm, Autumn and Brian at Tomten Farm, Hunter Hopcroft and the crew at Harvest, Kate from the St. Stephen's Farmer's Market, Maurice from the Birdhouse Market, and Anna from the Byrdhouse Market before that, plus all the folks working toward the Richmond Food Coop: thank you for re-

minding this kid who spent tons of time in gardens and on farms growing up why it matters so much what and how we eat, and expanding my sense of what it means today to imagine ethical forms of everyday life. Thank you to Lamplighter Coffee for providing a great deal of the caffeine that made this book possible, and often a table at which to write. Thanks to the folks at Salvation Tattoo (especially Josh Autrey) and Black Rabbit Tattoo (especially Jelena Wolves) for the endorphins, and to the whole crew at High Point Barbershop. Ward Tefft, Julie Glover, and everyone at Chop Suey bookstore are the best.

Bobby Egger at Vinyl Conflict made sure I always had records on my turntable to inspire my thinking and writing (and procrastinating). I want to thank Deathwish, Inc., Run for Cover, Sacred Bones, and Southern Lord for consistently putting out music that moves me. Claudio Arrau's Chopin records—both the Preludes and the Nocturnes—and Keith Jarrett also kept me company during many hours of work on this book.

Dan Black, Dan Johnson, and Bill Woitas have been inspiring me for most of my life. My love for Dan Black in particular is unending and unfathomable, and to see him develop something similar with Isadora is one of the greatest joys I know. While I was raising hell with those three, often in class, I met the person who did more to steer me toward literature than any other: Chris Thiem. Thank you, Thiem, for inspiring me in the classroom and letting me spend my senior year of high school reading books like *Naked Lunch* that wouldn't be allowed as part of the regular curriculum.

I want to thank my siblings Erin, Kelli, and Shannon, my late brother Gregg, and my father, Julian. My mother, Margaret, died as I was completing final revisions on the book. In writing the eulogy for her services, I began the process of coming to grips with the fact that this incredible woman who never went to college instilled in me a love of reading, and the pleasures of being surrounded by books. For giving me my biological life and helping me to find my life's most abiding passion, I owe you everything, mom. David Common, Lisa Balabuck, Christine Common, and Giovanni Geremia are family too.

Finally, I want to thank Ken Wissoker, Elizabeth Ault, and all the incredible staff at Duke University Press. Receiving an email with positive reviews from Ken is, I suspect, the most exciting email an academic working in

the theoretical humanities can receive. Being able to work with Liz as she transitions from assistant to an editor at the press has been a dream, and her commitment to the project matters enormously to me. Last, I want to thank the two anonymous reviewers whose suggestions, critiques, and enthusiasm kept me going and significantly improved the book.

1

THE HUMAN(ITIES) IN CRISIS

As any reader of this book will know, we are living through a long moment now when the humanities in general, and perhaps literary studies in particular, are said to be in crisis. This so-called "crisis of the humanities" seems thoroughly entrenched in a polarized debate between sides offering what seem to me to be boring platitudes. On the one side, some claim that the humanities are inefficient, requiring more energies than are justified in the contemporary moment of neoliberal market capitalism. This position seeks to close, consolidate, and de-emphasize humanities programs at the university, leading to some very high-profile closures (and near closures) of literature and language programs. Those on the other side claim that the humanities are the core of the university, transmitting skills that are indispensable for any worker or even citizen in today's world. Although I don't want to give specific enunciations in this debate any more interpretive energy than they claim in the opinion pages of newspapers and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, I thought it noteworthy that Michael Bérubé could tell CNN that humanities skills even make for good military and corporate leadership.[1] To put this most schematically, one side sees the humanities as a waste of energy (intellectual, instructional, and especially institutional) while the other side expends enormous amounts of energy legitimating their existence in terms that are almost always entirely friendly to neoliberal capitalism. Reframing this in terms of energy and its circulation allows me to pose two questions that I'll dwell upon in this book. One, what would happen if we redirected energy from this tiresome treading in place (one that could not be more

stuck in a rut)? And two, what possibilities might open for us if this reframing of the humanities in terms of energy allows us to see how the humanities is an assemblage that articulates energies across a wide variety of actants, many (or most) of whom are not human? What I am ultimately interested in here is pursuing a nonhumanist reconceptualization of the practices formerly called "humanist."[2]

As an initial shock to our presentist sense of this crisis, I want to note that almost thirty years ago Terry Eagleton wrote that the crisis of the humanities is permanent, resulting from their structural "marginalization."[3] He speculates that the role of the humanities is to produce the commonsense understanding of the human that allows for the relatively smooth functioning of social and economic life under capitalism. At times when this concept is in crisis, the humanities have to step in to clarify, critique, and shore up the human, but at moments of relative calm this crisis management role is less necessary. I'm not going to spend too much time on Eagleton, and I want to take his assessment with more than one grain of salt. Still, his speculations prompt an interesting question: Is it possible that in our time, the receding of support for and interest in the humanities stems, counterintuitively, from the taken-for-grantedness of the human today?

In one sense, this is an almost absurd, Pollyannaish question. Given the completely unworked-through grappling with evolution and climate change, the ongoing insufficiency of human rights law as a global political framework, the clusterfuck of genetic technologies and myriad other forms of biopolitics, and the increasingly well-known critique of the very notion of the human issuing from the so-called "posthumanism" in the academy, it seems like nothing today is less certain than the human.[4] And yet—and this is a big "yet"—there is something sublime about how little these erosions at the edges of the human seem to disrupt the daily march of neoliberal capitalist empire articulated around a certain version of the human, one Sylvia Wynter calls "Man."[5] Coursing through the entire complex of global relations in the wake of 1492, Man functions as a diagram: "a non-unifying immanent cause that is coextensive with the whole social field: the abstract machine is like the cause of the concrete assemblages that execute its relations; and these relations between forces take place 'not above' but within the very tissue of the assemblages they produce" (Deleuze 1988, 37).

This version of the human—Man—is the object of critique in the linked but divergent discourses of postcolonial and decolonial studies, critical studies of race, posthumanism, queer inhumanism, new materialisms, critical animal studies, non-anthropocentric ecologies, and biopolitics. And yet as long as they operate in the mode of critique alone, they don't seem to offer anything substantially different in relation to the operative model of Man. That is, they, like the antihumanist discourses they inherit and metabolize, end up being able to flourish in the neoliberal university of excellence.[6] But, and here's where I begin to wildly speculate, I think the most interesting thing about these discourses and the ways that they can potentially coalesce is their capacity not for critique but for spurring experimental forms of thinking and being (or, still better, becoming, moving) together. It is not only possible but necessary—and indeed I put a great deal of energy into this in the first chapters of this book—to offer posthumanist critiques of educational institutions and the ways they produce Man as the only permissible mode of being human. What would be far more exciting, though, is to redirect this critical energy to articulating new, nonhumanist ways of thinking about how we learn, together, remembering that this "we" will not be coincident with humanity as a collective, or—and especially not—with some subset of this humanity (Man) pretending to represent the whole.

I have been disciplined to think about the labor of reading, writing, and teaching as a humanist. Without downplaying this, I will argue that we need a significantly enlarged sense of affective participation in the events of literacy if we are to track how literacy gets articulated in relation to a particular conception of the human (Man), and in relation to imperialist states during the period of modernity. Humanists have long claimed that unlike the natural and social sciences that strive for parsimony, they reveal the importance of complexity and overdetermination. And yet, humanism itself—as the disciplined restriction of attention to properly human concerns—disavows most of the material conditions for the emergence of its objects (human societies, practices, cultures) and its own functioning. To play with Paul de Man's phrase, all the insights of humanism are predicated on an unquestioned blindness to virtually the entirety of what matters. That doesn't mean those insights haven't been important—in a wide variety of ways—but it does mean that the whole affair has been restricted and restrictive (this is what "discipline" means, after all).

Rather than take for granted the boundedness of literature as it is humanistically framed, *Animate Literacies* reinserts literature into a much wider field of literacy practices. I attend to how a whole host of actants and agents animate literacy in scenes of pre- or aconscious collision and affective contact that I call *the literacy situation*. This situation is where intrahuman politics of race, class, gender, sexuality, and geography shape the conditions of emergence for literacy events that animate subjects and the political relations with which they are entangled. Bringing together sustained attention to dehumanizing violence with an attunement to what is often called the "more-than-human," this project is at once backward looking and critical (offering an account of how our present situation has emerged) and speculative—oriented toward dehumanist, nonstatist futures not just for the study of literature and literacy, but for politics more generally.

Back to the erosion of the human. There are a lot of problems today (decolonization, global warming, biotechnologies, factory farming, deforestation, etc.) that simply can't be thought in traditional humanist frames. So, maybe, it's time to stop looking for the human. Rather than trying to justify the existence of the humanities by positioning humanist education as a crucial piece of the narrative formation of Man, we might put our energies elsewhere: into seeking out narratives that, in not automatically restricting themselves to humans, take every thing as potentially actant, potentially imbricated in change and growth, potentially at stake even in literacy events (reading, writing, teaching). Learning from Wynter's claim that we have been sociogenically produced as Man (or in relation to Man as inhuman or less-than-human), I think we have to turn toward narratives that don't presume Man and which enable creative, experimental practices of performing the human differently.

Let me propose now a somewhat polemical, extremely speculative project. Instead of seeing literacy events as the signs of a human rupture from all other beings (which is what the humanities propose: literature is uniquely human, so studying literature is ipso facto studying what the human is), I am going to take literacy as an animate practice.[7] That is, some animals make marks that circulate in various media with affective agency, and that are in turn attended by other animals. At least among human animals, some animals are charged with overseeing how other animals develop their attentions to these marks. The particular ways in which these

animals do this always require energies from a variety of nonhuman (and nonanimal) actants: soil, trees, power grids, computers, blackboards, eye glasses, Amazon.com, and so on. This description, which is, perhaps, a much more distant form of distant reading than the ones envisioned by Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova, calls for an ethological and ecological account of literacy, one that does not necessary destroy the particular actions (reading, writing, teaching) that we associate with the humanities. But it inserts these actions into other networks and other narratives. And in doing so, one hopes, it releases us from spending so much energy arguing about the humanities and their importance, freeing up energies to begin making sense of this bizarre, extensive, and extremely fragile ecology of things, events, and actants making up what I call *anima-literature*.

This will involve a refusal to be disciplined. Rather than taking disciplinary borders—or, as will become clear, any borders—as given, I want to think about them as a form of membrane. As Samantha Frost details in *Biocultural Creatures*, "A permeable cell membrane produces a continuously variable chemical or energetic imbalance between inside and outside the cell, a disequilibrium that in turn creates the conditions for the movement, flow, or dispersion of molecules and their transformation from one kind into another" (2016, 55). Although there is a risk in moving from the molecular level to the molar too quickly, Frost's account gives an extremely rigorous way of thinking about what Nancy Tuana (2008) calls the "viscous porosity" of borders. Borders are not things, per se, but activities, and they are particular activities that exist in order to enable the incomplete but functional separation of other activities. As Frost puts it, "What makes a living body separate from its environment are not the substances of which it is composed . . . but rather the activities and the processes that occur within and by means of that body" (2016, 75). I would like to hazard seeing this relation at all levels of my analysis: borders are not stable, given, or solid. Bordering is an activity, a process, and it enables certain things. All of the things I track in this book—literature, literacy, academic disciplines, the human—are processes, actions, movements of energy. Indeed, to the extent that this book has a method, I believe it is something like trying to cobble together insights from a range of disciplinary standpoints and projects in order to construct a machine that asks questions—What is literacy? What is the human? What is a collectivity? What is politics?—and fails to answer them in definite ways. Or rather,

like the stoner alone in her room who says a word so many times it loses its ability to signify, I try to look at these things over and over from different directions and distances so that they lose solidity, become uncertain, start trembling. Answers don't really interest me, but questions can disperse energy.

In *Animate Literacies*, I am trying to love literature by failing to understand what it is within the disciplined parameters of my humanist education. As Jack Halberstam has argued, "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" (2011, 2–3). This book is a record of my failure to be properly humanist, or perhaps it is an archive born of my loving desire to become untrained, undisciplined. Halberstam again: "In some sense we have to untrain ourselves so that we can read the struggles and debates back into the questions that seem settled and resolved" (11). As a thoroughly situated subject, one whose attentions have been disciplined over decades in schools at various levels, I cannot simply break free from such discipline (although I can begin to imagine alternative modes of education that would not discipline others in the same ways!). Rather, I am actively seeking to lose my way, to fail to stay on that paths I am supposed to take as a humanist. I will try to stay not with the disciplines but with the trouble that is "literature."[8]

Wandering off of the disciplinary track, though, doesn't mean a rejection of axiomatics. Indeed, as I get lost, I am doing so only by following my gut, my feelings, my attraction to the affective magnetism of what I love.[9] I would call this *affective attunement politics*, since it concerns how I am touched and how I touch things (and, indeed, how I am a site of touching that is not reducible to a liberal subject). *Animate Literacies* asks both what animates literacies, and how literacies animate particular forms of personhood and politics. In asking this double question, and in proposing anima-literature as a neologism for understanding this thing that I love (and that perhaps we love), I am drawing on Mel Y. Chen's analysis of animacy as it moves between linguistics and politics. Rather than a binary between the animate and the inanimate, Chen attends to how "stones and other inanimates definitively occupy a *scalar* position (near zero) on the animacy hierarchy [but] they are not excluded from it altogether" (2012, 5). In the chapters that follow, I try to feel my way into the presence of

a whole range of agencies—many of them nonhuman—participating in this thing called "literature." Many of the chapters begin with the relation between a reading mind and a signifying text—the relation presupposed in the overwhelming mass of scholarship on literature and education more broadly—but then my attention shifts, either pulling back the frame to see these literacy events within much wider networks of relations among entities and agencies, or zooming in to track the microrelations taking place beneath or alongside conscious attention. Sometimes I pan horizontally, following a particular cluster of ideas as it moves through a range of different sites or scales distributed rhizomatically. My aim is not to provide a systematic account of the forces and entities animating literacies as much as to attempt to pressure the borders around literacy that many assume are much more tidy than I do. In this sense, the book has a speculative and polemical edge to it, as I foreground some aspects of literacy (such as its smell) simply because they tend to be significantly disavowed or ignored in humanist scholarship.[10]

As I track the animating participants in literacies, I am aware that not all participation is the same (I do not propose, as do some speculative realists, a "flat ontology").[11] I draw extensively from feminist and queer new materialist scholarship and theories of affect to consider how these actors (or, as Latour might say, actants) have a share in literature, but I also keep my focus on institutions of education where we have a determinate political responsibility to think through intrahuman politics. Indeed, a fair amount of my attention is given to how these institutions shape our perceptions of animacy and, hence, of politics.

I attend, in what follows, to how the questions I ask about literature, literacy, and the human effect and affect those people excluded from political protection as human during modernity.[12] That is, my approach to literature is not humanist but what Julietta Singh (2017b) calls "dehumanist": my attention to literature is focused as much as possible not on the triumphant stories that disciplined academics tell about it, but on its messy entanglements with dehumanization, ecological devastation, and the material-political generation of impoverishment of all kinds.[13] Accordingly, to the extent that this is possible, I am constructing my account by foregrounding the knowledge produced about literature, literacy, and the human by scholars situated at a remove from Man, primarily in feminist, queer, postcolonial, black, brown, and decolonial studies. I thus al-

ways attempt "to recollect and foreground the very histories of dehumanization too often overlooked in celebratory posthumanisms" (Luciano and Chen 2015, 196). In doing so, I follow Chela Sandoval's affirmative "methodology of the oppressed," which responds to a moment of postmodern crisis: "The citizen-subject's postmodern despair over experiencing this condition can be released when the practitioner looks to the survival skills and decolonizing oppositional practices that were developed in response to such fragmentation under previous cultural eras" (2000, 33). That is, when confronting the crisis of the humanities, instead of responding with angst and a defensive desire to shore up this formation, I want to explore alternative, subjugated, fugitive modes of linking literacy, aesthetics, and modalities of being human. As Judith Butler has noted, "There is a certain departure from the human that takes place in order to start the process of remaking the human" (2004, 3–4). *Animate Literacies* is structured according to a series of such departures, and it is organized into sixteen chapters, each of them shorter than is common in most academic books today. This book's somewhat unusual structure is motivated by my sense that *Animate Literacies* is less about specific conceptual and political arguments (although there are many) than about a pedagogical desire to produce affects in the reader.

Chapter 2, "*Beloved*'s Dispersed Pedagogy," takes up one scene of literacy education in Toni Morrison's novel and suggests that decisions about how to frame that event have enormous consequences for how we understand the politics and materiality of education. In widening the frame, I find that underlying and surrounding the obvious event of literacy is an entire affective field that I call the *literacy situation*. Chapter 3, "Haunting, Love, and Attention," generalizes from my reading of Morrison's novel toward methodological principles that govern this book's account of the literacy situation. In particular, I elaborate on the need to "scope and scale" (King 2011) around literacy events in order to attune to the vast, swirling scene of collisions among bodies and agencies—many of them nonhuman—that animate literacy.

Chapter 4, "Humanizing Assemblages I: What Is Man?," proposes, by examining how literacy animates particular ideas about human persons and their politics, the concept of humanizing assemblages that produce subjects oriented around Man. Taking as my point of departure Lynn Hunt's (2007) provocative (if overly simple) claim that novel reading gener-

ates the neurological conditions for global human rights law, and linking this account to Sylvia Wynter's (2003) claim that in the wake of modernity a highly particular version of the human—which Wynter calls "Man"—is overrepresented as the human, I argue that the sociogenic production of Man through assemblages of humanization is woven into the fabric of institutional capture of literacy. This chapter begins to lay out a conception of power as circulating through statist mechanisms of both discipline and control that link literacy to the politics of humanization and dehumanization. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 elaborate this claim in much more detail through close readings of *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.

In chapter 7, "What Is Literacy?," and 8, "Humanizing Assemblages II: Discipline and Control," I lay out this book's main arguments about what literacy is and how it is captured by statist discipline and control. Arguing that literacy names scenes of affective collision among entities and agencies distributed unevenly across scales of space-time, I detail how that gets caught up in modernist politics of humanization and dehumanization, especially as those play out in institutions of education and their disciplinary apparatuses. That is, I attend to how the disciplinary configurations of the university today (but not only the university) are implicated in (de)humanizing politics precisely in how they condition our attentions to literacy.

Chapter 9 theorizes what I call *bewilderment*: an affective condition of disorientation that happens when disciplined attention fails and we become aware of the more-than-human literacy situation that swirls around us and in us. Beginning with close readings of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, I generalize toward a concept of bewilderment that can animate non-Man modes of political action and antidisciplinary attention to literacy.

Chapters 10 and 11 offer the book's most sustained elaboration of these antidisciplinary approaches to literacy. "Toward a Literary Ethology" zooms back from the scene of humanist literacy events to see them as part of a much wider ecology of animal literacy practices, while "What Happens When I Read?" zooms in to give an extended account of how literacy affects the reading subject at the prepersonal level. Agreeing with a range of humanist scholars that reading matters precisely because it changes us, I argue that such change is primarily conditioned in the literacy situation where nonhuman agencies and not-yet-human capacities and systems of

the reading subject collide. Chapter 12, "The Smell of Literature," elaborates on this claim by examining the role of smell in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. I argue that smell gives us a way of attuning to the range of agencies and affects at play in literacy situations, as well as the politics that shape how those situations crystalize into literacy events. Chapter 13, "Pleasures of the Text," broadens this claim by enumerating a wide range of affective pleasures animating and emerging from literacies. By continuing to read Joyce's novel, and putting it into conversation with Paul Preciado's *Testo Junkie*, I argue that literacy is fundamentally erotic, and that the politics of literacy adhere in the ways erotics and pleasures are distributed among humans and nonhumans.

The final three chapters of the book build from my account of the literacy situation and its politics to offer a way of thinking about both classroom practice and the politics of education in noninstitutional sites of study. Proposing what I call *literacies against the state*, I make the case that literacy situations are not pre- or protopolitical but are in fact the very scene of more-than-human politics. In these chapters I think directly about how the arguments in *Animate Literacies* enable us to wander away from tired debates about the crisis of the humanities and focus instead on a range of encounters—always more-than-human—that hold the potential to reorient us away from Man and toward other ways of becoming and relating.

My primary hope is that this book will make the reader feel differently about literacy and the ways it is institutionalized, and that this affective modulation can enable different ways of acting as readers, writers, teachers, and beings in a world woven from dense, bewildering ecologies. This is in keeping with one of my most basic claims about literacy: that it is affective more than symbolic or conceptual. Put differently, *Animate Literacies* is a material intervention into modulating the attention of the reader in order to allow her to attune differently to the affective situation of this book's being read in the hopes that this can "rearrange our desires" (Spivak 2003) away from wanting to be (like) Man. Rather than orienting ourselves in any particular direction, I have tried to write in such a way that the book doesn't just conceptualize bewilderment, it can also produce it in the reader. Let's get lost.[14]

Notes

1. *The Human(ities) in Crisis*

1. Bérubé (2013), in making that claim, is paraphrasing remarks by Richard Broadhead, president of Duke University.

2. I'm following William Spanos's (2015) call for a "non-humanist humanities."

3. See Eagleton's (1987) foreword to Daniel Cottom's *Social Figures*.

4. The insufficiency of human rights law is clearly legible in Hannah Arendt's (1968) *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, and her analysis has been extended in various theories of biopolitics such as Giorgio Agamben's (1998) *Homo Sacer* and Cary Wolfe's (2013) *Before the Law*.

5. I sketch Wynter's account of Man's relation to the human in chapter 4.

6. William Spanos argues that "however decisive their demythification of the binary logic of logocentric thinking, the various practitioners of postmodern theory have failed to break out of the established disciplinary parameters" (1993, 191). The phrase "university of excellence" is borrowed from Bill Readings's (1997) *The University in Ruins*.

7. This move owes much to animal studies, especially the work of Donna Haraway (1991, 2008, 2016) and Cary Wolfe (2009a, 2013), but it is also indebted to Charles Darwin, Friedrich Nietzsche, and those writers forming what Margot Norris (1985) calls "the biocentric" tradition in literature.

8. This phrase, again, comes from Donna Haraway (2016), but I also hear in it what Judith Butler (1990) calls "gender trouble."

9. My use of "gut" here signals Elizabeth O. Wilson's (2015) claim that mentation is dispersed throughout the body, not restricted to the mind.

10. Kyla Schuller (2018, 79) cites Constance Classen in order to draw out how the privileging of vision over and above other senses was tied to gender and race: "'The supposedly lower, feminine senses of touch, taste, and smell' were associated with domestic work, whereas 'men used their eyes and ears outside in the world.' Touch could represent the immediate grasping characteristic of the primitive, whereas sight enabled reflective consideration that strengthens, rather than compromises, the perceiver."

11. See Ian Bogost's (2012) *Alien Phenomenology*, Graham Harman's (2002) *Tool Being*, and Steven Shaviro's (2014) *The Universe of Things*.

12. This attention is one I have learned from feminist, postcolonial science studies. See Sandra Harding's (2008) *Sciences from Below*.

13. "Dehumanism," Singh writes, "aims to bring the posthuman into critical conversation with the decolonial" (2017b, 4).

14. I borrow this exhortation from Chance the Rapper's (2013) song "Lost" (featuring Noname Gypsy).

2. Beloved's *Dispersed Pedagogy*

1. Subsequent references to *Beloved* are given parenthetically as page numbers in the text.

2. My use of "assemblage" throughout signals Deleuze and Guattari's (2002) concept from *A Thousand Plateaus*. It refers to a combination of relations that organize, collect, assemble. As Jasbir Puar has argued, one of this concept's advantages is that "assemblages do not privilege bodies as human, nor residing within a human animal/nonhuman animal binary" (2012, 57). My use is also heavily indebted to Alexander Weheliye's (2014) concept of "racializing assemblages" in *Habeas Viscus*.

3. On the gendering of slavery's spaces, see Robert Reid-Pharr's *Conjugal Union*, in particular his analysis of the function of domesticity: "Domesticity should not be understood, then, as a static phenomenon. . . . Instead, domesticity is better understood as an irregular process of regulation, of law, in which the constant flight and return of desiring bodies is negotiated" (1999, 65). See also Christina Sharpe's *Monstrous Intimacies*: "The enslaved black woman in the house . . . , often in a better material position than the black woman in the field, is nonetheless positioned in the midst of the everyday intimate brutalities of white domestic domination, positioned within a psychic and material architectonic where there may be no escape from those brutalities but in the mind" (2010, 9).

4. Picking up on a use of the word in Gilroy's (1993) *The Black Atlantic*, Nyong'o writes, "Black subjects eavesdropped on an anxious discourse of white supremacy, black inferiority, and the dangers of racial contamination. Overhearing this discourse, they replayed and refracted it, precisely in the hopes of shaming whites about it as well as using it as evidence to rouse other blacks out of their acquiescence to the present state of affairs" (2009, 89).

5. Jodi Byrd argues that "indigenous critical theory . . . might provide an agnostic way of reading and interpreting colonial logics that underpin cultural, intellectual, and political discourses. But it asks that settler, native, and arrivant each acknowledge their own positions within empire and then reconceptualize space and history to make visible what imperialism and its resultant settler colonialisms and diasporas have sought to obscure" (2011, xxx). For an extended treatment of settler